RELIGIOUS ETHICS

A SOURCEBOOK

ARTHUR DOBRIN, EDITOR
PROFESSOR OF HUMANITIES
HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY
HEMPSTEAD, NEW YORK
USA

© 2002 Arthur Dobrin
# Table of Contents

**Introduction**
Arthur Dobrin

**Baha’i**
Jonah Winters et al.

**Buddhism**
- **Mahayana** — Kelsang Togden
- **Theravada** — Pongpun Saovaphudhasuvej

**Christianity**
- **Anglican/Episcopalian** — Stephen White
- **Baptist** — Michael Hale
- **Eastern Orthodox** — Stanley Harakas
- **Jehovah Witness** — Writing Staff
- **Lutheran** — Thomas Prieto Peral
- **Methodist** — Beth LaRocca-Pitts
- **Pentecostal** — David K. Bernard
- **Presbyterian** — E. M. Myers
- **Roman Catholic** — Ralph Gallagher
- **Seventh Day Adventist** — Sednak Yankson

**Confucianism**
Whalen Lai

**Hindu**
- **Saivite** — Sivasiva Palaniswami
- **Vaishnavite** — Venkat Kanumalla

**Humanism**
- **Ethical Culture** — Joseph Chuman
- **Unitarian-Universalist** — Pat Hoertdoerfer

**Islam**
- **Sunni** — Rasheed Abdulkareem
- **Shi'a** — Moustafa Al-Qazwini
- **Ismaili-Bohra** — Mustafa Abdulhussein
- **Nation of Islam** — Hamid Muhammad
JAIN
Mehool Sanghrajka

JUDAISM
CONSERVATIVE — Michael Katz
ORTHODOX — Moshe Ben-Chaim

SCIENTOLOGY
Lynn Robert Farny

SHINTO
SHRINE — Ueda Kenji
SECT — Yoshiya Abe
SHINREIKYO — Kazuhiko Hosokawa

SIKH
Arvind-pal Singh Mandair

TAOISM
Yun Xiang Tseng

VODOUN
Vivian Dansi Hounon

WICCAN
Michael Thorn

ZOROASTRIAN
Khurshed Pastakia
INTRODUCTION

Definitions

Religion

Is there any cultural endeavor more ubiquitous than religion? It hardly seems so. Estimates are that eighty-five percent of the world’s population is identified with a religion. This is an extraordinarily high number, even if one discounts the fact that many identified with a religion may not be active participants or even believers in the core tenets of the religion. A fact of human existence is that religion is nearly everywhere, deeply embedded in modes of thought, art and production. It is impossible to think of Western culture without its Jewish and Christian influences, the Arabic world without Islam, India without Hinduism and East Asia without Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. The face of humanity would be hardly recognizable without the highlights of religion.

The prevalence of religion may indicate that there is something about human nature that predisposes us to be religious being. This comes out of the need we have to make order out of chaos. There is a seemingly endless welter of information in the environment, so the brain forms patterns, which in turn become the narratives, stories and theories that help guide us in our survival. These are stories our creation and belonging. These stories also provide structure and cohesion to our experiences, so that life is given meaning and purpose. Gestalt psychology teaches us that people see complete pictures even when there are only partial pictures to be seen. We complete the incomplete, thereby explaining the mysterious, constructing a picture that we call reality. Often we go the next step — finding what we expect to be the case while our minds confirm our predictions, whether or not supported by the facts. Or more precisely, we find the “facts” to support our beliefs. This mode of thinking and behaving may be so basic that it has led some to conclude: “The process of forming [religious] beliefs is genetically hardwired” (Shermer, 38). Writer W. G. Sebald (2002) expressed this thought more poetically: “Our brains, after all, / are always at work on some quivers/ of self-organization, however faint,/ and it is from this that an order/ arises...”

Religion may also provide an evolutionary advantage. Survival requires that we master the environment. Unlike other animals that rely upon strength or speed, human survival depends upon intellect and social cooperation. The challenge is to know what is helpful and what is harmful when we have only partial knowledge. Therefore, while any given situation may be unique, we can make reasonable guesses about how to handle it because we have encountered something like it before and have made sense of it by creating seemingly sensible and meaningful narratives and patterns. The necessity for social cooperation creates rules that are translated into cultural norms. These processes are commonplace and universal. Out of these needs arises religion.
None of this speaks to the truth claims of religion. A religion may or not be factually correct, but the claims are true to those who accept the religious doctrine. The reality that the religion provides is independent of reason or empirical facts, in the same way that poetry is true when it speaks to the emotional reality of the reader. The phenomena I am referring to here help to explain the universal nature of religion and the religious experience.

What is religion? Assuredly it has to do with belief. But which belief? It also has to do with organization, but what type organization? The definition isn’t straightforward and remains allusive. Christianity, everyone agrees, is a religion. But what about Marxism? Is this a political movement or is it, as some have suggested, a religion cloaked in the rhetoric of secularism and anti-religion? I am nearly ready to accept the latter viewpoint, after having made a visit to China shortly after the death of Chairman Mao Zedong, in 1978.

My group of American tourists visited the Beijing mausoleum in which the body of the venerable leader of the Chinese Liberation was laid out for viewing. There, in the center of the world’s largest square, stood an imposing marble building. From it streamed lines of silent, solemn people, in queues so long that they nearly reached as far as the Forbidden City itself, the grounds of which were once reserved for the royal family and their minions and from which now hung a huge portrait of the Chairman in the center of a pantheon of portraits of other Marxist theorists.

While the mausoleum reminded me of the Lincoln Memorial, this visit didn’t feel like the patriotic pilgrimages many make to the American capital, as I have on several occasions. In Washington, people sit on the steps eating snacks; parents read the inscriptions on the walls to their children who are as much interested in playing as in receiving civics lessons. Indeed, the trip I took later to the beautiful tomb in Nanjing of Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the modern Chinese state, seemed much more like the American experience, a worthy excursion for educational and aesthetic reasons, a vacation to an interesting site, an homage to an esteemed and revered patriot.

As honored guests, we Americans were taken to the front of the line at Mao’s tomb and we assumed the somber attitude of those around us. The Chinese men had taken off their proletarian caps and clutched them in their fists; the women’s faces were in sober repose. Inside, as we filed past the crystal vault and looked at the burly founder of the Chinese communist regime who lay in state as a waxen figure, the Chinese pilgrims began to weep.

Once outside I remarked that this rite struck me as religious as any I had ever seen, if not the worship of a god, then the veneration of a saint. My fellow tourist, a dedicated Marxist, took umbrage at my remark. She was angry that I could be so disrespectful as to suggest that this revolutionary, whose very ideology was, in part, an attack upon religion — “the opiate of the people” — could himself serve as a religious icon.

My comment was not simply foolish, mistaken or slanderous. She reacted as though my words were heretical and blasphemous. Years later I read a novel set in China during this same period (Jin). At a wedding ceremony the couple bows three times to a portrait of Chairman Mao. This scene served to underscore my impression that Maoism was, if not a religion as such, something very close to it.

So it is always useful to begin with definitions, particularly in a field as notoriously beset by definitional vagueness as religion. The more abstract the subject, the more difficult it is to reach a common definition and no single human endeavor is at the same time so concrete, universal, subjective and abstract as is religion.
Examining religion, we find enormous diversity in content, as well as form. Some religions are highly structured, some loosely held together; some require a god belief, others do not; some have a well-developed metaphysics that provides a philosophical grounding, some do not; some require an acceptance of well-defined doctrine as the sine qua non of belief, others do not; some have clergy, others do not. We could extend this list further, but it would only make the same point, namely, it is extremely difficult to pin down exactly what religion is.

This problem besets even those who make their livelihood from the study of religion. Vergilius Ferm (1945) notes that both scholars and lay people make ten mistakes in defining religion: 1. vagueness; 2. turning to etymology; 3. indiscriminate usage where the same word carries different meanings; 4. defining the word in terms of an activity; 5. defining the word as an indefinable experience; 6. restricting the word to the practice of a particular religion; 7. defining the word so broadly that it refers to that which is not religion; 8. confusing the word with being ethical; 9. defining religion by what it ought to be rather than descriptively, as it is; 10. restricting the definition to a God concept.

After this exhaustive list of what religion isn't, Ferm offers the following definition of what religion is: "a set of meanings and behaviors having reference to individuals who are or were or could be religious." This only gets us to another question, namely, what does it mean to be religious? According to Ferm, it is to effect a "vital adjustment to whatever is . . . worthy of serious and ulterior concern." As we can see, Ferm has as much difficulty avoiding the pitfalls with defining religion as he pointed out in his criticism. However, his definitional approach is echoed in some, mainly academic, circles. Christian theologian Paul Tillich's famous definition reflects this trend, one in which religion is defined as that which is of "ultimate concern." Under this definition, in which religion is understood in terms of human quest for meaning, Rossi (2001) grants the status of religion to Marxism.

These definitions can take us far from the commonly understood definition of religion, for it begs the question. What is meant by serious, by ultimate?

Clifford Geertz (1973), an anthropologist, offers his definition of religion. For him religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts (2) to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in people by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. This approach allows researchers to look at behaviors and associations throughout the world and begin to systematize their observations in some comprehensible way that cuts across cultures.

William James (1902) all but gave up the task of finding a definition. As both a philosopher and psychologist, he said that the concept of religion was too broad for there to be an agreed upon a single definition. Arnal (2001) goes even further and calls for a thorough redefinition or even rejection of the term completely as currently understood.

Nevertheless, it is useful to have a working definition in mind. In that spirit, I offer my own. Religion is that set of beliefs and/or institutions, behaviors and emotions which binds human beings to something beyond their individual selves and fosters in its adherents a sense of humility and gratitude that, in turn, sets the tone of one's world-view and requires certain behavioral dispositions relative to that which transcends personal interests. In other words, religion connects a person with a larger world and creates a loyalty that extends to the past, the present and the future. This loyalty not only makes demands upon the person but — and this is
the part that makes it distinctively spiritual — it creates a sense of humility. So religion provides a story about one’s place in the larger scheme of things, creates a sense of connection and it makes one feel grateful.

**Ethics**

Ethics, like religion, is difficult to define with precision and for many of the same reasons — it is an abstraction whose content shifts with time and differs from place to place. A further difficulty enters because some use morals and ethics as distinct terms, while others use them as synonyms. Although it is possible, and sometimes useful, to draw a distinction between morals and ethics, as do a number of respondents in this book, I use the two terms interchangeably, as do most of the respondents whose answers are presented.

Philosophers may draw the distinction between the morals and ethics this way: morals are the beliefs people maintain regarding matters of right and wrong, good and bad, and ought and ought not. Ethics, by contrast, is the considered, philosophical reflection upon those beliefs.

Social scientists may draw the distinction this way: moral behavior is that which conforms to the conventions of society, while the person engaged in ethical behavior makes reference to universal principles. Morality refers to the particular, while ethics refers to the universal. Understood this way, Mohandas Gandhi could be viewed as being at once immoral (he broke the law) but at the same time ethical (he lived consistently with principles that apply to all).

Another distinction between morality and ethics is that morality refers to personal issues, such as sex, while ethics refers to social issues, such as the fair distribution of the world's resources. Generally, these two realms are distinct. Abortion, though, is an example of an issue that is moral in the sense that it is personal but at the same time is ethical, since it is also subject to social policy.

Ethics has many theoretical approaches and underpinnings. By-and-large, though, these philosophical and foundational matters play little part in religious ethics of most practitioners. Of course, Aristotle’s philosophy is significant in Christian ethics, and philosophical considerations can be found in nearly every other religion as well and there are those who want or need to intellectually justify ethical guidelines. But metaphysics are of concern to only to a minority. There are, too, anti-intellectual strains, found mainly in the mystical schools of the various religions. In any case, few religious leaders are concerned with the philosophical fine points. They are more interested in presenting guidelines for living, and to this extent, leave the more difficult foundational issues to one side.

It may be useful for the reader to keep these various definitions in mind, so as not misunderstand the intent of the writers presented here. But for all practical purposes, these are distinctions without a difference.

My own view is that ethics refers to those values that help us to evaluate the behavior of people to determine whether they add to the well-being of humanity in general. A good person, in my view, is one who exhibits compassion and justice, considers the interests of others as equal to his or her own and acts in a socially responsibly way. But like the definitions regarding religion, this too begs the question or at least isn’t sufficient until specific situations are looked at. After
all, what does it mean to act in a socially responsible way? What do we mean by justice? What do
we do when compassion and justice are in conflict with one another? And even if we can agree on
these moral values as being the most important, it should be noted, though, that some religions
find these qualities insufficient to constitute “goodness.” The term “good” is reserved for those
who accept their religious doctrine. A person, therefore, could be virtuous but not good.

How Religions Function

Using these definitions, we can examine religions by looking not only at what
they professes (metaphysics, creed and doctrine) but also by the functions they perform. It is my
view that religions perform three main functions, namely 1. providing an understanding of
ultimate truth (even if to deny that there is an ultimate truth); 2. offering methods of being
spiritual (even if that way of relating is found in the natural world); 3. furnishing moral guidance
(even if the guidance is implicit rather than explicit).

Belief

Belief is the conceptual component of religion, the domain of meaning and
cognition, understanding and theology. A belief system is the doctrinal and intellectual basis of a
religion and is generally defined by the areas of metaphysics and theology. Here the great
ultimate questions are considered: Is there a guiding force in the universe? Is there life after
death? How did the universe and all that is in it come into being? Is there a reason why life
unfolds as it does? Does time have a beginning or an end? What is the meaning of life? Does life
have a purpose? Is that purpose linked to something beyond the natural world? Is there another
realm of reality, a supernatural? What is the nature of the supernatural? Is there a force for good
built into the very existence of the universe?

Unlike science, which asks how things work, religion addresses why things work as they
do. For example, when someone is ill, she may ask, "Why am I sick?" “Because you have a
virus,” is one response, a scientific and secular one. There may be explanations about where one
catch the virus and how viruses work on the immune system, but there would be no meaning as
such attached to the explanation. The secular answer would be contained within the material
world of cause and effect and the answers generally refers to the most immediate cause. By way
of contrast, a religious answer to the same question "Why am I sick?" might be “Because you
didn’t properly sacrifice to your ancestors.” The religious answer contains a meaning, as the
religious response is not contained by the material world. For some the meaning may reside in a
supernatural dimension; for others the spiritual dimension may simply be the non-material world
of relationships. The religious answer generally is one that refers to ultimate causes. As the
scientific mind hears the questions, “Why am I sick?” the religiously inclined hears the questions
as, “Why am I sick?” Science attempts to understand and unravel mystery; religion accepts and
revels in it. Science is content with chance and probability; religion seeks design and purpose.

Belief may take a general form, without much emphasis upon specific beliefs. For
example, Judaism takes the belief in God as axiomatic. There is no need for a Jew to profess a
particular belief. What one does as a Jew is more important than what one believes as a Jew. Jewish study, then, concentrates upon the religion’s requirements as they pertain to practice. Hinduism, too, mainly dismisses the salvific power of belief and focuses upon ritual instead.

Christianity, by contrast, is based upon the belief that God sent Jesus to earth and through Jesus’ death provided a way for humankind to escape punishment for sin. Immortality is offered to those who believe in Jesus. Nevertheless, Pentecostals downplay theology and emphasize enthusiastic expression as one directly experiences the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Faith is a form of belief. From one point of view, it may be said that it is a belief in that which is beyond proof. But from the adherents’ points of view, there is more than adequate proof for their faith. It is that the faith they hold is based in something other than the empirical or the rational proof. The proof they find may be rooted in tradition or in a subjective (spiritual) or revelatory experience that demonstrates to the faithful the reality of their beliefs.

Even humanist religions have a faith of sorts. In this case, it is a faith in the dignity and worth of human beings, a proposition that is independent of empirical evidence. In fact, some might say, this faith flies in the face of the history of humankind. However, it is precisely this faith in human possibilities that is the defining feature of all forms of humanism, whether the brand of humanism is secular or religious.

Ritual Practice

RITUALS ARE THE EXPERIENTIAL COMPONENT OF RELIGION. Some consider ritual to be the core of religion, as it moves the adherent along the line of action and feeling designed to bring the adherent closer to the desired state, whatever that may be, as defined by the religion. This is the realm of sacrament, ritual, rite, sacrifice, offering, prayer, meditation, song, dance and other forms of worship or practice. These are the techniques and disciplines that are designed to provide experiences to match the religious beliefs.

So while beliefs are connected to understanding the universe and one’s place in it, rituals are connected to feeling accepted by the universe around oneself.

Rituals may serve as reminders of the world of belief or doctrine. Washing before entering a mosque is cleansing in preparation for the proper spiritual repose in the presence of God. Rituals may also be doors that enter into an unseen realm. For example, offerings of food at a temple allows the Hindu to become part of the spiritual other world. While Confucians promote rituals, they do so for quite different reasons. Rituals are understood as part of harnessing emotions in order to produce moral behavior (Slingerland).

Rituals may be understood as symbolic or literal. Anglicans take wafers and wine as symbols of the body and blood of Christ, while Roman Catholics see the wafer and wine as the real body and blood of Christ. Vodouns offer animal sacrifices to ancestors not as a way of remembering the ancestors but as a way of appeasing the spirits.

Rituals also provide methods of attaining heightened states of inner being or awareness. In mystical traditions found within most religions, such as Sufis within Islam and the charismatic movement within Christianity, beliefs are downplayed, replaced by experiences with the unseen and divine realm.
Religions provide adherents tools by which to intuit or experientially enter the realm beyond ordinary senses. The faithful thereby become enlightened, inspired, transformed, uplifted or saved. These techniques are designed to tap into that which is beyond the empirical and rational. These methods may be designed to control unseen forces. Other times the tools are meant to provide a type of understanding of the inner self (as well as the natural world), an experiential understanding that is frequently called spiritual.

Rituals are often formal and vary little from time to time, but they may also be simple and elastic. The high church of Anglicans, for example, is full of pomp and circumstance, robes and symbols. Quaker services are simple and unadorned, the ritual stripped to the barest, leaving few observable traces other than the spiritual sincerity of its participants. Whichever approach is undertaken, "participation in a ritual culture provides the basis of religious identity..." (Lubin).

Ethics

RITUAL PRACTICE MAY OR MAY NOT BE LINKED TO MORALITY. It is often assumed that rituals and doctrine lead to moral values and behavior, but it isn’t always the case that morality is dependent upon ritual behavior. However, ethics can be understood as being something distinct from the larger and central concern of a particular religion. So while religion may always have some connection to morality, it sometimes plays a supportive, not central, role in its formation i.e. religion may be seen as a necessary but not necessarily sufficient ingredient for ethical behavior.

Ethics is distinct from religion in so far as it applies to the social world, regulating the behavior of humans toward one another and, by extension, to the world around them. Morality offers guidance for coping with the lived experiences of social existence. Ethics is an approach to living that coordinates the interests of two or more people, an attitude geared to the practicalities and the necessity of a social species that must live together in order to survive.

Unlike the realm of the sacred, which is a hidden world that is distinct from the natural and ordinary, ethics focuses upon the world as it is perceived through the senses and mediated by reason. And while the sacred is largely the heart, ethics is primarily of the mind, although emotions are a necessary component.

Some see morality as a step-by-step manual. Being moral according to one’s religion means to live strictly with the injunctions found in sacred books or as articulated by religious authorities. A moral life here is living obediently and consistently with demands of the religion as passed down either through ecclesiastical bodies, scripture or individual leaders. It is to know the religious law and follow the rules. This is sometimes referred to as “command ethics.” Obedience and consistency are highly prized.

Others see religious morality as dispositional, a set of guidelines requiring reflection which when rightly understood in particular contexts leads to a virtuous life. Morality is something to be cultivated and the primary goal of moral education is to foster good judgment so as to behave virtuously. Emotions play a role here, as they are linked to creation of an authentic and autonomous response to life’s demands. Ethics, then, is a blueprint by which to approach living a life that takes care of those in need and fairly distributes goods and services. Philosophers refer to this approach to ethics as teleological, i.e. the cultivation of a set of virtues, in this case, the virtues as outlined by the religion.
Within all religions there is the tension between a strict and liberal reading of religious texts and their ethical injunctions. As late as 1692, prosecutors who found justification in Exodus 22:18 (“Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live”) burned women at the stake in the American colonies. The American Revolution was led by many whose Christianity was recognizably modern and tolerant. We find counterparts in nearly every religion. For example, while most Muslims in the West stress the tolerant aspects of Islam (Discover Islam), noting that the name itself means peace, the Taliban, who follow the literalist teachings of the Koran as propounded by Mohammed ibn Ahd al’ Wahab (1703-87) are inspired to action by the text that says, “And when the sacred months are passed, kill those who join other gods with God wherever ye shall find them, and seize them, besiege them, and lay wait for them with every kind of ambush.”

It is difficult to generalize about the ethical component. For moral behavior may be construed as strict religious requirements which regulate many aspects of social living, thereby conflating the secular and the religious, or it may be downplayed, thereby making morality a practical and secular concern but not one that sees the secular and the religious as related by distinct realms of understanding and concern. Ethics may be either intrinsic to the religious life or incidental to it; religion may be seen as a necessary condition for an ethical life or morality may be seen as a prior condition in order to lead a religious life.

Balancing Belief, Ritual and Ethics

Varieties

There is great diversity in approaches to religious practice in regard to the relationship between belief, ritual and ethics. The contrast between Judaism and Christianity is a good example, with Islam falling somewhere in between. The defining feature of traditional Judaism is a set of 613 laws that specify ritual and moral practice. "[I]n Jewish tradition, theology and religious concepts rarely have been perceived as defining features" (Segal). Christianity is filled with theologians i.e. philosophers of God who illuminate the nature of God. This is a consequence of Christianity’s contention the Messiah waited for by Jews had indeed arrived in the historical person of Jesus. Through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is the promise of life eternal life. The Christian story raises difficult conceptual problems. Is Jesus the Son of God of is he God himself? How can God die? Did he die? What is the nature of the Holy Spirit? Is grace freely given or is earned? In other words, what is the nature of God? Numerous councils addressed these concerns. Judaism left these considerations to one side. As a generalization, Judaism avoids speculation regarding God’s nature and instead simply sings his praises. It also says little about life-after-death. As a result, rabbis (teachers) play a more significant role in Judaism than do theologians (philosophers of God). Islam is both a practice and a faith. Islam means the practice of the religious and social duties. In the religion there is also iman, frequently translated as faith (Martin). This means that in addition to the carrying out of the Five Pillars, there is concern to address matters of God and his attributes, the nature of prophets and angels and the sacred books.

Salvation is primary in some religions; others are more concerned with enlightenment. Here one might contrast Western and Eastern approaches, the West tilting towards the former, as it uses the terminology of soul and spirit, and the East towards the latter, with its vocabulary of mind and thought. The line between these two approaches isn’t always clear-cut. Buddhism
Religions sub-divide into branches, then into denominations (or schools) and finally congregations. This reflects the multiple ways in which religious ideas and experiences get played out by people with different understandings, temperaments, cultural, historical and personal histories. We find religions in which rituals are raised to high levels. Others find such activities a diversion from the life of the spirit. We can see the differences manifested even within one religious tradition. Eastern Orthodox and Mennonites, both Christian, are at the opposite ends of the spectrum. Ritual is the core of what defines Eastern Orthodoxy, while Mennonites, in their simplicity, eschew outward signs of display, as they viewed the indulgence of the senses as diversions of the spirit and all pomp as contrary to the Christian value of humility. Eastern Orthodox churches are filled with pageant and incense. Mennonite meetings are spare in the extreme. One views ritual and liturgy as the way to reach spiritual and ethical ends, while the other views ritual and liturgy as impediments to those very same goals.

While all religions may encourage its adherents to adopt “the moral point of view, prohibiting wanton killing or injury, condemning deception and breaking of promises and requiring some assistance to those in need” (Green), the ethical component may not be central. For example, in Voudon rituals take priority. In Confucianism, by contrast, ethics is central. Its essential text, the Analects, can be used a kind of handbook for ethical living. Rituals (li) are presented in the Analects, but as a complement to goodness (jen) (Tu).

Some do not consider Confucianism a religion at all because of its lack of speculation regarding another a supernatural realm. Confucianism’s concern is nearly exclusively that of ethical relationships. Confucius viewed rituals as instrumental values, as a means of promoting proper behavior, not as ends in themselves. For Buddhists, religion also revolves around moral behavior, yet some schools of this same religion foster a retreat from the world as it is by building monasteries. Judaism, which downplays speculation and stresses both ritual and morality, has divided in modern times over the centrality of ethics, with Reform Judaism placing moral behavior and social conscience as the centerpiece of religious concern. Similar kinds of divisions can be found in other religions, with some denominations looking more inwardly than those stressing norms for living in this world with one's fellow beings.

A religion may have well-developed moral precepts, offering guidance across a broad section of human behavior. Islam tends to view itself as comprehensive, covering every aspect of human life, from civil law to sexual relations. Catholicism also has a long tradition of scholarship that translates into a set of rules or guidelines for both personal and social ethics. As a practical matter, many Catholics see their religion more in spiritual terms, as illustrated in the observations of Mary Austin (1996) in the American Southwest in the late 1800s. She writes that some go to church to be edified, but “at Las Uvas they go for pure worship and to entreat their God. . . If they love too hotly, as we say ‘take their meat before grace,’ so do their betters. Eh, what! shall a man be a saint before he is dead?”

Religion may demand strict compliance to commandments that regulate even (or perhaps, especially) the most intimate human discourse. But this isn’t true of all religions. Morality may be understood more loosely as a guidepost to life that is open-ended, a map and a compass, if you like, that illuminates a direction. The journey’s destination is clear but the ways to arrive are many.
To complicate this even further, there may be different demands upon people depending upon whether one remains engaged in the larger world or withdraws into some sort of closed life. Hinduism goes so far as to provide different sets of moral rules depending upon one’s station in life. There are requirements for young people, other requirements for householders and still other directions for the retired and elderly. In other words, religious morality can be either strict, following specific commandments, or part of living in the spirit of one's religion's values where there are few rules for specific cases and the moral requirements within a religion may differ from person to person depending upon one’s station.

Some religions leave moral guidance to the broader community in which the religion exists. The religion may say little or nothing about moral behavior because it assumes the legitimacy of prevailing morality of the culture in which it is situated. Cultural norms are sufficient as far as these religions are concerned, in large measure because the religion itself is deeply embedded in the culture itself. Shinto exemplifies this approach, as it takes as a given Confucian morality as it has come to be mediated through Japanese culture. It supports existing morality by insisting upon rites and rituals that are understood as buttressing social norms. Unlike prophetic religions that may stand outside of and opposed to prevailing norms, these religions serve to buttress the status quo by endorsing the legitimacy of existing morality.

The prophetic traditions found in the three western monotheistic religions, by contrast, may be highly critical of social practices of their culture. They call their adherents to follow a moral path that may be contrary to prevailing moral norms. They encourage a religio-ethical life whose principles stand in contrast to the mundane and secular values of the society in which it finds itself. Some strands of Christianity are prophetic, calling existing institutions to task. Many Protestant ministers who challenged segregationist laws by referring to a higher law they found in biblical scripture sustained the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s.

**Ethical Differences**

The three religious functions, while more or less present in every religion, can be variously prioritized. These differences are found even within a single religious tradition, with different branches, schools or denominations emphasizing different religious functions. So while one group may stress ritual and another belief, they may share the same moral structure. But even this isn’t always the case. There are sometimes greater differences within one religion regarding morality than there are between different religious bodies. In other words, while there may be agreement in theological premises, within a single religion there may be many notions of right and wrong.

Having said this, it is also accurate to say that while ethics may be ancillary in some religions, it is the starting place of others. Verhoeven (2001) places Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and one strain of Hinduism in this category. He notes that enlightenment follows from the perfection of the mind. The mind, in turn, "requires a solid basis in ethics." This is made explicit in Confucianism's challenge is "to live a deliberate, studied, self-disciplined life, always considerate of others, always concerned for the common good; a life grounded in virtuous habits that form character" (Hoad). This is considerably different from those branches of Christianity in which ethics is not the objective of life but rather a means towards another transcendent goal. For monotheistic religions in general, ethics is a means towards an end rather than the starting point of the religion itself.
Some suggest that the real differences amongst religions today are not so much doctrinal whether the religion is flexible and liberal or fixed and conservative. The real divisions today are more within religions than between them. These differences depend upon the extent to which modernity and secularism are accommodated or excluded from the religious framework. Are the basic texts of the religion taken as is, without change or interpretation, or do they serve as documents that are touchstones that must be adapted to changing conditions? There have always been differences between orthodox and reformists in religion: those who want to maintain the status quo — or at least change very slowly and cautiously — and those who view their religion in broader terms and more ready to meet new challenges with new answers. But the differences today are sharper, as orthodoxy has taken the form of fundamentalism.

Every fundamentalism that we could find grew on soil that was conservative, traditional, classical or orthodox. Then, something comes along which is perceived by the people in such cultures as a total threat to the group, to the world’s future. They don’t pick at little things. Third, and this is a key feature, they then say, “You must react.” It isn’t about being conservative. The Amish are the most conservative Protestants around, and they don’t fight for the Lord. They just want you not to butt in on them. But fundamentalists say you must react. You must be the army of the Lord; you’re failing God if you don’t. Fourth, you select those features from the past that you think will most effectively fight off the threat and convince others of the threat.

Marty

Fundamentalism has arisen with many religions, including Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Hinduism in India. Fundamentalisms all share certain characteristics, namely relying on religion as a source of identity, setting boundaries so that some are excluded, creating dramatic stories that give meaning to the believer and mythologizing enemies (Bartholomeusz and De Silva). One might also add that the moral stance of most fundamentalists tends to be puritanical. Not only is there one correct answer to moral issues but also, in terms of personal behavior, the codes encourage asceticism — modest dress, abstinence from alcohol, separation of the sexes and strict discipline for children. Fundamentalisms exhibit an austere outlook. From this perspective, fundamentalist Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs or Christians who takes their religious texts literally, its teaching inflexibly, its leaders unquestioningly and its enemies very seriously have more in common with believers from other religions than they do with their more liberal counterparts within their own tradition.

The disagreement isn't new nor is it confined to only one area of the world. Early followers of Jesus saw their differences with the Jewish establishment as being, in part, between those who supported the letter of the Law vs. those who followed its spirit. Closer to our own times, we find the regularization of Hindu rituals in the early part of the 19th century and Protestant literalism in the latter half of that century. The urgency felt by conservatives has increased by the end of the 20th century as science has challenged religious narratives with alternative stories regarding the creation of the universe and as the socially disruptive changes wrought by technology have exerted enormous pressures on religious traditions to come to grips with new conditions. Conservatives view themselves as cleaving to basic religious beliefs and practices that present countervailing modernist and secular values in a changing and relativistic world.
Does religion stand as a challenge to modern values or does it adapt to them? Does it become aloof and separate from modern society or does it engage it? And if it chooses engagement, will it succeed in changing secular values in a more spiritual direction or will itself be absorbed into the new set of values, transformed into something utterly different, something unrecognizable to its ancestors? How does it relate to other religious traditions? These are strategic questions that beset all religions today.

**Religious Authority**

HENRY ROSEMONT, JR. (2001) CLAIMS THAT "WHICHEVER TEXTS WE CONSIDER SACRED, read appropriately, in conjunction with the sacred texts and narratives of others traditions, can guide us back from the abyss of meaninglessness that is becoming increasingly characteristic of contemporary life. . ."

In some measure, this book attempts to consider Rosemont's claim, one that essentially argues that underneath the obvious differences between religious traditions there is a common ethical core. However, my interest is not so much the theoretical claim to universality but the real-life understanding of ethics by those who embody the tradition in today's world. By this I do not mean that the answers here reflect the real-life conduct or even the beliefs of the majority of people who are adherents of a particular religion. That is because the respondents are not necessarily typical. Rather, they are those who have interpretative authority within a particular tradition. These are the voices that, in one way or another, are authorized to speak for the religious tradition. By and large, these people are recognized as leaders — priests, ministers, rabbis, imams, and so forth. Their answers may not conform to the religious councils or scholars who make normative claims. Some of the respondents may also be scholars. However, as is evident in newspapers with some frequency, not everyone accepts the official position of his or her religion. Dissenters abound, even with the clergy. So the positions presented here mainly are those of the practitioners, not the theoreticians, those doing the pastoral work, not the theologians.

**Descriptions and Prescriptions**

KNOWING A RELIGION'S ETHICAL STANCE DOESN'T MEAN that you can predict what an adherent will do in any given situation. While there may be a link between religious teaching and moral behavior, the correlation is too imperfect to provide much assurance in this regard, as many social science studies have demonstrated. What people say about moral convictions isn't neatly translated into moral behavior. What a religion prescribes and prescribes may not accurately describe what someone actually does. The gap between theory and practice is sometimes gaping. Knowing and doing are imperfectly connected. For example, many in prison consider themselves to be religious people. They say they believe in God, they may go to church services, hold prayer meetings and read their sacred text regularly. There are reasons for this discrepancy between profession and action. The larger social environment has a great deal to do with determining the extent to which stated convictions are related to actual behavior. Social pressure and other non-moral values may count more than stated religious and moral principles. Next, being able to recite a code of ethics isn't the same thing as acting ethically. The ability to put moral convictions into practice may have as much to do with psychological strength as it does with knowing the right thing to do. Also, a person’s religious affiliation may have more to do with their parent’s
affiliation or the church their neighbors belong to or their preferring the spiritual atmosphere than they do the moral teachings of the religion. And, finally, they may understand religion as a spiritual matter, not an ethical one. For them, there may be no relationship between saving their own souls and treating their neighbors as they treat themselves.

Matters of authority are contentious, for it is often unclear who speaks for a religion. It isn’t simply that there are differences between intuition, belief and personal behavior. On another level the questions are, Who is to say what the authentic beliefs are? Who is to say what interpretation is valid and which not? Is a religion what its leaders say it is or is it what the people who practice it actually do?

There is the official position found in declarations issued by the religious leaders and then there is the religion as the ordinary person practices it. This is why the study of theology and religious ethics is different than the sociology of religion. Some scholars make the distinction between “official” religion and “popular” religion, the former being religion as it is defined by those who hold the power to make such pronouncements and the ability to enforce their doctrines and practice, the latter being those labeled heretics or apostates by the “official” religion (Berlinerblau). From this perspective, in America, Baptists are “official” while the Christian Identity Movement is “popular.” It should be understood that popular is not the same as large. Popular simply refers to a group that arises without official sanction. After the September 11th attack on the Pentagon and World Trade Center, various people claimed to speak in the name of Islam. Some proclaimed a holy war against America, Others said, “It is equally important for authentic and mainstream scholars to help correct, inform and present credible and weighty theses to counteract and refute the ideas advanced by the minority” (Negm). Sermons in the mosque preach one thing while people on the street chant something different. Who does speak for the authentic religion — the majority of practitioners, the dedicated minority, the religious leaders or the scholars?

While this book isn’t a predictor of how someone will actually behave when presented with an ethical choice, what it does give is what that person’s religion says the person ought to do. In other words, it presents the “official” view. But even here, matters are complicated. Who speaks for the official religion? Whose interpretation of scripture, doctrine and theology has legitimate standing? Which positions are normative? How do we separate those positions that have standing within the tradition from those that are idiosyncratic or simply wrong?

In religions with scholarly traditions we can turn to the texts that have defined the religion historically. And in hierarchical religions, it is relatively simple to find the authoritative voice: that person or group that sits at the top of the hierarchy speaks authoritatively for that religion. The Roman Catholic Church is a prime example. It is structured with the Pope at the top of the hierarchy, as the Commander in Chief, so to speak. Also, centuries of scholarly discourse has taken place within church sanctioned academic settings. Of course, there is dissension even here. Yet the final authority does rest in one person, in consultation with those in the hierarchy closest to him. Still, even within the Roman Catholic Church we can see some of the difficulties found in the application of ethics in religion. In recent years the Vatican has tended to rein in some academics who have presented church teaching in a way considered unacceptable by the Vatican and has even barred some from teaching theology at Catholic universities. Beginning in June 2002, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops began to implement the requirement of the papal document *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* that Catholic theologians at Catholic universities obtain an ecclesiastical license. This is to ensure that only authentic Catholic doctrine is taught at Catholic-sponsored universities. Yet even within the Roman Catholic Church there is disagreement about authority. Some argue that there are two magisterial within the Church — the
theological and the pastoral, with the duty of the former to critique the latter, the pastoral/hierarchical magisterium (Maguire). According to a survey conducted by the University of Notre Dame, there is widespread disagreement amongst young American Catholics regarding church teaching on sexual issues (Steinfels). While these young Americans may disagree with official doctrine, they remain within the Church and continue to regard themselves as faithful and good Catholics.

Additionally, there are different interpretations regarding the application of ethical concerns to particular circumstances even within the “official” religion. The Roman Catholic Church also presents an example as it is applied to social ethics. Soon after the September 11, 2001, terrorist bombings in Washington and New York, the Church seemed to be of two minds about the application of the just war theory to the situation. The pope had said, “War is an adventure with no return.” In attempts at clarification whether this left room for a military response, one spokesman said, “I suppose.” On the same day, the Italian Bishops Conference said, “There is the right, even the duty, to neutralize international terrorism” (Henneberger, Sept. 30). Similar differences surfaced within Islam. Most Muslim religious leaders condemned the acts of terrorism as being contrary to Islam. The head of Saudi Arabia’s Islamic judiciary Shaikh Salih al-Lahidan who is also a member of the Council of Senior Scholars in Saudi Arabia, said Islam strictly forbids bloodletting and does not condone the killing of innocent people, especially in a collective manner. "Killing a person who has not committed a crime is one of the major sins and terrible crimes... What happened in America is...undoubtedly a grave criminal act which Islam does not approve of and no one should applaud" (The True Religion). At the same time Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a noted theologian from Qatar, took a different view because his interpretation of the political and religious context differed. “We refuse terrorism but don’t consider it terrorism to defend one’s own home” (Henneberger, Oct 5). Similar kinds of disagreements within the “official” religion can be found in all religions. To complicate this further, the official views change over time. Until the last century, many Christians in America found support for their racism in biblical texts. Polygamy was once the accepted position of the Mormons but today is forbidden.

In other religious traditions, authority rests not in individuals or institutions but in texts as interpreted by duly ordained religious leaders who have been trained, in one form or another, to understand the real meaning of the documents in light of their historical roots. These religious leaders and scholars are the arbiters of interpretation. Judaism is one such tradition. While there may be differences in interpretation amongst rabbis, there is an understanding that ethics must be rooted in and justified by the Law. What the Law in fact is and how it applies arises out of debates amongst the rabbis. So while some positions become normative they remain standard out of common agreement, not out of fiat.

At the other end of the spectrum from hierarchical religions are those that grant complete individual autonomy in religious matters. Many Protestants groups fall here, as Christianity is understood to be the province of the priesthood of all believers. Each person freely interprets scriptures and finds personal meaning directly in relation to text or spirit. Nevertheless, just as in hierarchical religions there is judicious consultation with those lower in the ranks, latitudinarian religious traditions also has its boundaries. The rejection of Jesus Christ as one’s savior is one such position. It was this that ultimately pushed Unitarians outside the Christian fold, as individual conscience was raised to new heights. Yet even in such groups as the Unitarians, there are limits to acceptable practices and values. For example, that which would violate the integrity of the person would be viewed as contrary to acceptable Unitarian thought.
Whether hierarchical or not, a religion may offer wide latitude towards dissent or it may
discourage independent thought. I began with a personal anecdote, so I will close with one as
well. Once I visited a religious commune for two weeks. Christian pacifists started this group
soon after WWII. Disillusioned by a world that put material values ahead of moral and religious
values, they removed themselves from society to create a utopia inspired by the Gospel. There
would be no competition, no money, only a place that took the social gospel of Jesus to heart.
During the 1960s, it became a place where civil rights workers, exhausted from their work to
overcome segregation, came for respite. No questions asked about religious beliefs; no attempts
at conversion. They simply extended their hands of kindness, motivated as they were by
compassionate hearts. They valued peace, they valued justice, and they valued love. But what
they no longer valued when I visited in 1976 was questioning, open inquire and debate. The
commune conducted its own school on the commune and used their own texts. The only visits off
the grounds were done as group trips. No one was allowed a public library card — they had their
own library with all the books and magazines chosen by the elders. There was no television set.
During lunch all sat quietly as a reader provided entertainment from a book chosen for its good
moral lessons. At the pond, men and women swam on separate sides. The women wore one-
piece bathing suits with skirts. The commune bought all clothing collectively and all clothing was
practical and modest. If I had a substantive question about their religion, I was directed to one of
the leaders, as no one else felt competent to engage in serious discussions of any sort. There had
already been a split in the group and the minority was asked to leave. I understand that soon after
my stay, invitations to visitors were less common. The commune was becoming a closed society.
What thirty years before had been a group of open-minded Christians attempting to lead a life
modeled on Jesus had become a group intolerant of differences. Their understanding of religious
ethics had been transformed in less than three decades.

Finally, this book does not attempt to systematize moral judgments or draw conclusions
about religious morality in general. Such efforts belong to religious philosophy. Rather this is a
collection of statements of principles and rules/guidelines that are recommended as norms of
conduct as they relate to matters of good and bad, and right and wrong. In this way, the book is
religious sociology. I have asked people to speak from within their own tradition and I have asked
them to answer succinctly. I have not edited their comments nor added anything of my own. What
you have here is a compilation of short answers to complex questions, a kind of introduction to
religious ethics that allows the reader to make easy cross-references in regard to specific
questions.

Sources

I have attempted to be comprehensive in the religions represented, but the sources
must necessarily reflect a bias of the compiler. The number of denominations/schools is so
numerous as to be staggering. For example, there are more than 30,000 Christian denominations
alone. A similar pattern, but not as extreme, is found within Buddhism. I have attempted to
include the major branches of each religious and I have tried to present both a cross-section of
religious ethics and representative sample that reflects the size of the various religions.

In part, I have relied upon sources with which I was able to make personal contact. In this
way, the book isn't representative but reflects a convenience sample. The choices in this
sourcebook reflect yet another bias, this one technological. Whenever my personal-contact trail
has gone cold, I have used the Internet as a research tool. Several contacts I have made this way
declined to participate, for varying reasons. Others did not respond at all, even after repeated
attempts. This means that some religions, which have large numbers, aren't in this book because they have no Web sites. I have made an honest effort to be as inclusive (but not exhaustive) as I can be. There are a few religious bodies that I have contacted which have declined to participate in this project. And there may be oversights in neglecting to include others. In the end, I have chosen efficiency over thoroughness, fully recognizing the limitations this entails.

The book is also written mainly with an American audience in mind. This is one reason why a disproportionate number of religions and respondents are from the United States. But there is yet another reason for the inclusion of so many American denominations in this book. For a variety of historical reasons, the United States has been fertile soil for the proliferation of religions and religious sentiment. While America may not be the most religious nation in the world (my own observation is that India surpasses the United States in this regard), it may well be the place with the greatest variety of religious expression, teeming as it does with hundreds, if not thousands, of denominations. America's laissez-faire attitude, fostered by the Constitution's First Amendment clause of separation of church and state, has created fertile soil for the flowering of religious experimentation (Balmer). America’s entrepreneurial spirit, mixed with the successive and huge waves of immigrants, has created a wondrous stew of religious expression quite unlike anything else in the world.

REFERENCES


**BAHÁ’I**

The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.

Bahá'u'lláh

THE MOST RECENT OF WESTERN MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS, Bab declared his mission in 1844 in Persia (modern-day Iran). In 1863, Baha’u’llah announced himself as the one promised by Bab as the Messenger of God. He died in 1892.

Baha’is are now found in nearly every country in the world. There are over 6 million followers, centered mainly in India. Its headquarters are in Israel.

Compiled and edited by Jonah Winters, Executive Editor, Baha’i Library, from answers and quotations provided by Dianne Bradford and Fiona Missaghian with input from Bill Garlington, Jason Sandlin, Robert Stauffer and reviewed by Robert Stockman, Director, Research Office at the United States Baha’i National Center Evanston, Illinois USA

**Terms:**

*Abdu'l-Bahá* (1844-1921): Eldest surviving son of Bahá'u'lláh and his designated successor; regarded as being the perfect "Exemplar" of the Bahá’í Faith and the first of two infallible interpreters of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation.

*Báb, The* (1819-1850): The Prophet-Forerunner of the Bahá’í Faith; seen as a "bridge" of sorts between the Islamic revelation and the Bahá’í revelation.


*Guardian, The*: honorific of Shoghi Effendi

*Manifestation*: A Prophet of God in any age, e.g. Christ, Buddha, Muhammad, and The Báb. "Minor" prophets such as Isaiah or Amos are not manifestations. The Manifestations are not God descended to earth, but rather perfect human reflections of the divine, such that the face of God as reflected in the Manifestations can be regarded as God Himself.

The Universal House of Justice: Supreme elected administrative body of the Bahá'í Faith, consisting of a nine-member committee acting as a single executive voice. First elected in 1963, its seat is in the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel.

Some prefatory comments:

I. All writings and texts quoted below can be found online at the Bahá'í Academics Resource Library, http://bahai-library.org. Full citations have not been provided; write to Jonah Winters, winters@bahai-library.org, for further information about any text cited here. This survey itself has been posted online at http://bahai-library.org/essays.

II. By common Bahá'í convention, extracts from the writings of the Bahá'í Faith's primary figures (The Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi) have been italicized. Extracts from the writings of the Universal House of Justice and their agencies (including the Notes to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas where quoted below) have not been italicized.

III. A few respondents expressed their concern that the following 55 ethics questions might not be neatly answerable in a Bahá'í context. Reasons for this vary, but some primary objections have been:

a) From a Bahá'í perspective, many of the answers to these questions would require a degree of contextualization rather than a blanket 'yes or no,' 'this or that' answer. This is best expressed in a letter from the Universal House of Justice dated June 1988:

The Universal House of Justice does not feel that the time has come for it to provide detailed legislation on subjects such as abortion, homosexuality and other moral issues.... [I]n most areas of human behaviour there are acts which are clearly contrary to the law of God and others which are clearly approved or permissible; between these there is often a grey area where it is not immediately apparent what should be done. It has been a human tendency to wish to eliminate these grey areas so that every aspect of life is clearly prescribed. A result of this tendency has been the tremendous accretion of interpretation and subsidiary legislation which has smothered the spirit of certain of the older religions.

On behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 5 June 1988

While the same could be said of other religions, in the Bahá'í Faith context is also informative in light of the Faith's fundamental tenet that certain religious truth itself is relative. This is expressed in the Faith's teaching of the "Progressive Revelation" of certain religious truth; God sends his Manifestations to each people and each time as they are needed, and no Revelation is final. The Revelations thus differ in many points of context and cultural relevance. The core spiritual teachings of all religions, though, are universal and unchanging. (For more on the Faith's relativism, see http://bahai-library.org/articles/relativism.html.) Future Bahá'í law, when
universalized and globalized, may thus sometimes have to focus on the spirit of the law rather than its letter.

However, the Bahá’í Faith also teaches that ethical conduct can be universalized. Certain beliefs and actions are considered as wrong and immoral regardless of the historical context. But individuals are not necessarily capable of determining on their own which laws have contextual versus universal application. Bahá’ís are thus very conscientious about adhering as closely as possible to the written word of the Bahá’í Faith, its extensive body of sacred text left for the community by the Faith’s Central Figures.

In a certain sense, making ethical determinations is a requirement for and mark of maturity. The human race is slowly but presently coming of age, the Bahá’í Faith teaches, and the capacity to discern ethical behavior is becoming a capability and responsibility of all believers. As the Universal House of Justice continued in the above letter, there are “...area[s] of the application of the laws [which are] intentionally left to the conscience of each individual believer. This is the age in which mankind must attain maturity, and one aspect of this is the assumption by individuals of the responsibility for deciding, with the assistance of consultation, their own course of action in areas which are left open by the law of God.” (ibid.)

b) Besides the relativity of religious truth, the Bahá’í Faith also contains a certain relativity of historic truth. Authorized teachings of the Bahá’í Faith go back to the advent of the Báb, 1844. Authorized interpretations of Bahá’í Teachings then extend to the death of Shoghi Effendi, 1957, and still inform present-day legislation of the Universal House of Justice. In that 150 years Bahá’í history has spanned place as well as time, with its Manifestations [prophets; see definition above] living in and revealing from Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Palestine/Israel, and its authorized interpreters living in or speaking in England, Egypt, continental Europe, North America, and Israel. Some Bahá’í texts might have contextual but not universal relevance. Descriptions of specific ethical teachings must sometimes be described contextually and could be misleading when generalized. Examples include teachings on war, the treatment of apostates, martyrdom and suicide, genetic engineering, and bigamy.

c) The Bahá’í Faith is a very text-centered religion, in no small part because the tens of thousands of extant writings from its five central authorities (The Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice) contain guidance on thousands of topics. A corollary of this is that the three latter authorities were/are very careful only to interpret or legislate within the sphere of teachings left by their respective predecessors. By extension, present-day Bahá’ís and the Universal House of Justice refrain from extrapolating from precedents and hence avoid ruling on or offering interpretations about issues not previously addressed. Therefore, if any of the following answers lack clearly supporting quotations, they should be considered individual interpretation only and might or might not accurately represent Bahá’í teachings.

Introduction:

From Dr. Udo Schaefer, "On the Difficulty of Dealing with Ethical Questions," a chapter from "In A Blue Haze: Smoking and Bahá’í Ethics" (Prague: Zero Palm Press, 1997), online at http://bahai-library.org/books/bluehaze:

The question of whether a certain behaviour is permitted or prohibited, good, evil, or neutral, is a question of ethics. A Bahá’í who wants to
know how to act in a given situation, will begin by turning to his conscience, and since this has been formed by the revealed Word, to the Scripture, i.e. the sum of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the authoritative interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. What might appear to be self-evident for every religious person is not necessarily so, as we shall shortly see.

Today the presentation of concrete ethical standards has become problematic in our society. Certainly, the highest ethical values in the Bahá'í Revelation, the love of one's neighbour and of all humanity, or the cardinal virtue of justice, are sure to meet with approval. One can agree to these highly abstract values without having to commit oneself to changing any patterns of everyday life. However, when it comes to assessing actual everyday behaviour affecting one's own self, especially when it comes to prohibitions, irritation can set in quickly.

The Bahá'ís are living in this society and are influenced by the prevalent ways of thinking whether they want to be or not, and in this society, thinking in moral categories is becoming more and more unfashionable. Many people are unaccustomed to it. To many it seems increasingly questionable that there should be such things as rigid norms and unalterable duties which unequivocally state what should or should not be done. This is concomitant with the decay of religion and the resulting erosion of the Christian value system.

In many parts of the world morality, called an "honourable form of stupidity" by Friedrich Nietzsche, has not only lost its general binding force but also its self-evident importance and is actually seen by many as a kind of stupidity. It has largely disappeared from everyday speech and is almost only used with an ironical undertone. A person who maintains moral points of view is considered a "morality apostle", with whom no one wants any interaction. This is evident in political discussions or in talk shows on television where interlocutors are admonished, for God's sake not to moralise. Especially in regard to so-called "social fringe groups" (criminals, social outcasts, prostitutes, drug addicts, homosexuals) or on the issue of abortion one should kindly refrain from any moral approach whatsoever. Persons who fail to do so disqualify themselves, exposing themselves as Pharisees and die-hard reactionaries. This process of "demoralisation" began with sociology; how far it has already spread can be seen by the semantic cleansing of our language, which bans the use of all terms that might hold any moral reproach.

Of course, Bahá'ís do not think that way. Experience with these issues shows, however, that they often have similar feelings, which is not surprising in this social climate. Therefore, a person presenting ethical demands and thus drawing an ideal of humanity "in light of which one's own everyday existence fails a thousandfold", is easily suspected of affectations or insincerity by being a moralist, a hell-and-brimstone preacher, as well as by violating the cardinal norm that prohibits self-righteousness. Self-righteousness is a distorted form of righteousness. According to Confucius the self-righteous are "the spoilers of morals."
They were frequently and uncompromisingly rebuked by Bahá'u'lláh even as He praised the truly righteous, "well is it with the righteous that mock not the sinful, but rather conceal their misdeeds". When someone uses the pretext of moral responsibility to scrutinize commonly accepted social norms of behaviour, isn't that person preoccupied with the faults and sins of others? In the end, doesn't such a person violate the imperatives of his or her own ethics?

If this were the case, it would actually be totally inadmissible to be concerned with Bahá'í ethics, which as in all religions do make up a substantial part of our theology. However, we are not dealing here with a specific individual's unique and personal behaviour, but rather with abstract human behaviour. And to judge this behaviour in the abstract is not only permissible, but imperative, since God's Book is the "unerring Balance" "in which all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth are weighed", through which "truth shall be distinguished from error". At a time "when no man knoweth how to discern light and darkness or to distinguish guidance from error", we are challenged to reflect what our duties are, whether certain ways of acting, accepted or disputed in society, are permitted or prohibited. How else could we then accomplish the task which 'Abdu'l-Bahá defined in a prayer: "to refute what is vain and false" and "to establish the truth"?

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
Submission under God's command is considered "good", but it needs to be pointed out also that this implies to follow (the most recent of) God's Messengers, Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh says:

The source of all good is trust in God, submission unto His command, and contentment with His holy will and pleasure.
Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Words of Wisdom, pp. 153-155

Our duty to the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is first recognize the Manifestations of God and follow their teachings, from which goodness follows:

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other...

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas
Some Bahá'ís believe that striving towards social good would also define what a good person is, and many Bahá'ís have dedicated themselves to social improvement. Ultimately, according to Bahá'í teachings, only God and His Messengers know what is the right and good thing to do, since only God has the "complete picture," hence the command to submission. God demands that His people strive towards the social good.

Bahá'ís also believe that being good or being an ethical person has consequences for this world and the world beyond, so the ethical teachings of the Bahá'í Faith have a spiritual and "other-worldly" dimension as well. One needs to keep this in mind when asking why one should be good etc. Being an ethical person is strongly connected with the purpose of existence: know God through His Messengers and follow the laws.

2. Why be good?

1) By divine command. Bahá'u'lláh says: ... Live ye one with another, O people, in radiance and joy. By My life! All that are on earth shall pass away, while good deeds alone shall endure; to the truth of My words God doth Himself bear witness....

*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Par. 70, pp. 44-45

Other reasons include: 2) Universal Eschatology: Because God knows what is good for His people and He only wants them to be happy, content and to live a life in peace. 3) Individual Eschatology: Because everyone's station after death will depend on one's goodness in this world (and of course God's acceptance) 4) Purely for Love for God (Ultimate and most selfless reason).

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh's appointed Successor and authorized Interpreter of His words, says: ... And the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight.

*Secret of Divine Civilization*, pp. 2-3

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?

Yes, especially if one is a member of another of God's religions, which the Bahá'í Faith regard as all authentic; "The holy Manifestations Who have been the Sources or Founders of the various religious systems were united and agreed in purpose and teaching" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*)

Abdu'l-Bahá even encouraged people to become "true Christians": Thou didst begin thy letter with a blessed phrase, saying: 'I am a Christian.' O would that all were truly Christian! It is easy to be a Christian on the tongue, but hard to be a true one. Today some five hundred million souls are Christian, but the real Christian is very rare: he is that soul from whose comely face there shineth the splendour of Christ, and who showeth forth the perfections of the Kingdom; this is a matter of great moment, for to be a Christian is to embody every excellence there is. I hope that thou, too, shalt become a true Christian.


While one can be good without being a Bahá'í, there is a great advantage to recognizing the truth of Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings. For example, say there existed a book series, and the first book in the series with all of its sequels contained the answers to all of the questions you could ever have. Now say you find one of these books. It could be one of these books that was already
owned by a family member or one you came across unexpectedly. You read the book and realize what a treasure it is. You might even seek out and read some of the earlier books in this series because this one is so exciting and you hope for more sequels as well. But either because you don't know that there exists another sequel in this wonderful series of books or because you have been convinced by others that this book which you read is the last book of the series, you don't even look for any other sequels.

Now, since each sequel in the series summarizes or restates the answers found in all of the previous books, not going back to read any of the previous books in the series may not hurt you; although you would miss out on the beauty and excitement of these books by not reading them. However, since each book contains more of these answers than any of the ones previously written, not reading these sequels means that there are answers on which you are missing out.

The Revelation of God is like that series of books. As humanity matured as a race, a greater measure of God's Revelation was revealed through each succeeding Manifestation. To reveal too much too early would be to give the people more than they could handle. Therefore the Revelation of God's Will and mysteries was revealed slowly and progressively according to the capacity of the people of the time to receive it. Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation contains the fullest measure of God's Revelation thus far given to humanity. Therefore, to miss out on Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings is to keep yourself from knowing as much as you can about the mysteries of God, God's Will for humanity, and the solutions for the world's problems—solutions given by God Himself through Bahá'u'lláh. In addition, Bahá'u'lláh has clearly written that He is not the last of God's Manifestations/Messengers either. So, in a few centuries we can expect another sequel to the Books of the Revelation of God.

Ultimately, though only God can decide who is "good" and who is not. Until we face Him nobody can say for sure if He accepts our acts, even if we thing they are good and even if they are in accordance with Bahá’í law.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion? i.e., can an apostate be a good person?

Yes, but one does not fulfill the purpose of one's creation. As earlier quoted from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh says: The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws.... Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. 

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Par. 1, p. 19

However, the Bahá’í teachings also emphasize that "One's beliefs are an internal and personal matter; no person or institution has the right to exert compulsion in matters of belief." (Universal House of Justice, private correspondence April 4 2001). As explained by Abdu'l-Bahá, "The Cause of God hath never had any place for denouncing others as infidel or profligate, nor hath it allowed anyone to humiliate or belittle another." (http://bahai-library.org/uhj/takfir.html)

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?

God is the source of all good and His commandments help distinguish between right or wrong. The standards of morality are established by Religion and they are renewed with the appearance of each Manifestation of God. Therefore, what religions require of their followers is the utmost in morality.

'Abdu'l-Bahá says: The real bond of integrity is religious in character, for religion indicates the oneness of the world of humanity. Religion serves the world of morality. Religion purifies the hearts. Religion impels men to achieve praiseworthy deeds. Religion becomes the cause of love in
human hearts, for religion is a divine foundation, the foundation ever conducive to life. The teachings of God are the source of illumination to the people of the world. Religion is ever constructive not destructive. Japan Will Turn Ablaze, p. 43

6. What is the source of ethics?

God, as announced through God's Messenger for this Age. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

... The divine religions embody two kinds of ordinances. First, there are those which constitute essential, or spiritual, teachings of the Word of God. These are faith in God, the acquisition of the virtues which characterize perfect manhood, praiseworthy moralities, the acquisition of the bestowals and bounties emanating from the divine effulgences — in brief, the ordinances which concern the realm of morals and ethics. This is the fundamental aspect of the religion of God, and this is of the highest importance because knowledge of God is the fundamental requirement of man. Man must comprehend the oneness of Divinity. He must come to know and acknowledge the precepts of God and realize for a certainty that the ethical development of humanity is dependent upon religion. He must get rid of all defects and seek the attainment of heavenly virtues in order that he may prove to be the image and likeness of God... As God is loving and kind to all men, man must likewise manifest loving-kindness to all humanity. As God is loyal and truthful, man must show forth the same attributes in the human world. Even as God exercises mercy toward all, man must prove himself to be the manifestation of mercy. In a word, the image and likeness of God constitute the virtues of God, and man is intended to become the recipient of the effulgences of divine attributes.'

Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 403-404

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?

Yes, since the morality brought by God's Messengers eventually becomes the standard for society. However, they are depriving themselves of attaining the purpose of their creation "to know and worship God." Someone who does the same thing as a religious person would do, but just does not believe in God, may be a good person in that he or she produces good for this world, but the purpose of his or her creation was not fully fulfilled.

The short obligatory prayer of Bahá'u'lláh, which many Bahá'ís recite daily, says: I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, # CLXXXI

Further, it is possible that religion may at times be itself bad and immoral (however, presumably the following quote doesn't contrast religion with atheism, i.e. actual disbelief in God):

Religion should unite all hearts and cause wars and disputes to vanish from the face of the earth, give birth to spirituality, and bring life and light to each heart. If religion becomes a cause of dislike, hatred and division, it were better to be without it, and to withdraw from such a religion would be a truly religious act. For it is clear that the purpose of a remedy is to cure; but if the remedy should only aggravate the complaint it had better be left alone. Any religion which is not a cause of love and unity is no religion.
All the holy prophets were as doctors to the soul; they gave prescriptions for the healing of mankind; thus any remedy that causes disease does not come from the great and supreme Physician.


8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?

By the standards of religion. As it has ever been, God tells humanity what is right and what is wrong through His Manifestations, teachings which we learn and internalize largely through prayer and meditation. It is no different with Bahá'u'lláh. He, Himself, affirms: We have, under all circumstances, enjoined on men what is right, and forbidden what is wrong. He Who is the Lord of Being is witness that this Wronged One hath besought from God for His creatures whatever is conducive to unity and harmony, fellowship and concord. By the righteousness of God! This Wronged One is not capable of dissimulation. He, verily, hath revealed that which He desired; He, truly, is the Lord of strength, the Unrestrained.

Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp. 38-39

About the Laws which He has revealed at God's bidding, Bahá'u'lláh says: Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power. To this beareth witness that which the Pen of Revelation hath revealed. Meditate upon this, O men of insight!

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Par. 5, p. 21

In addition, a certain amount of testing is also a part of each Revelation. Again turning to Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, we read: ... from time immemorial even unto eternity the Almighty hath tried, and will continue to try, His servants, so that light may be distinguished from darkness, truth from falsehood, right from wrong, guidance from error, happiness from misery, and roses from thorns...

The Kitáb-i-Iqan, p. 8

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?

The Bahá'í Faith offers a number of responses to this question. These include that suffering produces personal growth; that suffering need not prevent happiness, for one can be joyous in the midst of severity; that some people bring suffering upon themselves through their neglecting to follow the teachings of the Prophets; and finally that the reason for some suffering might only be known to God.

Tests and trials make us stronger. Not until man is tried doth the pure gold distinctly separate from the dross. Torment is the fire of test wherein the pure gold shineth resplendently and the impurity is burned and blackened. At present thou art, praise be to God, firm and steadfast in tests and trials and art not shaken by them.


Shoghi Effendi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's appointed successor and Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, wrote:

... As long as there will be life on earth, there will be also suffering, in various forms and degrees. But suffering, although an inescapable reality, can nevertheless be utilised as a means for the attainment of happiness. This is the interpretation given
to it by all the prophets and saints who, in the midst of severe tests and trials, felt happy and joyous and experienced what is best and holiest in life. Suffering is both a reminder and a guide. It stimulates us better to adapt ourselves to our environmental conditions, and thus leads the way to self improvement. In every suffering one can find a meaning and a wisdom. But it is not always easy to find the secret of that wisdom. It is sometimes only when all our suffering has passed that we become aware of its usefulness. What man considers to be evil turns often to be a cause of infinite blessings.

*Unfolding Destiny*, p. 434.

The Guardian also wrote: ...the world is full of suffering. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that the deeper are the furrows it digs into our very being, the greater will be the fruit of our life and the more enhanced our spiritual development. All the Saints that shine in the history of society had to pass through tribulations. Their form was various but their effect has always been the same, namely, the purification of our heart and soul for receiving the light of God.

Quoted in *Lights of Guidance*, No. 678, p. 204.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?

Since we learn what is moral from religion, the two are inextricably entwined, and an offense in one is also reflected in the other. However, the Bahá'í Faith does recognize a distinction between certain public and private ethical behavior; if a Bahá'í drinks at home he has only God to judge, but if he drinks in public he harms the Faith. Similarly, the Faith recognizes that non-Bahá'ís do not and are not expected to follow all Bahá'í laws. Again with the case of drinking, the Faith does not chastise or judge the consumption of alcohol by those who do not follow them.

It is always most unfortunate when Baha'is of long standing, and even members of institutions at the national level, partake of alcoholic beverages, thus damaging themselves, harming the good name of the Faith in the eyes of non-Baha'is, and setting a bad example for the rank and file of the believers.

Of course, the Assemblies should not pry into the lives of individual believers; but in the case of any Baha'í who blatantly violates the law, he should be counselled

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?

The individual is responsible to enforce the rules of his/her own personal religious laws (prayers, fasting, pilgrimage, charity), and the observance or non-observance of these laws is between the individual and God. As for the other social laws which protect and guide the community at large, Bahá'u'lláh has established the institution of the House of Justice as follows: *The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established... It behoveth them to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men and to regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all that dwell on earth. It is incumbent upon them to take counsel together and to have regard for the interests of the servants of God, for His sake, even as they regard their own interests, and to choose that which is meet and seemly.*

*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Par. 30, p. 29

Bahá'u'lláh has also set forth ordinances which helps to provide the Houses of Justice with the funds they will need to care for those under their jurisdictions. Of these Houses of Justice
Bahá'u'lláh also says: ...Verily have We made [them] a shelter for the poor and needy... (The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Par. 48, p. 37)

At present there is only one House of Justice established in the world, the Universal House of Justice, which deals with the world-wide affairs of the Bahá’í Faith, and has made itself available to world leaders for consultation as well. Indeed, several of the leaders and governments in the world have already availed themselves of this priceless guidance based upon Bahá'u'lláh's teachings offered by the Universal House of Justice. National and local Houses of Justice at the present time go by the name of Spiritual Assemblies. (see further explanation in Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá vol. 1 p. 6; also Robert Stockman's Bahá'í Faith in America vol. 2 note 139, p.448)

These "Local Spiritual Assemblies" and "National Spiritual Assemblies" run the affairs of the community and enforce moral behaviour in the rare cases that such enforcement is necessary (e.g., by repeated and egregious public behavioral offenses). Enforcement comes first in the form of patient counselling to make sure the individual is familiar with Bahá’í law, and in the most egregious cases culminates in the retraction of the believer’s voting rights and other aspects of community participation.

The Universal House of Justice explains the process: The Universal House of Justice feels that it is vital, for the sound development of the Cause of God in those communities where there remains any doubt among the friends as to the importance of obedience to [Bahá’í] law, that the National Spiritual Assemblies ensure that all believers are clearly informed of it. Of course, the Assemblies should not pry into the lives of individual believers; but in the case of any Bahá’í who blatantly violates the law, he should be counselled, assisted to overcome the habit, warned repeatedly of the consequences of continued disobedience, and ultimately, if he does not respond positively, be deprived of his administrative rights.

online at http://baha-library.org/uhj/alcohol.html

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
When Bahá'u'lláh wrote His books with laws and teachings He did not think that they will only benefit His followers, but the whole planet, that they in fact have the purpose to unite the whole world and enable it to live in peace. But of course everybody has the freedom to choose.

Since the morality brought by God's Messengers eventually becomes the standard for society, they will inevitably apply to everyone eventually. About the Laws which He has revealed, Bahá'u'lláh says:

They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognize that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples. He that turneth away from them is accounted among the abject and foolish. We, verily, have commanded you to refuse the dictates of your evil passions and corrupt desires, and not to transgress the bounds which the Pen of the Most High hath fixed, for these are the breath of life unto all created things. The seas of Divine wisdom and Divine utterance have risen under the breath of the breeze of the All-Merciful. Hasten to drink your fill, O men of understanding! They that have violated the Covenant of God by breaking His commandments, and have turned back on their heels, these have erred grievously in the sight of God, the All-Possessing, the Most High.
13. What role should religion play in secular society?

Religion should serve the spiritual and social needs of all those willing to accept such help and where it is allowed by secular laws. It is an indispensable part of society. Again we turn to the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá for clarification of the role and importance of religion to society: ... Religion is the light of the world, and the progress, achievement, and happiness of man result from obedience to the laws set down in the holy Books. Briefly, it is demonstrable that in this life, both outwardly and inwardly the mightiest of structures, the most solidly established, the most enduring, standing guard over the world, assuring both the spiritual and the material perfections of mankind, and protecting the happiness and the civilization of society - is religion.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: Secret of Divine Civilization, pp. 71-72

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?

Yes, if justice warrants it, such as in cases of self-defense and criminal justice. In the endnotes added to the English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, where further explanation and clarification can be found regarding some of its passages, is written: ... Shoghi Effendi in a letter written on his behalf has also indicated that, in an emergency, when there is no legal force at hand to appeal to, a Bahá'í is justified in defending his life...

Anonymous, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Notes Section, Note 173, p. 241

Abdu'l-Bahá explains in more depth:

There are two sorts of retributory punishments. One is vengeance, the other, chastisement. Man has not the right to take vengeance, but the community has the right to punish the criminal; and this punishment is intended to warn and to prevent so that no other person will dare to commit a like crime. This punishment is for the protection of man's rights, but it is not vengeance; vengeance appeases the anger of the heart by opposing one evil to another. This is not allowable, for man has not the right to take vengeance. But if criminals were entirely forgiven, the order of the world would be upset...

The communities must punish the oppressor, the murderer, the malefactor, so as to warn and restrain others from committing like crimes. But the most essential thing is that the people must be educated in such a way that no crimes will be committed; for it is possible to educate the masses so effectively that they will avoid and shrink from perpetrating crimes, so that the crime itself will appear to them as the greatest chastisement, the utmost condemnation and torment. Therefore, no crimes which require punishment will be committed.

Some Answered Questions, #77

There is no explicit statement on euthanasia yet. The Universal House of Justice has said that it is "a matter which the Universal House of Justice will have to legislate." Until they do,
"decisions [in these matters] must be left to the consciences of those responsible." (Lights of Guidance, pp. 291-292)

15. Is war ever justified?
Yes, if in defense of the innocent. Where one state rises against another, all other states are to rise to defend the attacked. Bahá'u'lláh says: "Should one king rise up against another, all the other kings must arise to deter him. Arms and armaments will, then, be no more needed beyond that which is necessary to insure the internal security of their respective countries.

Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 31

Peace is of course preferable. Bahá'u'lláh says: "... They must put away the weapons of war, and turn to the instruments of universal reconstruction. Should one king rise up against another, all the other kings must arise to deter him. Arms and armaments will, then, be no more needed beyond that which is necessary to insure the internal security of their respective countries.

Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp. 30-31

Abdu'l-Bahá summarizes how to avoid war: To remedy this condition there must be universal peace. To bring this about, a Supreme Tribunal must be established, representative of all governments and peoples; questions both national and international must be referred thereto, and all must carry out the decrees of this Tribunal. Should any government or people disobey, let the whole world arise against that government or people.


16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
No. The Universal House of Justice has written: 'The use of force by the physically strong against the weak, as a means of imposing one's will and fulfilling one's desires, is a flagrant transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings. There can be no justification for anyone compelling another, through the use of force or through the threat of violence, to do that which the other person is not inclined.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has written: O ye lovers of God! In this, the cycle of Almighty God, violence and force, constraint and oppression, are one and all condemned.

Quoted in letter from the Universal House of Justice, reprinted in The American Bahá'í, November 23, 1993, pp. 10-11

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
In our faith it is not allowed, though we can seek to serve in a non-combatant role. We are to obey just governments. Shoghi Effendi states: Our position as Bahá'ís is not that we won't obey our Government or support the country if attacked, it is that we do not believe in, or wish to take part in, killing our fellow-men. We are not conscientious objectors at all; we will serve, but wish, as there is a provision in the law in the U.S.A. covering our attitude, to be classified as non-combatants. If you need to consult on this matter, you should refer to the N.S.A., as this question continually arises, and they can give you advice which will be the most accurate and applicable to present conditions.

Lights of Guidance, No. 1352, p. 407

18. Is force justifiable against children?
Regarding the disciplining of children, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: ... Whosoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the
slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, No. 95, p. 125

The Universal House of Justice emphasizes just how important this is:

Among the signs of moral downfall in the declining moral order are the high incidence of violence within the family, the increase of degrading and cruel treatment of spouses and children, and the spread of sexual abuse. It is essential that the members of the community of the Greatest Name take the utmost care not to be drawn into acceptance of such practices because of their prevalence. They must be ever mindful of their obligations to exemplify a new way of life distinguished by its respect for the dignity and rights of all people, by its exalted moral tone, and by its freedom from oppression and from all forms of abuse.

From a letter online at http://bahai-library.org/uhj/violence.women.html

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?

Again, this depends on the circumstances. A wife defending herself against an abusive husband would be allowable if such force is in self-defense and no other options exist.

The Universal House of Justice has written: For a man to use force to impose his will on a woman is a serious transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that: 'The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy.

Bahá'í men have the opportunity to demonstrate to the world around them a new approach to the relationship between the sexes, where aggression and the use of force are eliminated and replaced by cooperation and consultation. The Universal House of Justice has pointed out in response to questions addressed to it that, in a marriage relationship, neither husband nor wife should ever unjustly dominate the other, and that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other. If agreement cannot be reached through consultation, the couple should determine exactly under what circumstances such deference is to take place.

'From the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh Himself has come the following statement on the subject of the treatment of women:... 'No Bahá'í husband should ever beat his wife, or subject her to any form of cruel treatment; to do so would be an unacceptable abuse of the marriage relationship and contrary to the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.'

From a letter online at http://bahai-library.org/uhj/violence.women.html

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?

Our religion forbids suicide, but there have been many Bahá'í martyrs who knowingly went to their deaths.
One reason not to commit suicide is because of the harm it can do to the spirit. Shoghi Effendi says that 'Suicide is forbidden in the Cause. God Who is the Author of all life can alone take it away, and dispose of it in the way He deems best. Whoever commits suicide endangers his soul, and will suffer spiritually as a result in the other Worlds Beyond...'

_Lights of Guidance_, No. 677, p. 204

There was one prominent Bahá'í, Nabil, who drowned himself shortly after the death of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892. However, his action is neither condemned nor viewed as a role model. Shoghi Effendi explained that "Nabil's suicide was not insanity but love. He loved Bahá'u'lláh too much to go on in a world that no longer held Him." (Unfolding Destiny, Page 406)

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?

Martyrdom is permitted if it is not done at one's own hands and is inflicted solely by others without solicitation, when, solely on account of our religious beliefs, others put us to death. We are to try to prevent this from happening, but we should not seek to save our life by denying our faith.

Martyrdom is one of the highest stations to which we can attain. Bahá'u'lláh says: _This is a Revelation, under which, if a man shed for its sake one drop of blood, myriads of oceans will be his recompense. Take heed, O friends, that ye forfeit not so inestimable a benefit, or disregard its transcendent station. Consider the multitude of lives that have been, and are still being, sacrificed in a world deluded by a mere phantom which the vain imaginations of its peoples have conceived._

_Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh_, sect. III, pp. 5-6.

However, martyrdom does not necessarily mean literally being killed for one's Faith. Those who sacrifice themselves by devoting their lives to teaching the Faith are equally martyrs. Martyrdom is also characterized by the high degree of detachment and sacrifice shown by the martyr. We have been told by the Universal House of Justice that what the Cause of God needs at this time are living martyrs. Even as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated: _Martyrdom is the supreme test of belief. Great martyrs will arise in this Cause in the years to come. A believer is sometimes called upon to suffer a living martyrdom._

_Quoted in Ten Days in the Light of Akka_, Julia Grundy, p. 5.


22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?

This is not allowable in most circumstances. It might be permissible in the case of an abortion of a fetus which endangers the life of the mother or in cases at times of tragedy when a choice must be made who receives medical attention first, etc. The Universal House of Justice says: Abortion and surgical operations for the purpose of preventing the birth of unwanted children are forbidden in the Cause unless there are circumstances which justify such actions on medical grounds, in which case the decision, at present, is left to the consciences of those concerned who must carefully weigh the medical advice in the light of the general guidance given in the Teachings...

_Lights of Guidance_, No. 1155, p. 345

23. Is capital punishment acceptable: if so, for what offenses?
As an act of justice, capital punishment for murder is permitted, though life imprisonment is an acceptable alternative: "The law of Bahá'u'lláh prescribes the death penalty for murder and arson, with the alternative of life imprisonment." (Anonymous: The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, note 86, page 203-204).

The reason for such punishment must be understood to be corrective, not retributive. It is understood to have a cathartic result on the soul of the criminal and in taking away his life he will not have to pay for his crime in the next world. The above note continues: In His Tablets Abdu'l-Bahá explains the difference between revenge and punishment. He affirms that individuals do not have the right to take revenge, that revenge is despised in the eyes of God, and that the motive for punishment is not vengeance, but the imposition of a penalty for the committed offence. In Some Answered Questions, He confirms that it is the right of society to impose punishments on criminals for the purpose of protecting its members and defending its existence." ibid.

Having said this, capital punishment will only be enforced in a future Bahá'í society when humanity has "reached a much higher point of evolution," not in the society that we are living in now. It cannot be said in advance how a future Bahá'í society will apply which punishments to which types of offenses: The details of the Bahá'í law of punishment for murder and arson, a law designed for a future state of society, were not specified by Baha'u'llah. The various details of the law, such as degrees of offence, whether extenuating circumstances are to be taken into account, and which of the two prescribed punishments is to be the norm are left to the Universal House of Justice to decide in light of prevailing conditions when the law is to be in operation. The manner in which the punishment is to be carried out is also left to the Universal House of Justice to decide. ibid.

Finally, arson in the above is not necessarily meant as an offense resulting in capital punishment: In relation to arson, this depends on what "house" is burned. There is obviously a tremendous difference in the degree of offence between the person who burns down an empty warehouse and one who sets fire to a school full of children. ibid.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?

Abortion is considered morally wrong if it is done only to take the life of the unborn and not to save another life; abortion might be permitted in cases where the doctor and family involved decides it is necessary to save the life of the mother, in which case it is left to them to decide.

The Universal House of Justice says: Abortion and surgical operations for the purpose of preventing the birth of unwanted children are forbidden in the Cause unless there are circumstances which justify such actions on medical grounds, in which case the decision, at present, is left to the consciences of those concerned who must carefully weigh the medical advice in the light of the general guidance given in the Teachings. Beyond this nothing has been found in the Writings concerning specific methods or procedures to be used in family planning. It should be pointed out, however, that the Teachings state that the soul appears at conception, and that therefore it would be improper to use such a method, the effect of which would be to produce an abortion after conception has taken place.

Lights of Guidance, No. 1155, p. 345
Regarding the case of rape, the Universal House of Justice says: One of the most heinous of sexual offenses is the crime of rape. When a believer is a victim, she is entitled to the loving aid and support of the members of her community, and is free to initiate action against the perpetrator under the law of the land should she wish to do so. If she becomes pregnant as a consequence of this assault, no pressure should be brought upon her by the Bahá’í institutions to marry. As to whether she should continue or terminate the pregnancy, it is left to her to decide on the course of action she should follow, taking into consideration medical and other relevant factors, and in the light of the Bahá’í Teachings...

Quoted in The American Bahá’í, November 23, 1993, pp. 10-11

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?

Autopsies are not forbidden, but proper respect to the body must be given and the autopsy must be followed by a proper burial according to religious law. The Báb explains the importance of treating the dead body with respect: As this physical frame is the throne of the inner temple, whatever occurs to the former is felt by the latter. In reality that which takes delight in joy or is saddened by pain is the inner temple of the body, not the body itself. Since this physical body is the throne whereon the inner temple is established, God hath ordained that the body be preserved to the extent possible, so that nothing that causeth repugnance may be experienced. The inner temple beholdeth its physical frame, which is its throne. Thus, if the latter is accorded respect, it is as if the former is the recipient. The converse is likewise true. Therefore, it hath been ordained that the dead body should be treated with the utmost honour and respect."

Selections from the Writings of the Bab, The Persian Bayan, V, 12, p. 95

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?

There are no specific injunctions against them, but moderation should be observed. One is not to become a cause of displeasure to others, as pertains to one's dress and appearance.

On a similar subject, the Guardian has written: Regarding Bahá'í women using facial make-up: individuals are entirely free to do as they please in such purely personal matters. As Bahá'ís are enjoined to use moderation in all things, and to seek the Golden mean, the National Spiritual Assembly can, if it deems it necessary or advisable, counsel the believers to use moderation in this respect also.

Shoghi Effendi: Dawn of a New Day, p. 193

Most especially, nothing should be done that would be harmful to one's body. Bahá'u'lláh says: ... Beware of using any substance that induceth sluggishness and torpor in the human temple and inflicteth harm upon the body. We, verily, desire for you naught save what shall profit you, and to this bear witness all created things, had ye but ears to hear.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Par. 155, p. 75

27. Are transfusions allowed?

Transfusions are not prohibited. Indeed, we are instructed to seek and follow the advice of a competent physician when healing is needed. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: According to the explicit decree of Bahá'u'lláh one must not turn aside from the advice of a competent doctor. It is imperative to consult one even if the patient himself be a well-known and eminent physician. In short, the point is that you should maintain your health by consulting a highly-skilled physician.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, No. 135, p.156
28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?

Extraordinary means to extend a life may be permissible with a doctor's advice and if it is not a cause of injustice. Regarding euthanasia, the Universal House of Justice has written: We have received your letter of March 18, 1974 in which you ask for the Bahá’í viewpoint on euthanasia and on the removal of life support in medical cases where physiological interventions prolong life in disabling illnesses. In general our teachings indicate that God, the Giver of life, can alone dispose of it as He deems best, and we have found nothing in the Sacred Text on these matters specifically but in a letter to an individual written on behalf of the beloved Guardian by his secretary regarding mercy killings, or legalized euthanasia, it is stated: "...this is also a matter which the Universal House of Justice will have to legislate."

Until such time as the Universal House of Justice considers legislation on euthanasia, decisions in the matters to which you refer must be left to the consciences of those responsible.

_Lights of Guidance_, pp. 291-292

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?

As a general principle, individuals are not to arrogate to themselves the responsibility for determining who may live. The Universal House of Justice has written: '... In general our teachings indicate that God, the Giver of life, can alone dispose of it as He deems best ... (Lights of Guidance, pages 291-292)

There are, of course, some exceptions: e.g. when abortion is necessary to save the life of the mother, or in the case where a criminal has incurred the death penalty. However, appropriate action in both cases must be decided by competent doctors and courts, respectively. Any other exceptions will have to be legislated by the Universal House of Justice as the issues arise.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?

The Bahá’í Faith has no explicit statement on this. The principle of preservation of life above all else would certainly apply, but how it would be applied would depend on the situation.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?

There is no broad statement on this in the Bahá’í writings or legislation. The Universal House of Justice has written: The House of Justice has not found anything specific in the Bahá’í writings concerning the ethics of genetic engineering on human tissue, including fetal tissue, and on possible means of biologically creating replacement limbs and organs for human beings. It regards it as premature to give consideration to these matters and to their spiritual consequences. For the present, believers confronted with such issues are free to come to their own conclusions, based on their knowledge of the pertinent Bahá’í teachings.

online at http://bahai-library.org/uhj/reproduction.html

The ethics of certain aspects of genetic engineering are thus left up to the individual. As the House recently clarified in response to a question about stem-cell research. For the present, believers faced with questions about them are free to come to their own conclusions based on their knowledge of the Bahá’í teachings on the nature and purpose of life.

online at http://bahai-library.org/uhj/stem.cells.html

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
Yes, in its broad strokes the Bahá’í Faith accepts the theory of evolution. This fits in with the principle that science and religion each have their sphere of truth, and neither sphere can overrule the other sphere's authority. If a religion issues a teaching or ruling on a purely scientific fact which is contrary to the informed contemporary scientific consensus, then Bahá’ís are to accept the scientific explanation.

Speaking specifically about evolution, Abdu’l-Bahá explained:

[Man], in the beginning of his existence and in the womb of the earth, like the embryo in the womb of the mother, gradually grew and developed, and passed from one form to another, from one shape to another, until he appeared with this beauty and perfection, this force and this power. It is certain that in the beginning he had not this loveliness and grace and elegance, and that he only by degrees attained this shape, this form, this beauty and this grace. There is no doubt that the human embryo did not at once appear in this form... Gradually it passed through various conditions and different shapes, until it attained this form and beauty, this perfection, grace and loveliness.

*Some Answered Questions*, section 47

Having said that, the Bahá’í Faith does not accept certain metaphysical extrapolations of evolutionary theory. For example, Abdu’l-Bahá explains that, though changing in outward form, the human identity has remained distinct from that of the animal.

[Man’s] aspect, his form, his appearance and color change; he passes from one form to another, and from one appearance to another. Nevertheless, from the beginning of the embryonic period he is of the species of man—that is to say, an embryo of a man and not of an animal; but this is not at first apparent, but later it becomes visible and evident. For example, let us suppose that man once resembled the animal, and that now he has progressed and changed. Supposing this to be true, it is still not a proof of the change of species. No, as before mentioned, it is merely like the change and alteration of the embryo of man until it reaches the degree of reason and perfection. We will state it more clearly. Let us suppose that there was a time when man walked on his hands and feet, or had a tail; this change and alteration is like that of the fetus in the womb of the mother. Although it changes in all ways, and grows and develops until it reaches the perfect form, from the beginning it is a special species.

*Some Answered Questions*, p. 193

Shoghi Effendi offers a bit of clarification: *We cannot prove man was always man for this is a fundamental doctrine, but it is based on the assertion that nothing can exceed its own potentialities, that everything, a stone, a tree, an animal and a human being existed in plan, potentially, from the very "beginning" of creation. We don't believe man has always had the form of man, but rather that from the outset he was going to evolve into the human form and species and not be a haphazard branch of the ape family.*

*Arohanui: Letters to New Zealand*, No. 75, p. 85

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Yes, the Bahá’í Faith believes not only that this world is important for our development, but also that it has been entrusted to our stewardship. Therefore, care must be taken to preserve and better our physical environment. Shoghi Effendi says: ... For it is only through such divine precepts that the world can obtain peace and tranquility, and become an environment within which man can spiritually progress and attain his noble destiny.


Moderation is again a key principle to achieving this end. Plant and animal species, many of which are important to our physical health and well-being, will not become endangered or extinct if moderation is exercised in how we use them and their environment. For example, regarding hunting, Bahá'u'lláh says: ... Take heed, however, that ye hunt not to excess. Tread ye the path of justice and equity in all things. Thus biddeth you He Who is the Dawning-place of Revelation, would that ye might comprehend.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Par. 60, pp. 40-41

35. Do animals have any moral standing?

No, but Bahá’ís are exhorted to treat animals with the utmost respect. Bahá'u'lláh writes: "Burden not an animal with more than it can bear. We, truly, have prohibited such treatment through a most binding interdiction in the Book" (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 187).

However, animals lack spiritual susceptibilities, are ignorant of divine religion, and have no knowledge of God. They thus do not have their own morality. This is discussed more fully online in Arthur Dahl's "The Bahá’í Attitude towards Animals" at http://www.bcca.org/ief/ddahl01a.htm

Though hunting is permitted, Bahá'u'lláh gives this warning: ... Take heed, however, that ye hunt not to excess. Tread ye the path of justice and equity in all things. Thus biddeth you He Who is the Dawning-place of Revelation, would that ye might comprehend.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Par. 60, pp. 40-41

Bahá’ís are also not required to be vegetarians. However, Abdu'l-Bahá did state that humanity would gradually turn away from a meat-based diet and begin to rely much more heavily on fruits and grains. When asked, "What will be the diet of the future?" Abdu'l-Bahá answered: Fruit and grains. The time will come when meat will no longer be eaten. Medical science is only in its infancy, yet it has shown that our natural diet is that which grows out of the ground. The people will gradually develop up to the condition of this natural food."

Ten Days in the Light of Akka, online at http://bahai-library.org/books/tendays/words.html

Abdu'l-Bahá explains that we should regard harmful animals, not as ethically impure, but as pragmatically harmful; justice then requires that we treat harmful animals with less tolerance but be fully loving to the peaceful animals:

Most human beings are sinners, but the beasts are innocent. Surely those without sin should receive the most kindness and love - all except animals which are harmful, such as bloodthirsty wolves, such as poisonous snakes, and similar pernicious creatures, the reason being that kindness to these is an injustice to human beings and to other animals as well. If, for example, ye be tender-hearted toward a wolf, this is but tyranny to a sheep, for a wolf will destroy a whole flock of sheep. A rabid dog, if
given the chance, can kill a thousand animals and men. Therefore, compassion shown to wild and ravening beasts is cruelty to the peaceful ones - and so the harmful must be dealt with. But to blessed animals the utmost kindness must be shown, the more the better. Tenderness and loving-kindness are basic principles of God's heavenly Kingdom. Ye should most carefully bear this matter in mind.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, No. 138, pp. 159-160

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?

This question could refer to three different issues: (a) the Big Bang; (b) a metaphysical beginning and ending to temporality itself, or (c) the Day of Judgment. The Bahá’í Faith affirms (a) via its emphasis on the primacy of science to solve scientific questions; it teaches that the metaphysics of (b) has no clear scientific answer; and it affirms the reality of and explains (c), the Day of Judgment. I'll explain further:

A) Big Bang: Little need be said about this. The scientific consensus on the reality of the Big Bang and subsequent cosmology/planetary genesis is so broad and detailed that Bahá’ís accept it as scientific fact. However, this does not mean that Bahá’ís necessarily accept all metaphysical meanings physicists might express about their theories.

B) Beginning and ending of time itself: There will not be an end of time. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: ... For example, by present consideration we say that God is the creator. Then there must always have been a creation.... Therefore, God has no beginning and no ending; nor is His creation limited ever as to degree. Limitations of time and degree pertain to things created, never to the creation as a whole. They pertain to the forms of things, not to their realities. The effulgence of God cannot be suspended.

Foundations of World Unity, p. 53

Having said that, Bahá’í metaphysics also recognize that concepts such as the finiteness or infiniteness of time are just that -- metaphysical concepts only. In the "Tablet of Wisdom," Bahá'u'lláh explained: As regards thine assertions about the beginning of creation, this is a matter on which conceptions vary by reason of the divergences in men's thoughts and opinions. Wert thou to assert that it hath ever existed and shall continue to exist, it would be true; or Wert thou to affirm the same concept as is mentioned in the sacred Scriptures, [i.e., that time had a beginning in Creation] no doubt would there be about it, for it hath been revealed by God...That which hath been in existence had existed before, but not in the form thou seest today. The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient. These two are the same, yet they are different. Thus doth the Great Announcement inform thee about this glorious structure."

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, online at http://bahai-library.org/writings/bahaullah/tb/8.html

C) Day of Judgment: As for what many believe to be the Day of Judgement, the Day of God, or the Day of Resurrection, Shoghi Effendi says: 'Concerning the meaning of "Resurrection": although this term is often used by Bahá'u'lláh in His Writings, as in the passage quoted in your letter, its meaning is figurative. The tomb mentioned is also allegorical, i.e. the tomb of unbelief. The Day of Resurrection, according to Bahá’í interpretation, is the Judgement Day, the Day when unbelievers will be called upon to give account of their actions, and whether
the world has prevented them from acknowledging the new Revelation. 'The passage in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet in which He explains the Sura of "The Sun" should not be interpreted literally. It does not mean that after the Day of Resurrection praise and peace will cease to be vouchsafed to the Prophet. Rather it means to the end of time, i.e. indefinitely and for all times."

Dawn of a New Day, pp. 79-80

Indeed, this Day of God comes whenever a new Manifestation appears in the world. Bahá'u'lláh says: "It is evident that every age in which a Manifestation of God hath lived is divinely ordained, and may, in a sense, be characterized as God's appointed Day. ..."

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Sect. XXV, p. 60)

However, the appearance of the next Manifestation of God, and therefore the next Day of God, is not for many years to come. Bahá'u'lláh says: "Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God, ere the expiration of a full thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying impostor. ..."); (The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Par. 37, p.32)

As for humanity's immediate future: following the periods of test and travail that invariably precede paradigm-shifting growth, Shoghi Effendi quotes Bahá'u'lláh:

"The winds of despair," writes Bahá'u'lláh, as He surveys the immediate destinies of mankind, "are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divides and afflicts the human race is daily increasing. The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appears to be lamentably defective." "Such shall be its plight," He, in another connection, has declared, "that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly." "These fruitless strifes," He, on the other hand, contemplating the future of mankind, has emphatically prophesied, in the course of His memorable interview with the Persian Orientalist, Edward G. Browne, "these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come.... These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family." "Soon," He predicts,"will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead." "After a time," He also has written, "all the governments on earth will change. Oppression will envelop the world. And following a universal convulsion, the sun of justice will rise from the horizon of the unseen realm." "The whole earth," He, moreover, has stated, "is now in a state of pregnancy. The day is approaching when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings." "All nations and kindreds," Abdu'l-Bahá likewise has written, "...will become a single nation. Religious and sectarian antagonism, the hostility of races and peoples, and differences among nations, will be approaching when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings." "All nations and kindreds," Abdu'l-Bahá likewise has written, "...will become a single nation. Religious and sectarian antagonism, the hostility of races and peoples, and differences among nations, will be eliminated. All men will adhere to one religion, will have one common faith, will be blended into one race, and become a single people. All will dwell in one common fatherland, which is the planet itself."
37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
No. Bahá'u'lláh forbids adultery in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, His Book of Laws: "Ye have been forbidden to commit murder or adultery, or to engage in backbiting or calumny; shun ye, then, what hath been prohibited in the holy Books and Tablets." (The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Par. 19, p. 26)

He then sets the penalty for it: God hath imposed a fine on every adulterer and adulteress, to be paid to the House of Justice: nine mithqals of gold, to be doubled if they should repeat the offence. Such is the penalty which He Who is the Lord of Names hath assigned them in this world; and in the world to come He hath ordained for them a humiliating torment. Should anyone be afflicted by a sin, it behoveth him to repent thereof and return unto his Lord. He, verily, granteth forgiveness unto whomsoever He willeth, and none may question that which it pleaseth Him to ordain. He is, in truth, the Ever-Forgiving, the Almighty, the All-Praised.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Par. 49, p. 37

In the endnotes section of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, it is written: 'The Arabic word "zina", here translated as "adultery", signifies both fornication and adultery. It applies not only to sexual relations between a married person and someone who is not his or her spouse, but also to extramarital sexual intercourse in general. One form of "zina" is rape. The only penalty prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh is for those who commit fornication (see note 77); penalties for other kinds of sexual offence are left to the Universal House of Justice to determine.'

Anonymous, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Notes Section, Note 36, p.181

38. Is sex only for procreation?
No, though procreation is one major reason for sex within marriage. Bahá'u'lláh writes: ...
Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Par. 63, p. 41.

However, the Bahá'í Faith also recognizes the sex impulse, and that there is a place for that in the lives of the individual. The Universal House of Justice quotes the Guardian as follows: 'The Guardian has clarified, in letters written on his behalf, that "The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse," and that "The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this very purpose that the institution of marriage has been established."'


39. Is masturbation allowed?
It is discouraged. Shoghi Effendi wrote: The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse, but condemns its illegitimate and improper expressions such as free love, companionate marriage and others, all of which it considers positively harmful to man and to the society in which he lives. The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this purpose that the institution of marriage has been established. The Bahá'ís do not believe in the suppression of the sex impulse but in its regulation and control.

Lights of Guidance, No. 1156, p. 345.
However, it is also a matter Bahá’ís are encouraged not to dwell unduly on. The Universal House of Justice says, You should remember, however, that [masturbation] is only one of the many temptations and faults that a human being must strive to overcome during his lifetime, and you should not increase the difficulty you have by over-emphasizing its importance.... Be vigilant against temptation, but do not allow it to claim too great a share of your attention. You should concentrate, rather, on the virtues that you should develop, the services you should strive to render, and, above all, on God and His attributes, and devote your energies to living a full Bahá’í life in all its many aspects."

Lights of Guidance, No. 1220

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
The Bahá’í Faith has no explicit statement on this. Bahá’u’lláh did expressly forbid liwat, but there is some disagreement on the exact meaning of this Arabic word. It almost exactly translates as sodomy, in that the word liwat means "the crime of Lot," i.e. the escapee from Sodom. However, just as the English word "sodomy" has multiple legal meanings, so did liwat. Its application to the Bahá’í context has yet to be clarified by the Universal House of Justice. More detail is found at http://bahai-library.org/conferences/sex.aqdas.html.

Shoghi Effendi provides some general principles:

On the question of sex the Bahá’ís are, in most of their fundamental views, in full agreement with the upholders of traditional morality. Bahá’u’lláh, like all the other Prophets and Messengers of God, preaches abstinence, and condemns, in vehement language, all forms of sexual laxity, unbridled license and lust. The Bahá’í standard of sex morality is thus very high, but it is by no means unreasonably rigid. While free love is condemned, yet marriage is though not forced, to perform. Sex instinct, like all other human instincts, is not necessarily evil. It is a power which, if properly directed, can bring joy and satisfaction to the individual. If misused or abused it brings, of course, incalculable harm not only to the individual but also to the society in which he lives. " 6 April 1936

Unfolding Destiny, pp. 434-435

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
Moderation and courtesy in dress and appearance must be practiced, so as not to offend. Regarding the hair, Bahá’u'lláh says: Shave not your heads; God hath adorned them with hair, and in this there are signs from the Lord of creation to those who reflect upon the requirements of nature. He, verily, is the God of strength and wisdom. Notwithstanding, it is not seemly to let the hair pass beyond the limit of the ears. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Lord of all worlds.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 44, p. 35.

The exact meaning of these statements has not yet been defined, e.g. what it means for hair to "pass beyond the limit of the ears"?

42. Is transvestism immoral?
43. Is homosexuality immoral?
44. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
While there is no statement on transvestism, Bahá’í teachings as conveyed by the Universal House of Justice do discuss trans-sexuality. Both homosexuality and trans-sexuality are considered immoral: No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between people of the same
sex, to let it find expression in sexual acts is wrong. To say that it is ideal is no excuse. Immorality of every sort is really forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh, and homosexual relationships he looks upon as such, besides being against nature.

From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, March 26, 1950

In practice, though, it's regarded more as a handicap than a moral failing, especially if it's the result of a treatable psychological disorder.

“A number of sexual problems such as homosexuality and trans-sexuality can well have medical aspects, and in such cases recourse should certainly be had to the best medical assistance. But it is clear from the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh that homosexuality is not a condition to which a person should be reconciled, but is a distortion of his or her nature which should be controlled and overcome. This may require a hard struggle, but so also can be the struggle of a heterosexual person to control his or her desires. “

From a letter of the Universal House of Justice, cited in Messages from The Universal House of Justice 1968-1973, p. 110-111

Part of the reason for this emphasis on "normal" sexuality is given as an endnote to the English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, which also explains why the state must not recognize gay marriage: The Bahá’í teachings on sexual morality centre on marriage and the family as the bedrock of the whole structure of human society and are designed to protect and strengthen that divine institution. Bahá’í law thus restricts permissible sexual intercourse to that between a man and the woman to whom he is married.

Anonymous, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Notes Section, Note 134, p. 223

45. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?

If the immoral behavior is determined to be criminal by secular law, then those convicted of such should lose some or all of their rights. But as long as behaviour is not criminal or harmful to society, justice is the right of every individual, without prejudice of any kind. However, if the immoral behaviour is itself considered a crime, then the individual is then subject to the penalties set for that crime if convicted, just as every other individual is subject to the same laws and incurs the penalties for breaking a law.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?

Bahá'u'lláh officially limited the number of wives a man might have from four — the prevailing Muslim standard as prescribed by Muhammad — to two but encouraged only one. He states: God hath prescribed matrimony unto you. Beware that ye take not unto yourselves more wives than two. Whoso contenteth himself with a single partner from among the maidservants of God, both he and she shall live in tranquillity....

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Par. 63, p. 41

However, Abdu'l-Bahá clarified that, by conditioning bigamy upon justice, Bahá'u'lláh was in practice allowing only one wife; fully equal justice would not be possible in a marriage of two women to one man. An endnote to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas quotes Abdu'l-Bahá: 'Know thou that polygamy is not permitted under the law of God, for contentment with one wife hath been clearly stipulated. Taking a second wife is made dependent upon equity and justice being upheld between the two wives, under all conditions. However, observance of justice and equity towards two wives is utterly impossible. The fact that bigamy has been made dependent upon an impossible condition is clear proof of its absolute prohibition. Therefore it is not permissible for a man to have more than one wife.'
47. Is divorce acceptable?

Divorce is provided for in Bahá'í law, but is highly discouraged except in cases where reconciliation is impossible. Bahá'u'lláh says: *Should resentment or antipathy arise between husband and wife, he is not to divorce her but to bide in patience throughout the course of one whole year, that perchance the fragrance of affection may be renewed between them. If, upon the completion of this period, their love hath not returned, it is permissible for divorce to take place. God's wisdom, verily, hath encompassed all things.*

_The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Par. 68, pp. 43-44_

However, it must be observed that divorce was seen as only a last-resort option. In the next paragraph, Bahá'u'lláh continued: *Truly, the Lord loveth union and harmony and abhorreth separation and divorce. Live ye one with another, O people, in radiance and joy. By My life! All that are on earth shall pass away, while good deeds alone shall endure; to the truth of My words God doth Himself bear witness. Compose your differences, O My servants; then heed ye the admonition of Our Pen of Glory and follow not the arrogant and wayward.*

_ibid, p. 44, #70_

Regarding its prevalent practice in Western society, Shoghi Effendi wrote: *There is no doubt about it that the believers in America, probably unconsciously influenced by the extremely lax morals prevalent and the flippant attitude towards divorce which seems to be increasingly prevailing, do not take divorce seriously enough and do not seem to grasp the fact that although Bahá'u'lláh has permitted it, He has only permitted it as a last resort and strongly condemns it.*

_Lights of Guidance #1309_

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?

Their roles are largely a consequence of nature, but their equality is an indisputable religious, and therefore moral, fact. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: *In this divine age the bounties of God have encompassed the world of women. Equality of men and women, except in some negligible instances, has been fully and categorically announced. Distinctions have been utterly removed.* That men and women differ from one another in certain characteristics and functions is an inescapable fact of nature; the important thing is that He regards such inequalities as remain between the sexes as being 'negligible'.

_Quoted in a "Women, A Compilation"; Lights of Guidance, No. 2102, p. 622_

49. Are men and women separate but equal?

Yes, though Abdu'l-Bahá explains that women excel men in some categories and men excel women in other categories. In the Introduction to _The Kitáb-i-Aqdas_ is found this statement: *... That men and women differ from one another in certain characteristics and functions is an inescapable fact of nature and makes possible their complementary roles in certain areas of the life of society; but it is significant that Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that in this Dispensation "Equality of men and women, except in some negligible instances, has been fully and categorically announced.*

_Anonymous, introduction to The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 7_

However, Abdu'l-Bahá also explains that the world's gradual equalizing of male and female roles will give the impression of a feminization of society, as the once-underrepresented feminine ideals and attitudes take equal place with masculine ones.
The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting--force is losing its weight and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine, and more permeated with the feminine ideals--or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced.


50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?
No, unless prescribed by a competent doctor. A letter from the Universal House of Justice writes:

...One of these ordinances is the clear prohibition in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh of the consumption of alcoholic drinks. This has been explicitly revealed in His Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. He states, "It is inadmissible that man, who hath been endowed with reason, should consume that which stealth it away. Nay, rather it behooveth him to comport himself in a manner worthy of the human station, and not in accordance with the misdeeds of every heedless and wavering soul."

http://bahai-library.org/uhj/alcohol.html

Abdu'l-Bahá explains the harmful effects of drugs: As to opium, it is foul and accursed. God protect us from the punishment He inflictheth on the user. According to the explicit Text of the Most Holy Book, it is forbidden, and its use is utterly condemned. Reason showeth that smoking opium is a kind of insanity, and experience attesteth that the user is completely cut off from the human kingdom. May God protect all against the perpetration of an act so hideous as this, an act which layeth in ruins the very foundation of what it is to be human, and which causeth the user to be dispossessed for ever and ever. For opium fasteneth on the soul, so that the user's conscience dieth, his mind is blotted away, his perceptions are eroded. It turneth the living into the dead. It quencheth the natural heat.


Shoghi Effendi explains that these prohibitions apply to all drugs: [The Bahá'í Faith] requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs.

http://bahai-library.org/writings/shoghieffendi/adj/2.html #20

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?
There is no statement on this, nor a clear principle I can think of that would shed light on this. There is the statement that "spiritual education is the light of the world of humanity and that its absence in the world is darkness itself," but extending this to cover prayer in school would be a stretch. The Bahá'í Faith does support the current separation of church and state.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
The state is not obligated to do so. However, it would be in the best interests of the state to do everything possible to see that all receive not only education that trains the mind, but also the spiritual education, which includes morals, that religion is so ideal for teaching. About the
importance of religious and moral education, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that "spiritual education is the light of the world of humanity and that its absence in the world is darkness itself." (Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 331)

'Abdu'l-Bahá also comments on the education of children and the importance which their training in morals has to society:

Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning. A child that is cleanly, agreeable, of good character, well-behaved — even though he be ignorant — is preferable to a child that is rude, unwashed, ill-natured, and yet becoming deeply versed in all the sciences and arts. The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light.

"Children are even as a branch that is fresh and green; they will grow up in whatever way ye train them. Take the utmost care to give them high ideals and goals, so that once they come of age, they will cast their beams like brilliant candles on the world, and will not be defiled by lusts and passions in the way of animals, heedless and unaware, but instead will set their hearts on achieving everlasting honour and acquiring all the excellences of humankind.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, No. 110, pp. 135-136

However, any state-subsidized religious school would not be able to indoctrinate into politics: Politics are occupied with the material things of life. Religious teachers should not invade the realm of politics; they should concern themselves with the spiritual education of the people; they should ever give good counsel to men, trying to serve God and human kind; they should endeavour to awaken spiritual aspiration, and strive to enlarge the understanding and knowledge of humanity, to improve morals, and to increase the love for justice.

This is in accordance with the Teaching of Bahá'u'lláh. In the Gospel also it is written, 'Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's.'

'Abdu'l-Bahá: Paris Talks, pp. 158-159

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?

We are taught to respect the gift of the body we have been given by the Creator. However, there are few restrictions regarding one's diet: alcohol is forbidden, as are the results of some hunting practices. Regarding the latter, in the Questions and Answers Section of The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh clarifies the passage regarding hunting as follows: [Concerning hunting] He saith, exalted be He: "If ye should hunt with beasts or birds of prey" and so forth. Other means, such as bows and arrows, guns, and similar equipment employed in hunting, are also included. If, however, traps or snares are used, and the game dieth before it can be reached, it is unlawful for consumption.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers Section, No. 24, p. 115

As to the food of the future, when asked what this would be, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said: Fruit and grains. The time will come when meat will no longer be eaten. Medical science is only in its
infancy, yet it has shown that our natural diet is that which grows out of the ground. The people will gradually develop up to the condition of this natural food.

quoted in Ten Days in the Light of Akka, Julia Grundy, pp. 8-9

Food does become a religious matter during the period of the Fast. This is March 1 - March 20 each year, during which time Bahá'ís refrain from all food and water from sunrise to sunset and are to use their hunger to help meditate on the meaning of the body and of the spirit.

54. Is gambling allowed?
No, Bahá'u'lláh forbids gambling in the following paragraph from His Book of Laws: "Gambling and the use of opium have been forbidden unto you. Eschew them both, O people, and be not of those who transgress." (The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Par. 155, p. 75)

This is elaborated in the endnotes to the Aqdas: “The activities that are included in this prohibition have not been outlined in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. As both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi have indicated, it is left to the Universal House of Justice to specify the details of this prohibition. In response to questions about whether lotteries, betting on such things as horse races and football games, bingo, and the like, are included under the prohibition of gambling, the Universal House of Justice has indicated that this is a matter that will be considered in detail in the future. In the meantime, the Assemblies and individuals are counselled not to make an issue of these matters and to leave it to the conscience of the individual believers.”

The House of Justice has ruled that it is not appropriate for funds for the Faith to be raised through lotteries, raffles, and games of chance.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, endnote #169

55. Is smoking allowed?
Yes, though tobacco only, and yet it is highly discouraged. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

But there are other forbidden things which do not cause immediate harm, and the injurious effects of which are only gradually produced: such acts are also repugnant to the Lord, and blameworthy in His sight, and repellent. The absolute unlawfulness of these, however, hath not been expressly set forth in the Text, but their avoidance is necessary to purity, cleanliness, the preservation of health, and freedom from addiction.

Among these latter is smoking tobacco, which is dirty, smelly, offensive — an evil habit, and one the harmfulness of which gradually becometh apparent to all. Every qualified physician hath ruled - and this hath also been proven by tests — that one of the components of tobacco is a deadly poison, and that the smoker is vulnerable to many and various diseases. This is why smoking hath been plainly set forth as repugnant from the standpoint of hygiene... [I]n the sight of God, smoking tobacco is deprecated, abhorrent, filthy in the extreme; and, albeit by degrees, highly injurious to health. It is also a waste of money and time, and maketh the user a prey to a noxious addiction. To those who stand firm in the Covenant, this habit is therefore censured both by reason and experience, and renouncing it will bring relief and peace of mind to all men. Furthermore, this will
make it possible to have a fresh mouth and unstained fingers, and hair that is free of a foul and repellent smell. On receipt of this missive, the friends will surely, by whatever means and even over a period of time, forsake this pernicious habit. Such is my hope.

Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, pp. 147-148

For an entire monograph on the ethics of smoking, see "In A Blue Haze: Smoking and Bahá’í Ethics" at http://bahai-library.org/books/bluehaze
**BUDDHISM**

The non-doing of any evil, to accomplish good, the cleansing of one's own mind: this is the teaching of the enlightened.

*The Sayings of Buddha, Buddha*

BORN MORE THAN 2,500 YEARS AGO in India, Siddhattha Sakyamuni Gotama broke with Hinduism and became known by his followers as the Buddha, the Enlightened One.

The paths of Buddhism are widely divergent. The religion is divided into three main branches that follow, more or less, geographical regions. Each of these branches is again divided into schools, many of which follow the teachings of particular individuals.

All schools of Buddhism acknowledge Buddha as the supreme teacher, the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path and the rejection of the idea of a supreme being who created and governed the world.

Between 300-350 million people are associated with Buddhism throughout the world. More than 90% of Thailand’s population is Buddhist, while nearly a third of all Buddhists reside in China.

From *Everyman's Ethics: Four Discourses of the Buddha* (WHEEL #14),
Narada Mahathera, trans.
Buddhist Publication Society
P.O. Box 61
54, Sangharaja Mawata
Kandy
Sri Lanka
www.buddhanet.org.au

The Discourse on Blessings [1]

This famous text, cherished highly in all Buddhist lands, is a terse but comprehensive summary of Buddhist ethics, individual and social. The thirty-eight blessings enumerated in it, is an unfailing guide on life's journey. Rightly starting with "avoidance of bad company" which is basic to all moral and spiritual progress, the Blessings culminate in the achievement of a passion-free mind, unshakable in its serenity. To follow the ideals set forth in these verses is the sure way to harmony and progress for the individual as well as for society, nation and mankind.
"The Maha-Mangala Sutta shows that the Buddha's instructions do not always take negative forms, that they are not always a series of classifications and analysis, or concerned exclusively with monastic morality. Here in this sutta we find family morality expressed in most elegant verses. We can imagine the happy blissful state household life attained as a result of following these injunctions." (From The Ethics of Buddhism by S. Tachibana, Colombo 1943, Buddha Sahitya Sabha).

Maha-Mangala Sutta

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Exalted One was dwelling at Anathapindika's monastery, in Jeta's Grove,[2] near Savatthi,[3] Now when the night was far spent, a certain deity whose surpassing splendour illuminated the entire Jeta Grove, came to the presence of the Exalted One and, drawing near, respectfully saluted him and stood at one side. Standing thus, he addressed the Exalted One in verse:

"Many deities and men, yearning after good, have pondered on blessings.[4] Pray, tell me the greatest blessing!"

"Not to associate with the foolish,[5] but to associate with the wise; and to honour those who are worthy of honour — this is the greatest blessing.

To reside in a suitable locality,[6] to have done meritorious actions in the past and to set oneself in the right course [7] — this is the greatest blessing.

To have much learning, to be skillful in handicraft,[8] well-trained in discipline, [9] and to be of good speech [10] — this is the greatest blessing.

To support mother and father, to cherish wife and children, and to be engaged in peaceful occupation -- this is the greatest blessing.

To be generous in giving, to be righteous in conduct,[11] to help one's relatives, and to be blameless in action -- this is the greatest blessing.

To loathe more evil and abstain from it, to refrain from intoxicants,[12] and to be steadfast in virtue -- this is the greatest blessing.

To be respectful,[13] humble, contented and grateful; and to listen to the Dhamma on due occasions [14] -- this is the greatest blessing.

To be patient and obedient, to associate with monks and to have religious discussions on due occasions -- this is the greatest blessing.

Self-restraint,[15] a holy and chaste life, the perception of the Noble Truths and the realisation of Nibbana -- this is the greatest blessing.

A mind unruffled by the vagaries of fortune,[16] from sorrow freed, from defilements cleansed, from fear liberated [17] -- this is the greatest blessing.

Those who thus abide, ever remain invincible, in happiness established. These are the greatest blessings."[18]
NOTES
(Derived mainly from the Commentaries)

[1] This Sutta appears in the Sutta-Nipata (v.258ff) and in the Khuddakapatha. See Maha-Mangala Jataka (No. 453). For a detailed explanation see Life's Highest Blessing by Dr. R.L. Soni, WHEEL No. 254/256.

[2] Anathapindika, lit., 'He who gives alms to the helpless; his former name was Sudatta. After his conversion to Buddhism, he bought the grove belonging to the Prince Jeta, and established a monastery, which was subsequently, named etavana. It was in this monastery that the Buddha observed most of his vassana periods (rainy seasons -- the three months' retreat beginning with the full-moon of July). Many are the discourses delivered and many are the incidents connected with the Buddha's life that happened at Jetavana. It was here that the Buddha ministered to the sick monk neglected by his companions, advising them: "Whoever, monks, would wait upon me, let him wait upon the sick." It was here that the Buddha so poignantly taught the law of impermanence, by asking the bereaved young woman Kisagotami who brought her dead child, to fetch a grain of mustard seed from a home where there has been no bereavement.


[4] According to the Commentary, mangala means that which is conducive to happiness and prosperity.

[5] This refers not only to the stupid and uncultured, but also includes the wicked in thought, word and deed.

[6] Any place where monks, nuns and lay devotees continually reside; where pious folk are bent on the performance of the ten meritorious deeds, and where the Dhamma exists as a living principle.


[8] The harmless crafts of the householder by which no living being is injured and nothing unrighteous done; and the crafts of the homeless monk, such as stitching the robes, etc.

[9] Vinaya means discipline in thought, word and deed. The commentary speaks of two kinds of discipline -- that of the householder, which is abstinence from the ten immoral actions (akusala-kammapatha), and that of the monk which is the non-transgression of the offences enumerated in the Patimokkha (the code of the monk's rules) or the 'fourfold moral purity' (cattuparisuddhi-sila).

[10] Good speech that is opportune, truthful, friendly, profitable and spoken with thoughts of loving-kindness.

[11] Righteous conduct is the observance of the ten good actions (kusala-ammapatha) in thought, word and deed: freeing the mind of greed, ill-will and wrong views; avoiding speech that is untruthful, slanderous, abusive and frivolous; and the non-committal acts of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct.
[12] Total abstinence from alcohol and intoxicating drugs.

[13] Towards monks (and of course also to the clergy of other religions), teachers, parents, elders, superiors, etc.

[14] For instance, when one is harassed by evil thoughts.

[15] Self-restraint (tapo): the suppression of lusts and hates by the control of the senses; and the suppression of indolence by the rousing of energy.

[16] Loka-dhamma, i.e. conditions which are necessarily connected with life in this world; there are primarily eight of them: gain and loss, honour and dishonour, praise and blame, pain and joy.

[17] Each of these three expressions refers to the mind of the arahant: asoka: sorrowless; viraja: stainless, i.e. free from lust, hatred and ignorance; khema: security from the bonds of sense desires (kama), repeated existence (bhava), false views (ditthi) and ignorance (avijja).

[18] The above-mentioned thirty-eight blessings.
Mahayana

Kadampa

Mahayana traditions are found mostly in China, Tibet and Japan. This branch of Buddhism emphasizes salvation for all. A person’s goal is to become a bodhisattva, someone who has achieved perfection but refuses to enter nirvana in order to help others.

About 185 million people follow this branch of Buddhism, with more than half found in China.

Kadampa is a school of Tibetan Buddhism founded in the 10th century.

Kelsang Togden
Resident Teacher, Dipamkara Meditation Center
Huntington, New York
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
To try to abandon non-virtuous actions that are the cause of suffering for oneself and others, and to try to practice virtuous actions that are the cause of happiness for oneself and others. To cherish others wishing to promote their happiness and refrain from causing others any harm.

2. Why be good?
Because we want to be happy, and good or virtuous actions establish the principal inner causes of happiness, both now and in the future. Our own good deeds bring us happiness when we engage in such actions, and plant the seeds in our mind to enjoy pleasant experiences in the future, including a tendency to repeat virtuous actions.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
Yes. Virtuous minds such as love, compassion, gratitude, and generosity are qualities that all living beings can develop. Sometimes such virtues are active and other times they are not. Buddhism is an effective method to generate such minds so they arise more naturally, eventually spontaneously.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion?
i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
Yes, it is possible because their goodness comes from their heart and their good qualities of their own mind. Buddhism offers techniques for awakening fully our potential to be a good person. According to Buddhist teachings there is a latent potential for immeasurable goodness within each living being.
5. **Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?**

Morality or moral discipline in Buddhism is a wish to abandon non-virtuous actions having understood their faults. It is a personal decision based on understanding or inner wisdom. A person who understands the faults of harming others, for example, and chooses to refrain from such actions, is practicing moral discipline. The term 'religious requirements' would not be very familiar to most Buddhists. It sounds like something imposed from outside, like from a religious organization. If there is no personal wisdom and free will regarding the choice to refrain from negativity then anger, resentment, or frustration may be the unfortunate result.

6. **What is the source of ethics?**

Whether an action produces happiness or suffering for oneself and others. Despite our knowledge that certain actions cause harm, we continue to be attracted to perform them. Once we realize the contradiction, we are in a position to train our mind in morality, or moral discipline. Buddha said:

```
You are your own protector,
You are your own enemy,
You are your own witness
When good or evil is done.
[...]
By controlling themselves
The wise attain high status.
```

7. **Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?**

Yes.

8. **How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?**

If it brings happiness to oneself and others it is right. If it brings suffering to oneself and others it is wrong. In the absence of certainty, we rely upon altruistic intention. If there is an intention to benefit others, motivated by love and compassion, generally we consider such action to be right. However, we understand well the importance of wisdom in all such matters. For example, someone may have a good intention and yet unintentionally create problems for others. In such cases we point at the importance of developing wisdom.

9. **Why do bad things happen to good people?**

Strictly speaking, bad things cannot happen to good people because bad things are the ripening of previous harmful actions, most likely created in previous lives. Harmful actions are those arising from deluded minds and negative intentions. Our consciousness and existence extend far beyond this present human body, in both the forward and reverse directions. Even those who are normally a good person will be able to detect within their own mind the presence of delusions, at least occasionally. When actions are performed with deluded intentions, the cause for bad things to happen in the future is established. In Buddhism we engage in purification practices to rid our mental continuum of such negative seeds or karma. Eventually, when one has a completely pure mind, all bad things naturally cease.
10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
Such a distinction is not important within Buddhism. Religion is just a teaching on how to live and how to fulfill our potential. In their essential meaning, such offences are the same.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
There is no enforcer because there are no rules. Buddha's teachings are to be taken as personal advice and to be put into practice. We create our own experiences of happiness and suffering through our actions of body, speech, and mind. As Buddha said, "You are your own witness when good or evil is done."

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
If everyone made an effort to refrain from harmful actions and to practice only virtue there would be great benefit to the world. But that does not mean that everyone should be a Buddhist! What everyone needs is to realize the true causes of happiness and suffering and to act accordingly. That wisdom applies to all living beings, and is the main core of Buddhism. Within Buddhism we have teachings and techniques to accomplish this. To the extent that others can accomplish this from other sources, such as other religions or philosophies, then they are improving themselves and the world.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
Individuals should have freedom to enjoy whatever religion they are drawn to, or born into. Religion should not be forced on anyone, because as such it will probably not bring much benefit. However, when many people in a country practice virtue and refrain from non-virtue, that society as a whole will experience great benefit.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
Killing is one of the most harmful actions and we should do everything to avoid having to resort to this action. Buddhists try not to kill even animals and insects. Fishing and hunting are seen as extremely negative actions. But there are examples in Buddhist scriptures where taking life is justified. If it is more beneficial to a larger number of people, and if it can be done with a mind of love and not anger. In this case, killing would be done with an intention to protect others, without the intention to harm the person who is killed. In fact, if we consider this carefully, the person being killed would also be protected from the negative effects of his or her own harmful actions. Clearly, this instance of "killing" requires great wisdom and great compassion. We must never kill simply to protect ourselves and our possessions, as this would be an extremely negative action.

15. Is war ever justified?
There has never been a war fought in the name of Buddhism. However, it stands to reason that if taking the life of one person could be justified, then a "war" could possibly be justified. This would be a last resort, with love not anger, and for the benefit of many. Such "war" would not resemble at all what we have seen to be war in this world.
16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
The Buddhist view would focus on what will benefit the greatest number in the most meaningful way. The most important mind to generate in such cases is the mind of equanimity, regarding all living beings with the same loving care. Naturally, this being such an imperfect world, we often see such instances of "innocent" people suffering the results of violent actions where many others are experiencing benefit.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
Yes. To engage in forceful actions one needs unbelievable strong love (to oppose frustration and anger) and wisdom. A forceful action should never be imposed on someone who is not able to do it with a loving mind. For a skilled Buddhist practitioner, forceful actions (ideally not taking life!) are an expression of their compassion, not their anger. The intention of their wrath is to protect, not to cause harm.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
If one realizes that a peaceful action would not be effective in protecting a child, then force would be not only justifiable but also required. What is really important is to be motivated by love and to have wisdom. For example, we must restrain a child from driving a car, and we must restrain a teenager from driving when under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. In such cases, if force is not used that child or teenager will likely cause great harm, including the death of others.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
See above, but take into consideration that a spouse is not a possession, simply another adult with whom we have a close relationship. We may be the only person in a position to help them effectively, and this may occasionally involve force, provided the intention is to help them, never to cause any kind of harm.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
Suicide is to be avoided, as we understand suicide to be coming from a mind of extreme anger, frustration, or depression. With such confused mind or negative intention, how could any benefit come? We also need to consider that suicide does not stop suffering, because suicide only destroys the body, but it is the mind that suffers, and the mind is never destroyed, it simply goes on to take rebirth.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
Exchanging self with others is a core training in Mahayana Buddhism. That could lead into actions that we might call martyrdom, including offering our own body for the benefit of others (for example, such as Jesus Christ is said to have done at the cross). The important consideration here is to perform pure selfless actions for the benefit of others, not reputation.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
It is possible, if it is more beneficial to a larger number of people, and if it can be done with a mind of love and not anger.
23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?

No, capital punishment is not acceptable according to Buddhism. It is far more compassionate to help the person who committed a crime to learn the effects of their negative actions. Simply killing someone does not solve the problem as they will soon take rebirth and continue to follow their own tendencies. Present criminals, including children who kill others, are just repeating the actions they used to perform in previous lives. Simply by killing such criminals we can never expect to rid the world of such evil.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?

From a Buddhist point of view, consciousness enters a mother's womb at the time of conception, so abortion is an action that destroys the life of another being. There are many factors involved in a woman's decision to have an abortion, and it is ultimately a personal decision. Buddhist women would almost certainly choose to have the child, even if it meant to give the child up for adoption by a couple with better conditions to raise the child.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?

Yes, after the person's consciousness has left the body, which is not necessarily when the heart and the breath stop. Usually we try not to disturb the person's body for 3 days. Sometimes there are clear signs that the consciousness has already left the body, such as when the body is severely damaged by an accident.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?

No. Modifying the body may be beneficial for medical reasons — a better or more effective vehicle for continuing our spiritual training. But if it is just to improve the look of the vehicle, then there is not much meaning. In fact, it may put at risk our good health or even our precious life.

27. Are transfusions allowed?

Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?

If the person so wishes. Death is inevitable, it is more important to have a meaningful and virtuous life and a peaceful mind at the time of death, rather than simply a long life. Extraordinary means may be a method for coping with an inability to let go and accept death, in which case it would be better, ideally, to confront that fear directly rather than to just put it off through prolonging the continuum of a physical body.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?

Suffering does not end by dying — it would be great if it did! So long as there are traces of negativity in the mental continuum, suffering will continue in life after life. The most important point is having a peaceful mind at the time of death, as this allows for positive imprints to ripen to guide one to a fortunate rebirth. Patients and family should
be empowered to discuss and decide on how to bring about a peaceful death through pain management and spiritual practice.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
Only if the aim is to help someone die with a peaceful mind. If that motivation is the guiding principle, then in general skillful actions will follow. One must be sure to have the best interest of the dying person in mind.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
Yes.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
Yes. One of the possible ethical problems according to Buddhism is the mixing of sentient life with non-sentient life. Generally speaking we create causes of more suffering when we try to manipulate the external world in search for the end of suffering. Suffering is a state of mind and, therefore, the end of suffering can only happen when mind is purified.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
Yes.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Yes. A healthy environment is kind to all of those who live in it — it gives temporary happiness, and more comfort and freedom to engage in spiritual practice. Also, we need a long and healthy life to continually make progress in our spiritual practice. If we destroy the environment we are making our own future lives more miserable!

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
Yes. They are sentient beings, and are as important as any other. Size is not a factor. Living beings take rebirth in many realms of samsara — sometimes human, sometimes animal, sometimes in other states of existence. They are simply living beings, not inherently or permanently animals.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
There is no end to our mental continuum, and the world appearing to us is a creation of our own mind, or karma. Therefore, there is no end to the world either. However, this world appearing to us, the world we call planet Earth, will certainly come to an end at some point. But all living beings will continue to exist, sometimes in human worlds, other times in different realms of existence, according to the quality of their own actions.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
Yes, for those who are single. If one chooses to get married, having sex outside that marriage would be considered sexual misconduct. It should be noted, however, that marriage is a social contract and not considered part of the spiritual path.
38. *Is sex only for procreation?*
   No.

39. *Is masturbation allowed?*
   Yes.

40. *Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?*
   No.

41. *Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?*
   No. The only exception is for those who choose to get ordained as a Buddhist monk or a nun and follow a religious life. In that case the hair is shaved or kept very short (symbolizing renunciation to concern with appearance) and the person wears the ordination robes, which represent the Three Higher Trainings of moral discipline, concentration, and wisdom. The robes symbolize the spiritual path leading to freedom from suffering, through the power of wisdom.

42. *Is transvestism immoral?*
   No.

43. *Is homosexuality immoral?*
   No.

44. *Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?*
   Yes.

45. *Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?*
   Yes. It should be noted, however, that marriage is a social contract and not considered part of the spiritual path.

46. *Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at a time?*
   Yes.

47. *Is divorce acceptable?*
   Yes.

48. *Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?*
   No.

49. *Are men and women separate but equal?*
   Yes.

50. *Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?*
   Allowable, but not conducive to spiritual development or realizations. One of the basic precepts Buddha taught for practitioners is to abandon intoxicants.
51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?
    No, because prayer is personal and no one should suggest what is or isn't appropriate prayer.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
    Yes, but only if open to people of all faiths. No particular faith should receive more subsidies. Perhaps it is better to maintain separation of church and state.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
    No. However, many Buddhists consider a vegetarian diet to be more compassionate, both to animals and to the environment.

54. Is gambling allowed?
    Yes, but it is recognized as a waste of time and an activity that will likely increase a person's attachment to worldly possessions. It may also increase miserliness, a very negative mind.

55. Is smoking allowed?
    Allowable, but not conducive to spiritual development or realizations. One of the basic precepts Buddha taught for practitioners is to abandon intoxicants.
THERAVADA

THERAVADA, also known as Hinayana (lesser vehicle), stresses personal salvation of the individual through attainment of knowledge and sainthood. The goal is to become an arhat, a saint who has attained nirvana and is in effect beyond all earthly attachments. For this reason, Theravada has a strong tradition of monks and monasteries.

Emphasis is placed on right practice and right conduct. The Four Noble Truths and the Eight-fold Path are of primary importance.

About 125 million people are identified with this branch of Buddhism.

Pongpun Saovaphudhasuvej
Former Vice-President, Young Buddhist Association of Thailand,
Advisor, World Fellowship of Buddhist Youth
Bangkok
Thailand

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
   To be able to keep the five minimum precepts, namely: 1. To abstain from killing; 2. To abstain from stealing; 3. To abstain from sexual misconduct; 4. To abstain from false speech; 5. To abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness.

2. Why be good?
   So you do not cause any harm to yourself in this life and future rebirth.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
   Yes.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
   Yes. So long that the person can still keep the five precepts referred to above.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
   Religious requirements are ways and means to lead to or develop morality. Morality is the basis of all religions and morality can lead one to enlightenment.

6. What is the source of ethics?
   For the Buddhist it is the Tripika.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
   Yes. So long that person can still keep to five precepts.
8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
Your inner feeling will tell you if you would just listen and be honest to yourself.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
Their old kammas in past lives.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
Yes, one can commit a religious offence in one religion (knowingly or unaware) but may not be considered a religious offence by a different religion. But for moral offence it is generally applied across the board with a few exceptions, i.e., more than one wife, to kill the sake of religion, etc.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
The Buddha tells us what is moral or not through the Tripika, but enforcement is by self-control for the benefits of one's own sake.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
Yes.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
Morality is the binding force for a peaceful and harmonized society. One should emphasize or give priority to the teaching of morality than religious belief. Once a person has become moral, that person can develop further spirituality.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
In general, no; but in a bigger picture (in span of many lives) it's the kamma of each individual being.

15. Is war ever justified?
No.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
No.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
Yes

18. Is force justifiable against children?
No.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
No.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
No.
21. **To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?**
To cause others to suffer or die is a bad *kamma* to one's own. If one has to die due to refraining from committing bad *kamma*, then it is good. It is never justified to kill others so that one can live.

22. **Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?**
No.

23. **Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?**
No.

**Science and Medicine**

24. **Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?**
To save the life of the mother, but it should not be the choice of the mother to say so.

25. **Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?**
Yes, to gain knowledge about the cause of death.

26. **Are there rules about body modification, e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?**
It is your body and if one wishes to hurt oneself with the hope to get better looking and gained more confident, then it is up to that person.

27. **Are transfusions allowed?**
Yes

28. **Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?**
If that person still can live with dignity and not be a burden to others unreasonably.

29. **Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?**
Not by killing!

30. **Does anyone have the right to hasten death?**
Not by committing suicide.

31. **In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?**
The intention there is not to kill but to save lives but only one can be saved!

32. **Is genetic engineering permissible?**
Yes.

33. **Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?**
No.

34. **Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?**
Yes.
35. Do animals have any moral standing?
   Yes. Animals have their own instincts and behaviors. They become animals through their own kammas in past lives.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
   No, but it predicts the end of the present Buddhist religious era under the immediate past Buddha, which will end after 5,000 years after the current Lord Buddha passed away.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
   No

38. Is sex only for procreation?
   No.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
   Not allowed for monks.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
   No, but not discussed in details.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
   Yes, for monks and nuns.

42. Is transvestism immoral?
   No, it's just a result of past unwholesome kamma in past live.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
   Similar to 42.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?
   Yes.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
   Yes.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?
   Yes, in the Buddhist context.

47. Is divorce acceptable?
   Yes.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
   No, it's a customs issue.
49. Are men and women separate but equal?
In the Buddhist context it is a better blessing to be born as men than women. However, to do good to one's mother gained more merit than to do similar thing to one's father. By the same token, to do bad thing to one's mother is more harmful than to do it to one's father.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?
No, as it is against one of the five basic precepts mentioned above. However, if used as medicines for healing purposes, it is permissible.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?
Yes.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
Yes, disregards of what religion so long that those religions teach humane morality, peace and brotherhood.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
It's a health concern.

54. Is gambling allowed?
No.

55. Is smoking allowed?
No.
CHRISTIANITY

Love your enemies.

New Testament of the Christian Bible, Matthew

FOR VARIOUS THEOLOGICAL, SPIRITUAL, POLITICAL, cultural and historical reasons, Christianity consists of a countless number of branches, churches and denominations. Some are very large while others consist of no more than a handful of followers. Some are ancient with firmly established institutions, some as a recent as yesterday and consist of nothing more than a storefront. While there are churches that are centralized and have a well-developed approach of ethical questions, others are decentralized and rely upon individual interpretation.

With about two billion followers, almost twice as many people are identified with the Christian faith than any other religion.

From “Foundational Norms for Christian Ethics”
J. Francis Stafford, Archbishop of Denver, Colorado
USA
www.catholic.net

The Christian Vision Of Man

The Gospel has an exalted view of the human person. We are born of God (John 1:13). Jesus Christ is "the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" of all creation (Rev. 22:13), including man. Our actions take on meaning in a world unified by God's action of creation and redemption in Christ. There is a marriage between the biblical revelation and ethics.

The context for our moral activity is revealed in John's great Prologue, the Word who was with God in the beginning and "through whom all things have been made, and without him was not anything made that was made" Jesus Christ (John 1:3). In the light of Christian revelation, the world is a drama initiated by God for our salvation in Christ. And our encounter with infinite freedom can only take place within the perspective of a personal call, within a sense of vocation, of an election. Our lives make sense only within God's story.

How are Christians to live in a society whose supreme values are tolerance and the creation of a system of cooperation between competing groups? Hans Urs von Balthasar gives a compelling response. "Christians must be more intensely on fire with the love of God; they will have to be so if possible more absolutely, more silently, with less dramatic gestures and forms of
devotion... They will have to efface themselves, disappearing in the uniform mass, and by doing so gain in sincerity and intensely humble objectivity."

Christians must accept the full impact that God no longer has meaning in the contemporary world. But this is not the last word by any means. Our testimony to Jesus of Nazareth must always and everywhere be a testimony of faith. This is what Balthasar calls the "elliptical structure of Christology."

Christ: The Supreme, Concrete Norm For Ethics

The supreme norm for Christian ethics is Christ. His obedience to the Father's will is the starting point for moral development. This is the teaching of the encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*. "Consequently the decisive answer to every one of man's questions, his moral and religious questions in particular, is given by Jesus Christ, or rather is Jesus Christ himself" (no. 2). And later, "Each day the Church looks to Christ with unfailing love, fully aware that the answer to the problem of morality lies in him alone" (no. 85).

Jesus Christ is the concrete, absolute, unqualified norm of all ethical actions. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms this by asserting that he is the unique measure and the archetype of divine love and the response to it. "The first and last point of reference of this catechesis will always be Jesus Christ himself, who is 'the way, and the truth, and the life.' It is by looking to him in faith that Christ's faithful can hope that he himself fulfills his promises in them, and that, by loving him with the same love with which he has loved them, they may perform works in keeping with their dignity" (no. 1698).

The ethical actions of Christians must mirror the reality that they live with Christ in the final times. By His death and resurrection, Christ carried creation to its eschatological fulfillment. Moral perfection is the goal of Christian reflection on ethics. "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Our perfection consists in taking part in a mission, the origin of which is within the Trinity of Divine Persons and which becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ.

Christ: The Universal Ethical Norm

The perfect obedience of Jesus to His Father is the valid and applicable norm for all ethical situations. This becomes clear when one reflects upon the saving link between Christ and sinners. By the Paschal mystery we all 'abide' in Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit. "The Crucified Christ reveals the authentic meaning of freedom; he lives it fully in the total gift of himself" for us (*Veritatis Splendor*, no. 85). We share in His freedom through faith.

This "for us" is to be taken seriously, that is, not metaphorically. It means that Jesus did not simply act in our favor, in solidarity with our sufferings. Rather for us God made him to be sin (2 Cor. 5:21) and Jesus became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13), that is, "in our stead" in the sense of representation. In what Balthasar calls "a breakthrough formula," St. Paul teaches that Jesus gives Himself for us to the extent of "exchanging place" with us. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

In virtue of the Cross, the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon all flesh (Acts 2:17). Through the Paschal Mystery the Holy Spirit of God universalizes the form of Christ in every
believer making it available and applicable to every moral situation. The Church, especially through the Eucharist, is the privileged place in which the Holy Spirit of freedom leads the individual Christian freely into the Father's kingdom.

"The Golden Rule"

"So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets" (Mt. 7:112). On the lips of Jesus "The Golden Rule" is not a humanitarian statement. It requires a distinctively Christian interpretation. It is a call for an exchange of the gift of love among persons who are "in Christ Jesus." Everything that Christians do and say must now be seen in the context of the Eucharistic Christ. His life's surrender is freely imparted to use only through him and with Him and in Him.

Sin

Sin and its guilt can only be seen within the context of Christ who loved His own in the world to the end (John 13:1). This is the teaching of Pope John Paul II in his 1986 encyclical letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*:

When on the eve of the Passover Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as the one who 'will convince the world concerning sin,' on the one hand this statement must be given the widest possible meaning, insofar as it includes all the sin in the history of humanity. But on the other hand, when Jesus explains that this sin consists in the fact that 'they do not believe in him,' this meaning seems to apply only to those who rejected the messianic mission of the Son of Man and condemned him to the death on the Cross. But one can hardly fail to notice that the more 'limited' and historically specified meaning of sin expands, until it assumes a universal dimension by reason of the universality of the redemption, accomplished through the Cross. The revelation of the mystery of Redemption opens the way to an understanding in which every sin whenever and wherever committed has a reference to the Cross of Christ - and therefore indirectly also to the sin of these who 'have not believed in him,' and who condemned Jesus Christ to death on the Cross (no. 29).

There are further sources for the formation of ethical judgements: other biblical elements (the promise and the law), fragments of philosophical ethics (conscience and natural law), and the application of the so-called "anthropological sciences" to a post-Christian and non-Christian ethics. These sources attain their goal only in and through Christ, the absolutely singular and universal ethical norm.

[In some of what has preceded, I am indebted to the insights of Hans Urs von Balthasar, especially his "Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics."]
ANGLICAN/EPISCOPALIAN

ARISING OUT OF AN ECCLESIASTICAL DISPUTE with the Vatican in the 16th century, there are 40 independent national Anglican churches throughout the world today. Each country elects its own presiding bishop and there are enormous differences in terms of morality from country to country within the Anglican community. However, they are all connected through the archbishop of Canterbury, England and rely upon the Book of Common Prayer.

Officially known as the Anglican Catholic Church, there are over 70 million Anglicans around the world. Nine of the national churches have more than a million members each, with nearly 25 million adherents in England and 2.5 million in the U.S.

Stephen L. White
Chaplain, The Episcopal Church at Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
We believe that it in the nature of human beings to be imperfect and broken. Laws and rules do not make us better persons, but only show us how imperfect we are when we compare ourselves to ideals of perfection. We believe that it is only through living a life following the example and teachings of Jesus Christ that we can ever hope to achieve goodness.

For a Christian the key to being a good person is to live in community with others. By living a life that is in every respect (that is as shown not only by acts, but an inner attitude) an acknowledgement that every other person is one who shares with us the basic level of humanness we share the claim of connection.

There are two ways of looking at community: utilitarian model of community (we form community because it is in our self-interest to do so) and the economic sense.

"Koinonia" — we gather in community not because it’s useful to be so gathered, but because it’s where we find our fullness (like the cripple at the gates of Athens in the Bible book known as the Acts of the Apostles, Peter cannot give him money for food, but Peter gives him fulfillment of his telos “be healed” so that he can be part of the whole community) — here in a justice sense.

2. Why be good?
We believe that it is our duty to please God. This duty comes from our appreciation of God's love for us, which implies us to become closer to God and to live a godly life. By attempting to achieve goodness we come closer to unity with God and begin to become complete
human beings. As I have suggested above, it is only by living a life in community — koinonia — in a selfless way that we can be fully human, fully ourselves.

As Christians we also promise to live moral lives in our vows at baptism. In the baptismal vows of the Episcopal Church in the United States, for example, we pledge to persevere in resisting evil, and whenever we fall into sin, to repent and return to the Lord. We further pledge to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves, and to strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being (Book of Common Prayer, p. 304-305).

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
Yes.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion, i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
All persons are capable of honoring God and loving their neighbors, whether a part of a church or not.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
Yes. Some rules and regulations of a particular religion apply in a moral sense only to adherents. But, as I have tried to suggest briefly above, the call to community transcends all distinctions about religion.

6. What is the source of ethics?
For Christians the source of all ethics is the bible and, most particularly, the teaching of Jesus Christ. In the bible we can discern a progression in terms of the primary focus. This progression is from a focus on the self to a focus on others. Here is a brief summary of this progression in the relevant books of the bible: Exodus 20:1-17: The Ten Commandments.

Leviticus 19:1-17: Ritual and moral holiness. Duty to the poor [leave part of field unharvested for poor and don’t strip it.] Do not steal or lie or defraud. Do not hinder the handicapped. Be just and fair. Do not hate in your heart or bear a grudge.

Leviticus 25: Sabbath year in 7th year. Year of Jubilee. The people of Israel are the servants of God v. 55. Free slaves, forgive debts.

Deuteronomy 5:1-33: Covenant. Ten commandments. You must follow this way of life so that it will go well with you. And you may live long in the land that you are to possess (5:33).

Isaiah 52-55: Suffering servant who was despised and rejected 53:3. He has borne our sins ch. 53:4. Promise of assurance to Jerusalem. Invitation to abundant life ch. 55.

Amos: Prophet as servant. In Amos 3:15 we learn that people of Israel had winter and summer houses. This is something previously only kings could boast about; the people of Israel living like kings. Amos 6:4-6 we hear of lots of leisure time and activities. Downside was widening gap between rich and poor. This expansion and prosperity followed and disasters that were a purge of the kingdom. This was a reward for faithfulness. The people on the other side of the wall were clearly not part of the 7,000. This justified oppression of those not part of the 7,000 and it was this oppression that Amos attacked. What Amos has managed to do is to finish off the enemies of Israel. The function of a prophet is to create well-being. Invective against Israel. They oppress and then have the gall to take the fruits of their oppression into the temple as an offering to Yahweh.

Matthew 5:1-12: The Beatitudes —
Those who mourn will be comforted
The meek will inherit the earth
Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled
The merciful will receive mercy
The pure in heart will see God
Peacemakers will be children of God
Those who are persecuted for righteousness will enter the kingdom of heaven
Those who are persecuted falsely will receive their great reward in heaven with the prophets

Matthew 25:31-46: Judgment of those who do not treat others as Christ. Hungry; Thirsty; Stranger; Naked; Sick; Prisoner,


Romans 12:1,13:10: New life in Christ (do not be conformed to this world). Differing gifts (but one body in Christ). Marks of true Christian — Genuine love; Hold fast to good; Show honor; Contribute to the needs of the saints; Hospitality; Compassion; Live in harmony; Never avenge yourself; Feed your enemies; For in doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads. (12:21); Being subject to authorities (13:1-7); All authority comes from God; If you want to be at peace with authority, live a good life; Love one another (13:8-10); Love your neighbor as yourself; By loving you fulfill the law.

1 Corinthians 1:18-21: Divisions in the Church. Be united in same mind and purpose. Do not allow divisions so as to empty the cross of Christ of its power. Christ the power and wisdom of God. Message of the cross is foolish to those who are perishing. To those who are saved the cross is the power of God.

2 Corinthians 12:1-10: Paul’s visions and revelations. Paul tormented by Satan (asks God 3 times for relief). God responds: My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness. I am content with insults, etc. for Christ . . . for whenever I am weak, I am strong. 12:10

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
Yes.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
The main test of ethical behavior for a Christian is whether an act or a failure to act is in keeping with Christ’s command that we love God and love our neighbors. Having said that, the evaluation of an ethical problem takes work. In our church there are few hard and fast rules of the kind that tend to simplify problems. As we approach a question, it is important that we do not begin with generalities, but instead break it down. We might begin by asking what is the inherent tendency of the act under consideration? Not its motivation, but its effect.

Thomas Aquinas said when you’re trying to figure out whether something is right or wrong, try to ferret out its ultimate objective and try to avoid thinking of its consequences that cloud our judgment owing to our self-interest. An act may be evil even though the consequences seem to be good. When presented with an issue, don’t try to resolve it, but enter into its parts and components. Open up both sides of the question and show how both sides relate to the Christian faith and the teachings of Jesus.
9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
   This is not an ethical question, but a philosophical or theological one. To know the answer would be to know the mind of God and, God being wholly other and apart from creation, that is simply not possible. But we believe that God is all loving and that God does not desire that we suffer. We also believe that there is a redemptive quality to suffering and that it can, if we are open to God's presence in our lives, transform us and change us into stronger and more perfect persons.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
   Of course.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
   We do not have "moral rules" per se. We do advocate a moral life as my answers to others of these questions attempts to show. We believe that each person is responsible for discerning the morality of an act in conversation with other members of the Christian community, including, but certainly not limited to, priests, bishops, and other spiritual advisers.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
   We do not believe that our moral values should be enforced by the state, if that is the meaning behind this question. But we do believe that every person should strive to live a moral life.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
   We believe that church and state should be separate. But we also believe that the church has a prophetic role in society. By prophetic we mean a duty to speak the truth about injustice and acts of individuals and the state that are harmful to the well-being of anyone. We further believe that the church can be a voice that helps society discern what are good and moral ways of living in community.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
   The reasoning sketched out in the answer to question 8 is critical here. If the objective of the act is consistent with the preservation of justice and human life, then killing may be justified.

15. Is war ever justified?
   The early Christian church was predominantly pacifist. Christianity began to feel tension when soldiers began to be Christian, part of the problem with duty to Caesar, but also going to war. Augustine felt that war is permissible and may be obligatory if you are the governor. Here he follows Romans 13 that suggests that God has given power and authority to government in order to protect people from violence.
   Criteria for just war: The entity making war has legitimate authority; There is a just cause; There is a just intention; Prudence (probability of success); There is justice in prosecution of the war; Discrimination; Proportionality.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
   No.
17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
While the church currently has no official stand on this, many in our church have been conscientious objectors given the circumstances of particular wars (e.g. the war in Vietnam).

18. Is force justifiable against children?
No.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
No.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
Suicide always calls for compassion for all its victims — the person who has died as well as those left behind who grieve. Suicide often is not a rational act and we must be careful not to judge a person whose pain has prompted such an extreme act. Having said that, we believe that God is the author of all life and that suicide is contrary to God's will.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
One should never seek to be killed as one's primary objective. However, in the defense of another person or in refusing to renounce one's faith, even in the face of certain death, one may accept martyrdom.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
No. I believe the key word in this question is "innocent."

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?
See the answer to question # 8. In breaking down capital punishment, we might say that the "act" of capital punishment is: Homicide (as opposed to killing an animal); State sanctioned and state-performed; Punishment (deterrence versus retribution).

Augustine and Ambrose were opposed to capital punishment. Their reason was the claim of neighbor (i.e. all persons) as imago dei or in the "image of God." Augustine believes that there is always the possibility of redemption and a turning back to community. In Romans 13 the apostle Paul calls the government the agent of God. We must acknowledge a tradition within Christianity that accepts capital punishment based on Romans 13. The reasoning is that only God can give or take a life, but the state is the agent of God according to Romans13 and this has been the classical Christian defense of capital punishment. Ambrose and Augustine accede to this, but say that in practice the state must lean over backwards to be sure that all is just. From this line of thinking the Episcopal Church is on record as being opposed to capital punishment.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
I would again refer the reader to my answer to question 8 and suggest that the tendency of abortion in each particular case, whether toward good or evil, should be considered in deciding the morality of the act.

The morality of abortion depends upon considerations of 1.) the rights of the unborn life; 2.) procreation; 3.) the welfare of the mother; and 4.) the interests of the father and the wider community in terms of the outcomes of pregnancies and births. Controversy about abortion turns on the relative value and weight different well-intentioned persons assign to each of these factors.
The Christian tradition has a high regard for life and for the notion that God alone is the author and ruler of life. Thus, while the Episcopal Church does not expressly prohibit abortion, the question of abortion in a particular instance must be approached with extreme caution and the advice of a spiritual counselor should be sought.

25. *Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?*  
   Autopsies may be performed to ascertain cause of death and to advance medical knowledge as long as the body is treated with respect and dignity.

26. *Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?*  
   There are no codified rules on this, but the reasoning outlined in the answer to question 8 should be applied to each situation.

27. *Are transfusions allowed?*  
   Yes.

28. *Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?*  
   Yes, when there is a reasonable chance of recovery. But life should not be prolonged by artificial means when a person's brain has ceased to function and when there is no chance of even a modest recovery.

29. *Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?*  
   No.

30. *Does anyone have the right to hasten death?*  
   No.

31. *In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?*  
   Yes.

32. *Is genetic engineering permissible?*  
   No.

33. *Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?*  
   Yes.

34. *Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?*  
   Yes. We believe that we are stewards of the earth and that God expects us to use creation in ways that will preserve it for the generations that follow us.

35. *Do animals have any moral standing?*  
   Yes, but not on an equal footing with humans. We believe that human beings have a special relationship with God. But we also believe that all creatures are blessed by God and should be treated with dignity and respect.

36. *Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?*  
   Our faith does not predict an end of time.
Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
The whole area of sexuality is an area of controversy within our church. Many Episcopalians would answer yes to this question and many others would argue that sex is permissible in a deeply committed relationship outside of marriage so long as the parties in the relationship are not exploited in any way. See the answer to question 8.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
No.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
It is not expressly forbidden. See the answer to question 8.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
No.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
We believe that dress should be reasonably modest and not sexually provocative, but otherwise there are no codes or rules pertaining to dress and hairstyles.

42. Is transvestism immoral?
There are no express prohibitions concerning transvestism. I would again refer the reader to my answer to question 8 and suggest that the tendency of transvestism in each particular case, whether toward good or evil, should be considered in deciding the morality of the act.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
This is a matter of great controversy within our church at this time. There is general agreement that there is nothing amoral or immoral in the condition of homosexuality. But there is disagreement within the church about homosexual acts. Some invoke a strict and literal biblical interpretation that prohibits homosexual acts. Others contextualize biblical injunctions and suggest that since the condition of homosexuality is not voluntary that it must follow that it is ordained by God and that homosexual acts are on an equal footing with heterosexual acts.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?
Yes.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
This is a matter of great controversy within our church at this time. There are many who advocate gay marriage and many others who oppose any blessing of same-sex unions. It is difficult to gauge where the majority is on this issue, but I would guess that there are many Episcopalians who would favor some sort of blessing of same-sex unions, which is, of course, not the same as saying that they would approve of "gay marriage." The problem with the term "marriage" is that it has the connotation of heterosexual relationships.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?
Yes.

47. Is divorce acceptable?
We believe that marriage is to be entered into with the sincere intention to be a lifelong commitment. Nonetheless, we also believe that, due to our imperfect natures, this ideal cannot always be achieved and that in the name of Christian love it is necessary to allow marriages to be dissolved and for people to re-marry. We believe that these decisions should be careful considered in consultation with a priest and that every reasonable effort should be made to preserve a marriage.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
Yes. We believe that men and women are created equally in the image of God and that before God there is no essential distinction between men and women. Thus, men and women are not only permitted, but also encouraged to participate fully and equally in the life of Christ's church including the ordained ministry.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?
Men and women are seen as fully equal in every respect in our church.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?
We do not advocate the use of any substance that is either harmful to the body or that is prohibited by the law. We do not oppose the use of alcohol as long as it is used in moderation.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?
No. The Episcopal Church advocates the strict separation of church and state.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
No. The Episcopal Church advocates the strict separation of church and state.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
Food should be eaten in moderation to nourish the body as well as for enjoyment. But we believe that it is wrong to abuse food in ways that may be harmful to the body.

54. Is gambling allowed?
It is not expressly forbidden. But I would once again refer the reader to my answer to question #8 and suggest that the tendency of most forms of gambling is in an evil direction. This is particularly true in the case of state-sponsored gambling in the form of lotteries. State lotteries are typically marketed very aggressively in the media with suggestions that quick riches await the buyer of a lottery ticket. However, the state knows very well that the probability of winning is extremely low and becomes even lower as the size of the prize increases and more buyers are attracted. The state also knows that there is a demonstrable inverse relationship between one's income and the likelihood that one will buy a lottery ticket (very few rich people or well-educated people who grasp the simple laws of probability will waste money on lottery tickets). Thus, it can be seen that state lotteries are nothing more than a regressive tax on poor people. We believe that is immoral and unjust.

55. Is smoking allowed?
It is not expressly forbidden, but each individual must grapple with the moral implications of engaging in behavior known to be harmful to the body.
BAPTIST

BEGIN IN 1608 BY ENGLISH REFUGEES who settled in Holland, Baptists believe in baptism of adults, that sin is not living up to God’s laws and that salvation comes through God’s grace and a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Nearly 90% of the 35 million Baptists are found in the USA.

Michael Hale
Minister, Travis Baptist Church
Corpus Christi, Texas
USA

This is one Baptist Pastor point of view and I do not speak for all Baptist. No one can speak for all Baptist on issues.

MH

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
   A good person in the general since is one treats people as if they have worth! This would mean no matter what they look like including their race. Often people treat those they believe are like them in a good way. But to really be a good Person we must treat all people with a sense of dignity.

2. Why be good?
   I was always taught that I should treat people the way I want to be treated. I would want to be good so that others would treat me in the same way.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
   Yes

3. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
   No, A true apostate has turned his back on the teachings of Jesus Christ and therefore would turn from good to evil.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
   Religion is man seeking to find God. In the Christian faith we believe that God has reached out to man in his Son Jesus Christ. Therefore the only religious requirement is that of by faith inviting Jesus Christ into your life. As we learn to walk with Jesus Christ we begin to understand the lifestyle that He has called us into from what the Bible teaches. I Peter 1:14-16 tells us not live like we once did And that we are to live a "Holy' life. The word means different, different from the world. That leads us on a discovery of what kind of lifestyle that the Lord would have us live. It is a discover process and for some we are slow learners.
6. What is the source of ethics?
For the Christian it is the teaching of the Bible. I believe that the Bible is the Word of God and I believe it is literal.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
I would say yes, but the problem with being and atheist is the idea that I am ultimately responsible to no one which could lead some to do whatever they desired no matter the consequences.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
Hebrews 5:13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.14 But solid food belongs to those who are full of age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. I believe this is telling us that through the Bible and experience we can see what is right and what is wrong.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
We live in a fallen sinful world. The Bible teaches that when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit all of creation fell. Romans 5:12- tells us that sin came to the human race. Romans 8:19-23 tell us that creation groans (as if in pain) and it is due to the fact that a perfect world became an imperfect world the day that sin entered the world.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
If I commit an offence it damages my witness to Christ and to the world. The only difference is that found in Romans 1:18 where there is stated that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," The phrase "ungodliness" is sin against God while "unrighteousness" is against man. Ungodliness is a denial of the rule of God in ones life, while "unrighteousness" is against man. For example someone gets drunk and kills someone, who is "unrighteousness" against man. Yet both are considered sin and needs to be forgiven but only in the blood of Jesus Christ.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
There is no one except the local church that can take any kind of action. The truth is about the only time someone commits a terrible sin it is usually the Pastor and the church terminates their relationship with the Pastor.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
I believe there are Biblical morals that should apply to everyone. Such as abstaining from sexual relations until married, that homosexuality is a sin against God and mankind. The taking of a life is wrong and there should be penalties. I believe that it is wrong to steal.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
True religion deals with the morals that God has given us in the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments have been the bedrock of our society, our secular society and should continue to be the guiding force in modern Day America.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
There may be times to use force in defending oneself and one's family. If you feel that your family is in danger from someone and you have to kill the person to stop the danger.

15. Is war ever justified?
When our nation has been attacked and we have to defend ourselves. At present [May 2002] our president I believe wants to attack Iraq and they must justify their actions to the American people plus the U.N.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
Most of the time the answer is "no" but the problem of war is that the innocent often suffer as a result of the evil of others. This is one of the sad results when national leaders decide to attack others they often do so at the risk of having their people killed in retaliation.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
Yes, if they feel it is wrong but I believe there should be other ways from them to serve this nation.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
Only in seeking to punish a child who breaks the rules or misbehaves, or if the child is doing something that would hurt himself or others.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
Only if the spouse is about to hurt themselves or someone else. I have lived with my wife for 29 years and I have never hit her and she has never hit me. We have been blessed with a great marriage and a great relationship.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
No, suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
When someone is living out their faith and they are told to stop serving Jesus Christ or die!

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
In certain situations, Yes. Like when a tubule pregnancy takes place to save the mother’s life.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?
The state ought to exercise capital punishment for certain crimes. Therefore killing is justified in capital punishment cases. For example, taking another life, taking the life of a police officer.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
Tubule pregnancy

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
When there is the need to know why the person died and in seeking to solve a crime.
26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
   It is only what we have accepted in society. I don't care for tattoos, but that is a personal thing.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
   Yes, there is no Biblical teachings against transfusions those who say otherwise quote Old Test. Passages that deal with eating the blood from meat.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
   No

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
   They have a right to refuse medical treatment.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
   No.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
   In this case I feel that if you can save one life by allowing the other to die then we must do what we can to save one life.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
   I believe this is a field that may bring some good to the world but we must be very careful. No matter what we say are do genetic engineering I believe will be mankind's future we must learn to use this with care.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
   No,

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
   Yes, I believe that we are to be good stewards of the world but there are many extremists.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
   Yes, we need to treat animals in a humane way.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
   Yes the Bible clearly tells us that the day is coming when Jesus Christ will return for his bride the church. The Bible clearly tells us that there is a heaven and a hell, that there will be a new earth and a new heaven, with a heavenly Jerusalem as the center of it all.

   No man knows the time of the end but one of the signs of the end is when Israel once again became a nation in 1948. For many of us in the Baptist, evangelical faith we believe the signs of the times relate to world events and to what is happening in the Middle East.
Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
No

38. Is sex only for procreation?
No, it is to be enjoyed between a husband and wife.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
There are no real guidelines, but I feel that it takes some form of pornography to stimulate and there for it is wrong.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
Sex between a husband and wife can be what they enjoy together.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
No, yet we do teach that we need to have a sense of decency.

42. Is transvestism immoral?
Yes.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
Yes.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?
The homosexual needs to be seen as a person who lives a lifestyle that is unnatural.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
No

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?
Yes, it has always been the plan of God One man and one woman freely committed for life.

47. Is divorce acceptable?
Acceptable yes, but not encouraged.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
No, but there is a theological issues of the role of women in the ministry, at least as Senior Pastor for conservative Baptists. The role of senior pastor is to be left in the hands of men.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?
Yes.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?
No.
51. *Should prayers be allowed in public schools?*
Students should be allowed to pray and meet in groups to pray. But never forced to pray.

52. *Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?*
No, I realize that many Baptist want the state to subsidize private schools. First once the state starts to give state money to a private school the state will be able to have some control on the school. Second, I still believe that public schools serve the community to educate all children. I believe there needs to be disciple in the public schools like we had when I was attending school.

53. *Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?*
No.

54. *Is gambling allowed?*
Lots of Baptist gamble I am sure, but we would teach that this is not the way God plans for us to gain money.

55. *Is smoking allowed?*
Allowed but not encouraged, we cannot stop people from smoking but would point out the bad affects.
EASTERN ORTHODOX

In 1054, a division took place within Christianity, with the Catholic Church centered in Rome and the Orthodox Churches centered in Constantinople (Istanbul).

Eastern Orthodoxy is one of the three major doctrinal and jurisdictional groups in Christianity.

There are more than 215 million adherents of Eastern Orthodoxy. This includes members from the Eastern Orthodox worldwide communion — the Russian Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Church of Greece, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and others.

Stanley S. Harakas
Priest, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Professor Emeritus of Orthodox Theology
Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology
Brookline, Massachusetts
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
   There are two ways of answering this. A good person in a general or natural law context is one who follows the life pattern implicit in a moral code such as the Decalogue. On the other hand, true good is being transformed through the saving and redeeming work of Jesus Christ into a God-like person, realizing in practice the truth that we have been created in God's image, with the goal of God-likeness, which is our true identity.

2. Why be good?
   That is what true humanity is. Not to be good is to be less than truly human.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
   As explained above, the first understanding does not require Christian faith, but it is a minimal, low-level ethic.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
   Only in the first sense, as expressed above.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
   Morality describes behavior. Ethics is normative. Of course, not all religious requirements are strictly understood as ethical. But, most religious requirements have ethical dimensions.
6. What is the source of ethics?
The source of ethics is God. God is the good and God is love. So the supreme ethical value is God's love, which we are called to embody in our lives. God’s goodness, finally, is the source of all other values, goods, motives, intentions, rules, laws, standards, etc.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
Already answered above.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
There are many elements that go into a moral decision under the umbrella of God's love and love for our fellow human beings and for nature. For Orthodox Christianity these could be described as the following: An ethical decision can be made on the consideration of a) The Right: Law and Rules; b) Consequences: Good and Evil Results; c) Intent: What is to be Accomplished; d) Motives: What Moves us to Action; e) Means: Appropriate Methods; f) Values and Disvalues; g) The Perception of the Situation; h) Decision Making as an Ecclesial, Corporate Process. All this is practiced within the framework of a worldview and understanding of reality as taught historically within the Orthodox Christian tradition.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
Two reasons. "Good people" is a relative term, none of us is so good that our life-styles are not subject to "bad things." In short, we bring some bad things upon ourselves. Secondly, "good people" live in communities and relationships where there are bad people and bad influences. Bad people can and do bad things even to "good people."

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
Of course, but only by way of emphasis. For the Orthodox Christian, the whole of life falls within the range of concern, since all aspects of life are ultimately connected. It is impossible to separate godliness from the rest of life. To perjure one's self on the witness stand may be seen as "secular" by some. But only the venue has changed. It is still lying and violates the honesty that Orthodox Christians are to have in all circumstances.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
Primarily the conscience of each Orthodox Christian. In some cases, a person's Spiritual Father or Father Confessor can apply some spiritual remedies for sins, or assist the Orthodox Christian to grow spiritually and morally toward full humanity (God-likeness, holiness, righteousness, love for God and fellow human beings).

On occasion, the Church through a Bishop, Priest or Father Confessor may impose spiritual canons, such as refusal of Holy Communion for a period, or participation in other sacraments because of severe sinful actions. But all these are not punishments. Rather, they seek to assist the person to repent, and change from doing evil to doing God's will.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
The basic moral rules described above are a form of natural law. "Should other religious ethical requirements be applied to all others" can be answered in two ways. Ideally, all persons should be Orthodox Christians; in this sense, God's will should be followed by all persons. However, since part of authentic ethics implies self-determination, the specifically Orthodox Christian ethical requirements can never be imposed upon non-believers.
13. What role should religion play in secular society?
Ideally, God should be at the head of the human family and His will should be followed in all of society. But, since this is not the case, tolerance for other views is essential. What should not happen is that society exclude on principle religiously based and motivated values, perspectives, reasoning, and participation.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
Murder is unjust killing of human beings. Killing another human being in self-defense or to protect the innocent may be necessary sometimes; in such cases, it is a tragic "forced or necessary evil."

15. Is war ever justified?
Similarly, war is an evil. Peace is the goal for human society. Yet, for the same reasons mentioned above, it may become a forced or necessary evil to protect life and property (a means for maintaining life) from unprovoked and unjust attack. But it all takes place in an ethically grey area. War may be necessary, but it is not often truly just, in the complex realities of international conflict.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
No.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
Yes, but the c.o. must assume the ethical consequences of refusing to defend his own nation and people.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
"Force" is a complex term. If by "force" what is meant is physically injurious, the answer is no. Any effort to persuade another may be also defined as "force." But so long as there is the possibility of self-determination, force as violence or slavery is not proper. The case of children and their formation may require a certain kind of "benevolent persuasion," when the well-being of the child and society require training and guided development. Gratuitous violence is never appropriate.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
The first part of the previous response dealing with adults applies here. In marriage, the relationship should be one of mutual care, regard, and protection. Physical violence against a spouse is the total opposite of such a loving relationship.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
If it were, it would be in the most narrow and limited situation. Generally, the Orthodox Church teaches that suicide is self-murder and because of its finality, cannot be forgiven. It is classified as a mortal sin.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
Martyrdom is to witness to the truth of the faith. It is required. However, the Church has always taught that it is wrong to provoke one's own death in standing up for the Faith, or to actively seek to be killed for the Faith. If it is to take place, it is the persecutor who is responsible, not the victim.
22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
   Again, it would be a very rare situation for such a situation to justify the taking of
   innocent life for the benefit of another. Under nearly all ordinary circumstances, a third party has
   no right to murder an innocent person for the sake of another. However, in some limited
   circumstances, the sacrificing of one's own life out of love for another can be considered a heroic
   act of care and concern.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?
   In principle, the goal of criminal punishment should be primarily the reformation of the
   criminal and secondarily the protection of society. Considering, however, heinous crimes such as
   treason, serial murder, rape and murder of the victim, etc., capital punishment may be a last
   resort. Most Orthodox Churches in the United States have stated an opposition to capital
   punishment as practiced presently in our country.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
   Abortion is a form of murder. Only if a choice has to be made between the life of the
   unborn child and the life of the mother — a tragic situation — a decision based on the specifics
   of the case may lead to approval of abortion. Again, "a necessary or forced evil."

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
   Yes. Primarily for the family to know why a beloved one has died. There is hesitancy
   among the Orthodox Christians to have autopsies done simply because of routine procedure.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or
   amputations?
   It depends on the intents and motives. The basic principle is that the body is beautifully
   made in its own right. Normally, there is little sympathy with tattoos. Similarly, cosmetic surgery
   motivated out of inordinate concern with external appearances is not normally approved. However, there can be cases when the correction of certain abnormalities is justified for the well-being of the patient. If it is medically necessary to protect the life of a patient, an amputation may be properly indicated.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
   Yes, as a therapeutic procedure.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
   Life should be prolonged so long as there are reasonable therapeutic possibilities for the
   patient. Once it is medically determined that therapy is no longer possible or expected, the patient
   has entered the dying process. Spiritual concerns should be addressed, and the patient kept
   comfortable, and "allowed to die" without the use of extraordinary medical efforts.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
   It is best for the person to indicate in advance how to handle these situations. However, suicide or killing a patient through active means is never justified. As long as the person is able to maintain life functions, no one should kill him or her. We can properly medicate the ill person for pain, and we may "allow death to come" without seeking to extend the dying process, however.
30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
This is ambiguous. To murder someone is to hasten death. That is wrong. To withdraw artificial mechanical means that keep organs functioning is another issue. The criterion of brain death has been generally accepted, allowing the removal of mechanical devices, originally prescribed to assist in recovery. We pray for the release of such persons in a service called “The Rite of the Tearing Away of the Soul.”

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
Again, this is the case of an unavoidable and necessary evil — a tragic situation — that calls for the preservation of one life, if two lives cannot be saved. In this case, it is not a case of killing one of the twins, as it is making it possible for one of the twins to live. This is a sign of the overall imperfection of the world in which we find ourselves.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
So long as it is therapeutic in intent and motive, it is. Its use for eugenic purposes, the creation of chimera, human clones, or cosmetic, or super race ambitions, etc., is wrong.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
Yes, a modified theistic evolution stance holds that there is development within species and that this development takes place through physical processes within the structures and dynamics of God's creation.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Yes, very much so. The Orthodox stance on the protection of the environment is commemorated liturgically each year on September 1. It is based on the theology of creation, on a sacramental and eucharistic approach to the material world, and on the Christian imperative of love.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
Of course. They are creatures of God, but they are also given by God for human use. Not for abuse. So, cruelty to animals, disregard for their needs either in the wild or domestic situations, or the thoughtless destruction of animal environments are unethical.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
There will be an end-time when Christ will return for the Final Judgment. We cannot know when that will be. Our responsibility is to always be ready for it. We will share in Christ’s eternal kingdom in joy and happiness, but we can only use inadequate terms based on our present human experience to describe it now. Eternal life is deep and rich communion with God and with all others, angels and humans.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
It is either fornication or adultery. Both are sins.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
No. It is for procreation, but also for the expression of love and marital unity.
39. *Is masturbation allowed?*  
It is seen as an inappropriate sexual behavior. Only heterosexual relations between husband and wife are considered ethically appropriate.

40. *Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?*  
It is the only kind of sexual intercourse accepted.

41. *Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?*  
Not specifically. Modesty and decency are the norms.

42. *Is transvestism immoral?*  
It is a psychological disorder, a sign of a confused psyche.

43. *Is homosexuality immoral?*  
Since sexual relations are properly exercised in marriage, homosexual behavior is immoral.

44. *Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?*  
The civil law should encourage ethical behavior. Ethical behavior cannot be forced, because it then is no longer ethical behavior but forced behavior.

45. *Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?*  
No. Marriage by definition is the life-long sharing of a man and a woman.

46. *Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?*  
Yes. It is bigamy and is a contradiction in terms.

47. *Is divorce acceptable?*  
We expect all marriages to be life-long. When for numerous reasons the marital relationship breaks down, in spite of repeated attempts to bring about reconciliation, the Orthodox Church recognizes the tragic reality and will sometimes allow a church divorce and second and third marriages.

48. *Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?*  
Both men and women share more in their common humanity than their gender roles. The most important differentiating roles are based in the reality that women bear children. Both parents are responsible for nurturing children, but in different ways.

49. *Are men and women separate but equal?*  
They are different. Spiritually, both men and women equally strive for God-likeness.

50. *Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?*  
Medicinal drugs, yes. So-called recreational drugs, no. Alcohol in controlled and modest amounts consumed as a food, yes. Abuse of alcohol for its own sake in order to inebriate, no.

51. *Should prayers be allowed in public schools?*  
Yes, individually by students themselves. The public school can allow silent time for such prayer in the classroom, but it should not author or sponsor such prayers. Student interest groups certainly have the right to pray in their meetings on school property.
52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
   Schools, no. Particular programs, such as science and math, yes, because there is a state
   interest in the education of all of its young citizens.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
   For the Orthodox there are prescribed days and periods of fasting as a spiritual and
   religious exercise. It is not food itself, with only a few exceptions (cannibalism, strangled
   animals, etc.) that is considered wrong. As a discipline, fasting is encouraged to aid in self-control
   and to assist in focusing on the things of God, helping the Orthodox Christian to grow toward
   God-likeness.

54. Is gambling allowed?
   It is discouraged because of the dependency on chance and not on God.

55. Is smoking allowed?
   Yes, but it is discouraged as harmful to health.
JEHOVAH WITNESS

CHARLES TAZE RUSSELL STARTED THE WATCHTOWER in 1879 and it has been one of the fastest growing Christian denominations throughout the 20th century, with most of the growth occurring after WWII. Until 1931 adherents of the movement was variously known as Watch Tower People, Millennia Dawnists, Earnest Bible Students and Russellites.

There are now nearly 6 million followers who are found in nearly all countries of the world. All baptized members, including women and children, are considered ministers.

Writing Staff
Jehovah Witnesses
Brooklyn, New York
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
   Jesus Christ showed that “good” depends on perspective when he said: “Nobody is good, except one, God.” (Luke 18:19). Therefore, good is relative to God, and to the extent one learns and goes with the will of God as expressed in the Bible, he or she is doing good. Good is not be confused with “nice,” which describes people who usually do not harm their neighbors and do some things they perceive to be positive. Good goes beyond being nice to include doing the will of God. As Jesus put it “not everyone saying to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter into the kingdom . . . but the one doing the will of my Father who is in heaven will.” — Matthew 7:21.

2. Why be good?
   It serves the interest of both God and man.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
   That is for God to judge. As indicated in question 1 above, there are many “nice” people who are not members of our religion. Knowing this, Jesus Christ provided a touchstone or key to identify goodness among those professing to be followers: “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves” — love enough not to kill one’s fellow believers under any circumstances. John who recorded Jesus’ words, explained: “Not like Cain, who originated with the wicked one, and slaughtered his brother.” (John 13:34, 35; 1 John 3:10-12) History is full of evidence that nice people of virtually all religions have willingly responded when called upon by national, political, racial, or tribal leaders to support and participate in warfare that brings death even to members of their own faith. On the other hand, the record of Jehovah’s Witnesses in this regard is well-known. [1]

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
   They may be “nice” persons from certain perspectives, as noted under question 1 above.
5. *Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?*

Christian standards of conduct expressed in the Bible are the basis for morality and therefore are a religious requirement; however, a number of religious requirements in the Bible involve worship of God beyond morality.

6. *What is the source of ethics?*

The Bible as a guide for one’s inherent sense of right (conscience). “When [people] do by nature the things of the law, [they] demonstrate the matter of the law to be written on their hearts, while their conscience is bearing witness with them.” — Romans 2:14, 15.

7. *Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?*

“Good” in the sense Jesus defined it in answer to the question 1 above excludes atheism; however, atheists may be nice persons, sometimes nicer than many professed believers.

8. *How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?*

By reasoning on and understanding the application of principles from the Bible. A properly trained conscience also guides Christians as to what is morally right and what is not.

9. *Why do bad things happen to good people?*

Generally because “time and unforeseen occurrence befall them all.” — Ecclesiastes 9:11.

10. *Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?*

Since Jesus Christ said to “pay back, therefore, Caesar’s things to Caesar, but God’s things to God,” there is a fundamental difference, although his words also make it a religious requirement to give “Caesar” his “things.” If there is conflict between God’s things and Caesar’s things, then “we must obey God as ruler rather than men.” — Matthew 22:21; Acts 5:29.

11. *Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?*

Those held Biblically responsible: individuals between each other, parents, or congregation elders, depending on the nature of the violation. — Matthew 18:15-18; 1 Corinthians 5:1, 12 Ephesians 5:22-6:4.

12. *Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?*

It would make all persons far happier and more peaceful, but compliance must be voluntary. Each individual must choose to conduct himself in accord with God’s standards because he wants the good results in his life.

13. *What role should religion play in secular society?*

Even when caring for mundane or secular activities, Christians are expected to be guided by their religious principles. If all people did so, obviously there would be greater morality, integrity, honesty, impartiality, compassion, unity, and other good qualities manifest in secular society. However, because society is so religiously divided, it becomes a practical necessity to honor the Constitutional principles of keeping religion separate from State interests.

**Use of Force**

14. *Is killing ever justified?*

Not unless specifically directed by God.
15. Is war ever justified?
See answer to question 14.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
No.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
Yes.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
Violence is never justified. The “rod” of authority God grants parents to discipline their children may at times require a limited degree of force (e.g., spanking, — never beating), but often it does not. (Proverbs 13:24) Parents should correct their children lovingly, never in anger. — Ephesians 6:4.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
No.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
In principle the answer is no, but we realize that many factors must be considered, such as the emotional and mental state of the individual. However, if a person with a terminal illness rejects extreme measures to keep alive and allows death to take its natural course, we do not view this as suicide. To ensure that a person’s wishes in this regard are respected, he or she may wish to complete a Durable Power of Attorney.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
Only when there is no alternative to giving one’s life in obedience to the law of God. One should not purposely make himself a martyr.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
Question too broad — needs clarification, although see answer to question 24.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?
In accord with Biblical injunctions at Matthew 22:21 and Romans 13:1-4, we leave it to the State to decide what punishment is administered for crimes committed. However, the bible does not prohibit it from taking the life of one who willfully and maliciously murders another.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
None. However, it is recognized in a medical setting that at times saving the life of the mother will result in the death of the child.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
This is a personal decision when there is good reason for doing so.
26. Are there any rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?

Extremes in dress and grooming, such as tattoos, are discouraged. The bible advises “well-arranged dress, with modesty and soundness of mind.” (1 Timothy 2:9). As to corrective surgery, much depends upon the situation. This may be advisable under certain circumstances.

27. Are transfusions allowed?

The bible commands that Christians should ‘abstain from blood.’ (Acts 15:28,29) On this basis, Jehovah’s Witnesses do not accept transfusions of whole blood or the four major components: red cells, white cells, platelets, or whole plasma. However, some feel that they can conscientiously accept minor fractions of the major components.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?

See answer to question 20.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?

See answer to question 20.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?

See answer to question 20.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?

This would be a decision for the parents to make after taking into consideration the recommendations of physicians who have carefully studied the case. It would be expected that consideration be given first to saving both babies, but if that it is not possible and there is a good chance that surgical separation will save the life of one, the parents may see no reasonable alternative to their approving the procedure that results in the other baby losing its life.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?

Much would depend upon the situation. The field of genetic engineering is evolving. While some procedures might be acceptable, others may run counter to Bible principles.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?

No. The universe and man are creations of God.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?

Our publications often discuss the environment and its problems and encourage consideration for it; however, we do not take part in environmental activism.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?

No, although we do not condone their abuse.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?

We believe that mankind is living in what the Bible calls “the last day,” although we do not know specifically when the end of this period will come. (2 Timothy 3:1-5; Matthew 24: 32-36) The Bible promises that the earth will then be restored to a paradise, as in the beginning; Jesus told the thief impaled next to him: “you will be with me in paradise.” — Luke 23:43; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-4.
Behavior

37. *Is sex outside marriage permissible?*
   No.

38. *Is sex only for procreation?*
   It is also for pleasure. — Proverbs 5:18-20

39. *Is masturbation allowed?*
   It is an unclean habit that is discouraged.

40. *Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?*
   Yes, if by “sex” intercourse is meant.

41. *Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?*
   See answer to question 26.

42. *Is transvestism immoral?*
   Yes.

43. *Is homosexuality immoral?*
   Yes, if homosexual activity is meant.

44. *Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?*
   We are neutral in political matters.

45. *Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?*
   We are neutral in political matters.

46. *Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?*
   Yes.

47. *Is divorce acceptable?*
   Not for remarriage except on grounds of marital infidelity. — Matthew 19:5.

48. *Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?*
   Their roles are clearly defined in the Bible. — Ephesians 5:22-33.

49. *Are men and women separate but equal?*
   They are complements and are equal in the eyes of God. — Genesis 2:18; Galatians 3:28.

50. *Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?*
   We are neutral in political matters.

51. *Should prayers be allowed in public schools?*
   We are neutral in political matters.
52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
We are neutral in political matters.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
What one eats is a matter for personal decision.

54. Is gambling allowed?
No.

55. Is smoking allowed?
No.

References:


ATTEMPTING TO REFORM THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, Martin Luther began the Protestant Reformation in Germany in the 16th century.

Lutheranism is the established church in Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden. More Lutherans are found in Germany than anywhere else.

The more than 60 million Lutherans make up nearly half of all Protestants worldwide.

Thomas Prieto Peral  
Pastor, Head Office  
Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Munich, Bavaria  
Germany

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?  
To believe in God and to act as a person justified by faith according to the ethics of Jesus

2. Why be good?  
Because being justified by faith leads automatically to the knowledge of good and evil.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?  
Good behaviour is possible, but not in the full sense of being good as God created mankind originally.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?  
See 3.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?  
Yes: Religious requirements ask for a change of the whole person (called "faith"), morality is only interested in the results of acting.

6. What is the source of ethics?  
See 2.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?  
See 3.
8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
I have to prove both my conscience and the gospel.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
Nobody is "good" in an absolute sense. Everybody has to cope with his bad energies (we call it sins).

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
No.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
Everyone who experiences faith as new life is able to take part in our ethical discussion. In important matters our synods decide.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
There may be other ways of ruling one's life in a good way. We are tolerant.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
A main problem of secular society is that there is no real idea of the spiritual dimension of life. Religion should have credibility in living from their spiritual roots to give orientation for people's lives. Religion must not work for a mono-religious society following their ideas exclusively.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
Only as self-defense.

15. Is war ever justified?
Only as *ultima ratio* with four conditions: 1. Having tried to find a political solution in any possible way; 2. a decision by UN, no national wars at all; 3. Existence of plans of a post-war peace-system are necessary; 4. Civil victims have to be avoided in every case.

6. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
No.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
Yes.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
No.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
No.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
Not justifiable, but in case it happens our church will not reject pastoral care for anyone involved.
21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
Only as a testimony for faith, if it is not actively searched and if it doesn't cause other victims.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
There is no general answer. Problem: who is "innocent" (if at all, only unborn children)? There may be situations, where the killing of a person is necessary (there was for example a discussion within the church in Nazi-Germany about the killing of Hitler), but it never will be "right".

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?
No.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
Only if the life of the mother is in danger.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
Yes, under any circumstances.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
No.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
This is a personal decision. The church offers people a text to sign in advance, where they can decide what should be done in case of painful severe illness.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
To end suffering, yes. But not to end life.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
No.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
Yes.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
Only for health improvement, not for commercial reasons.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
Yes.
34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
There is an ecumenical programme for environmental engagement and a lot of projects in our church.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
No. They are creatures of God with the right for life, but they have no moral conscience.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
We don't predict a concrete date for the end of time. We think, that we have to work for good life here and now and not to wait for the end.

**Behavior**

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
It shouldn't be the rule, but it's no sin.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
No. Sex is also a joyful matter in itself.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
Nobody has forbidden it the last 30 years...

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
No. We don't care about such details of sexual life. This is a private question. The main criterion is: Do both partners agree.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
No.

42. Is transvestism immoral?
It is not the moral standard. But we care for them as people being loved by God.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
See. 42.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?
Yes.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
There is a discussion at the moment in our church. The majority would say: No.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?
Yes.

47. Is divorce acceptable?
If there is no other way to avoid violence and personal tragedy: Yes.
48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
   No.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?
   Yes.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?
   Drugs no. Alcohol yes, if it is used in a responsible way.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?
   Yes (They are allowed in Germany)

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
   Yes (This is the case in Germany)

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
   It is a spiritual concern, not a matter of religious rules.

54. Is gambling allowed?
   No.

55. Is smoking allowed?
   Yes.
METHODIST

METHODISM WAS A TERM FIRST USED BY JOHN WESLEY at Oxford University in 1729 to designate a religious society that emphasized private revelation and religious enthusiasm. Intending to reform the Church of England from within, by the end of the 18th century, Methodism broke completely with the Anglican Church. In the English tradition, it stands between Protestantism and Anglicanism. In America, it is closely aligned with other non-Anglican Protestants.

In the beginning of the 21st century, American Methodists were divided into two main sections, split over the question of homosexuality.

There are about 12 million Methodists worldwide, with approximately 8 million members in the U.S, where it is the third largest religious body.

Beth LaRocca-Pitts
Elder, North Georgia conference of the United Methodist Church
Assistant Professor of Old Testament
Duke Divinity School
Durham, North Carolina
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
   Goodness is based on how one behaves toward God and others. The bible gives us revelation of what God considers good, as well as the example of Jesus Christ on which to model our own behavior.

2. Why be good?
   It is an expression of love for God.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
   Of course.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
   Sure. Some are good without knowing it.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
   Yes. Some religious requirements are not intended to relate to morality. They are for the up-building of the believer, such as the sacraments. We are encouraged to "avail ourselves of the means of grace" which feed us and make us stronger believers, but it is not exactly amoral to neglect them. We neglect them to our own detriment.

6. What is the source of ethics?
   Divine revelation coupled with human interpretation of that revelation over time. This interpretation is partly built on accumulated experience in the world.
7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
   Yes.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
   Wrong is that which destroys life. Right is that which promotes life. Our interpretation of received tradition from revelation has to be coupled with an assessment of how acting on a received tradition, at this point in time, would either heal or destroy, build up or tear down. Right and wrong aren't static concepts. They are situationally conditioned.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
   Because this is the way God made the world and the people in it. Some evil in the world is accidental. It is a by-product of the way the ecosystem works (fires, floods, famine, earthquake, etc.).

   Some evil in the world is caused by human free will to choose the wrong over the right. God made us free. We sometimes choose wrongly. Our freedom makes us vulnerable to our own limitations and weaknesses.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
    Sure. According to my religion it is a sin to let the hungry and naked remain so. There's no law against that in secular society.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
    Each individual. We have no hierarchical arbiter of ethical behavior. Ministers are judged by ecclesiastical courts, but there is no such sanction anymore for lay people. There once was, but there hasn't been for about 100 years. It used to be a pastor could bar one from communion based on information concerning sinful behavior. But this is no longer true.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
    No.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
    Religion should be a force for good. It should promote peace and cooperation. It should build up tolerance and trust between people. It should heal and bring life and hope to those who have despaired.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
    Sadly, yes. In cases of self-defense, or in defense of another.

15. Is war ever justified?
    Rarely. Again, in defense of the innocent.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
    No.
17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
Certainly.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
Without a definition of "force" I can't answer. Physical restraint of children with certain medical conditions may not only be justifiable, but warranted for their safety. If that is "force" then yes. Personally, I don't believe in physical punishment of children, but not all Methodists would agree with me.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
Again, you must define "force." It is possible for a spouse to need medical treatment to which they are resistant and into which they must be coerced or compelled. If that is force, then I would say yes.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
Rarely. All other avenues of release from pain must be attempted.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. It is acceptable to lay down your life to save another-not needlessly, but if it is necessary. It is also acceptable to be killed for one's beliefs rather than recant them.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
Rarely. One example would be a case in which an innocent person is unknowingly killing another (because of diminished capacity, etc.) and cannot be prevented from doing so by any other means. All other means should be exhausted to stop the loss of life of either party. Also, one must choose which innocent life to attempt to save, the one killing or the one being killed.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?
No, but those who are pathologically incapable of being rehabilitated need to be permanently incarcerated.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
Our official statement is "We recognize the tragic conflicts of life with life that in some cases may justify abortion." But I think there is only one reason to allow abortion, although others may take a more liberal view than I do. I think the only ethical reason is to save the life of the mother, especially in cases in which the child would not survive delivery at any rate either. If the child would survive delivery, the mother may choose to sacrifice her life for the child, but she should not be forced to do so.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
They are allowable.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
No.
27. Are transfusions allowed?
   Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
   The will of the sick person, where previously stated, should be followed. Where there is
   no express will of the person known, one should err on the side of prolonging life, unless the
   person is in obvious pain and no release from pain can be effected.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
   Yes, but only after all medical means to end suffering have been attempted.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
   Yes, but only in extreme and rare cases where medical treatment cannot end suffering.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them
    but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one
    acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
    Yes. It is better to save one of them than to lose both.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
   It depends on what type your are speaking of. Gene therapy to prevent or cure illness is
   acceptable. Tampering to attempt to increase abilities or redesign the human species is not.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
   Sure.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
   Yes. We were placed on the earth to be its caretakers, not its consumers.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
   I'm not sure I know what you mean by "moral standing." It's wrong to be cruel to them,
   but they don't have an immortal soul (that I know of!). As carnivorous animals we eat other
   animals, but if they are killed in a humane way that is acceptable.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the
    world be like for humans?
   At some undetermined point in the future Christ will return to restore the earth and
   establish the Kingdom of God. Evil will be destroyed and God's reign established.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
   Not officially. Our official standards for ordained ministers is "celibacy in singleness and
   fidelity in marriage." Since we don't allow same-sex couples to be married, same-sex partners
   who are faithful to each other currently, nonetheless, stand outside the church's sanction if
   sexually active.
38. *Is sex only for procreation?*
No. It is a gift of God for humans to enjoy.

39. *Is masturbation allowed?*
Yes.

40. *Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?*
No.

41. *Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?*
No.

42. *Is transvestism immoral?*
No.

43. *Is homosexuality immoral?*
I don't think so, but my church considers homosexuality "incompatible with Christian teaching." I think that we are ethically inconsistent on this point because we do not, for instance, have prohibitions against specific sex acts practiced by married heterosexuals.

44. *Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?*
Yes.

45. *Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?*
Yes. I think they should be recognized by the Church too.

46. *Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?*
Currently, yes, but it was not always so.

47. *Is divorce acceptable?*
Yes, but it is not encouraged. It's a destructive thing, especially for children.

48. *Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?*
No.

49. *Are men and women separate but equal?*
We are equal and different, but hopefully, not separate.

50. *Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?*
No. Many in my church, including myself, use alcohol in moderation, but even that level of alcohol use is against the teachings of our church. Alcoholism is a dangerous and pervasive disease and our policy against any use of alcoholism is an attempt to be a support and a witness to those hurt by it.

51. *Should prayers be allowed in public schools?*
No. The separation of Church and State protects the church from potential state sponsored repression.
52. *Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?*
   No.

53. *Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?*
   Yes. One should strive for health as a form of stewardship.

54. *Is gambling allowed?*
   No.

55. *Is smoking allowed?*
   No.
PENTECOSTAL

THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT, WITH ITS EMPHASIS THE INERRANCY OF THE BIBLE and speaking in tongues, began in 1901 in Kansas. In 1916, a group withdrew from the Assemblies of God over doctrinal issues and later became the United Pentecostal Church International, as a result of the merger of the Pentecostal Church and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ in 1945.

There are more than 100 million Pentecostals worldwide. About two and half million are associated with UPCI worldwide, with nearly two million found in the U.S.

David K. Bernard
Pastor, New Life United Pentecostal Church
Austin, Texas
President, Urshan Graduate School of Theology
St. Louis, Missouri
USA

NOTE:
In many cases, the UPCI has taken no official position, although there is usually a general consensus. So I would have to qualify the answers by saying they are my personal views, although I deem them to be in the mainstream of UPCI thought.

DKB

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?

In general, a good person is one who makes right moral and ethical choices. In a theological sense, no one is totally good but God; thus, humans must receive goodness from God. We can be counted as good or righteous (justified) and actually made good or righteous (sanctified) only by God’s work in us.

We receive His work by grace through faith, which results in repentance from sin, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). This biblical experience of salvation produces the fruit of good moral and ethical choices.

2. Why be good?

The first reason is to please God, for He created us. The second reason is to have the best possible society. The third reason is because being good is the best life for us, with the best consequences both now and in the life to come.
3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?

It is possible to be good in the sense of making right moral choices without belonging to our church. It is also possible to be good in the sense of justification and sanctification by God without belonging to our church. However, in the latter case, while membership in our organization is not essential, the biblical experience of salvation is necessary.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion; i.e., can an apostate be a good person?

It is possible for a person to be good in the sense of making many moral choices even after leaving our church. However, if a person has experienced the saving grace of God and then turns away from it, then he or she has made a wrong choice and is not good in the sight of God.

It is possible for someone to leave our organization, still maintain a right relationship with God, and be good in God’s sight, but if the person turns away from his or her saving relationship with God, he or she is no longer good.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?

There is some difference, but the two are very close. In the major issues of life, the requirements of true religion (that is, a right relationship with God) and the requirements of morality will be the same. Moreover, true religion will never require us to do something immoral.

However, there are some examples in which a failure to fulfill a religious requirement is not inherently immoral. For instance, faithful church attendance is our religious duty, but failure to attend a particular service is not inherently immoral.

6. What is the source of ethics?

The source of ethics is God. The Bible, which is the Word of God, teaches us the principles of ethics.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?

Yes, in the sense of making many right choices regarding moral issues. No, in the sense of being in right relationship with God and experiencing God's work of justification and sanctification.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?

We decide what is right and what is wrong by studying the Bible, which is the Word of God. For assistance in applying its teachings to our lives in a practical way, we look to spiritual leaders, such as pastors and teachers, and we seek to develop a personal sensitivity to God. In this context, the individual conscience is an important means of discerning right from wrong.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?

Bad things happen to good people because we live in a sinful world and are members of a fallen race. Some bad things happen because of our own wrong choices, some bad things happen because of the wrong choices of others, and some bad things happen simply because the world is chaotic, disorderly, and under the curse of sin.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?

Yes. While there is a very close connection between the requirements of true religion and morality, as explained in answer to question 5, there can be a difference between what true religion requires and what society requires. For example, it is a sin to lie, but in most cases it is
not a crime to lie. Under certain circumstances, however, a lie can be a secular offense also, as in the case of perjury or fraud.

11. **Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?**

Ultimately, God is the one who will uphold morality at the last judgment. He is also the one who teaches morality through His Word, His Spirit, and His impressions upon the conscience. He does not force anyone to do what is right, but He gives each person a choice. Our church organization is governed and guided by articles of faith, bylaws, and position papers adopted by the general conference of ministers. On a local level, pastors make practical applications of the teaching of Scripture in their own context.

12. **Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?**

Yes, but they should not be forced on people. Moral rules should be legislated by society when there is a clear harm to society, such as in the case of theft or murder. Other moral teachings must be left to the individual conscience, such as lying or blasphemy.

13. **What role should religion play in secular society?**

Religion should be a voice of conscience in secular society by promoting moral values and seeking to change human hearts.

---

**Use of Force**

14. **Is killing ever justified?**

The New Testament calls individual Christians to peace, and in this sense it is never justifiable for a Christian to deliberately take human life. In cases of individual self-defense, we encourage believers first of all to trust in divine protection and second to use the minimum force necessary to preserve life without deliberately seeking to take life.

We recognize that secular society has a God-given role to preserve life and safety, and thus there are certain circumstances in which society has the authority to take human life, such as just war, defense of innocent human life, and capital punishment.

15. **Is war ever justified?**

From the New Testament perspective, war is never the right answer to human problems but is always a manifestation of human sinfulness. However, we recognize that secular society has a right to defend itself against aggression.

16. **Is violence against innocent people justifiable?**

No.

17. **Can someone be a conscientious objector?**

Yes. We encourage and support people in this choice, and our articles of faith include a statement of support for this position.

18. **Is force justifiable against children?**

Harmful force against children is not justifiable. Corporal discipline of children is permissible for the sake of instruction when performed in a manner that does not harm them.

19. **Is force justifiable against a spouse?**

No.
20. Is suicide ever justifiable?  
No.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?  
To the extent that it is forced upon someone; to the extent that the only alternative is to renounce one's faith in God.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?  
No.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?  
As Christians, we offer mercy and the opportunity for repentance, but we recognize that the state has the right to impose capital punishment for heinous murders.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?  
Abortion is not allowable, since it is the taking of innocent human life. If a woman will lose her life because of her pregnancy, a choice can be made to take the baby prematurely with the goal of preserving both lives if possible.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?  
Yes. Autopsies are allowable for medical and forensic reasons.

26. Are there rules about body modification, e.g., tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?  
Yes. We do not approve of marking or altering the body for personal adornment or enhancement. However, we do not oppose amputations for medical reasons or reconstructive cosmetic surgery to restore the natural appearance in case of genetic abnormality, injury, or disease.

27. Are transfusions allowed?  
Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?  
Yes, if there is a significant chance of survival or recovery. If not, a choice can be made not to use extraordinary means.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?  
No, not by active steps to hasten death, but they may refuse to use extraordinary means of prolonging life.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?  
No.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?  
We are not in favor of deliberately taking innocent human life. The case just described could be perhaps be re-characterized as conducting an operation with the goal of saving at least
one life and, if possible, both lives, rather than deliberately seeking to end one life. If so, we would leave this decision to the conscientious choice of parents and doctors, admonishing them to trust God and to believe in the possibility of a miracle.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
Yes, if the purpose is to cure disease. No, if the purpose is to select a child’s characteristics or to modify human nature.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
Not when it involves atheism or a denial of creation by God as taught in Genesis. Microevolution, or adaptation within relatively narrow genetic limits, is compatible. While we generally oppose the modern theory of evolution as the proper explanation for human life, we recognize that someone can believe in theistic evolution and still have a saving relationship with God.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Yes. We are stewards of God’s creation and as such should act responsibly to preserve our environment.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
Yes. We are to treat animals humanely as part of God’s creation and part of our stewardship under God. It is permissible to own pets, to hunt, and to raise animals for food and clothing.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
Yes. After a time of great tribulation, Jesus Christ will return to earth and establish a kingdom of peace for a thousand years. After this period, the last judgment will take place, followed by the creation of a new heaven and a new earth and the beginning of eternity.

No one knows when Jesus Christ will come, but there are many indications that He will come soon—first to take away His church and then to establish His kingdom on earth.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
No.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
No. It is also a gift of God for the mutual enjoyment of husband and wife to strengthen the marriage relationship.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
The Bible does not specifically address this issue, but it teaches that it is wrong to entertain sexual lust, i.e., to fantasize about a sexual relationship outside marriage. Moreover, the Bible teaches that the purpose of sex is to benefit the relationship between husband and wife. These teaching indicate that lustful or habitual masturbation is not God’s will.
40. *Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?*

The Bible does not specifically address this issue, but it teaches that the sexual relationship is a private matter between husband and wife. At the same time, it also indicates that no one should engage in unclean or unnatural sexual behavior (such as behavior patterned after homosexuality), that no one should violate his or her own conscience in this matter, and that no one should ask a spouse to violate his or her own conscience in this matter.

41. *Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?*

Yes. The Bible teaches that we should wear modest clothing, that men and women should be distinct in their dress, that men should cut their hair short, and that women should wear their hair long.

42. *Is transvestism immoral?*

Yes.

43. *Is homosexuality immoral?*

Yes.

44. *Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?*

Yes, they should have the same personal rights as anyone else except when they engage in criminal behavior.

45. *Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?*

No.

46. *Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at a time?*

Yes.

47. *Is divorce acceptable?*

No, except in cases of marital infidelity. We also recognize that no one should be forced to remain in a home where the person or the person’s child is subjected to physical abuse.

48. *Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?*

Yes; they have distinct roles in the family.

49. *Are men and women separate but equal?*

Yes. They are separate in that the roles of husband and wife are distinct, as are the roles of father and mother. Both sexes have equal value before God, in society, and in the church.

50. *Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?*

No.

51. *Should prayers be allowed in public schools?*

Yes, in the case of voluntary prayer but not a sectarian prayer dictated by the state.

52. *Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?*

Yes, for the purpose of general education, but the state should not regulate or endorse religious content.
53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
No, except that we follow the teaching of the New Testament not to eat blood and not to knowingly eat food offered to idols.

54. Is gambling allowed?
No.

55. Is smoking allowed?
No.
PRESBYTERIAN

PRESBYTERIANISM AROSE OUT OF THE CALVANIST REFORMATION in the late 16th century and took root first in Scotland under the direction of John Knox. In Europe, Calvinist churches became the Reformed churches. Now there are over 120 independent Presbyterian Churches united in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

There are about 40 million Presbyterians worldwide, with 3.5 million adherents in America.

E. M. Myers
Pastor, The Presbyterian Church in Garden City
Garden City, New York
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
   Presbyterian theology states only God is good. Any goodness that we possess is only from God.

2. Why be good?
   This is the wrong question for Presbyterians. The question is, “Why be faithful?” One is to be faithful because mortals have been created to praise God and serve others.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
   Presbyterians believe we are all “sinful and unclean,” whether we are religious or not. To speak of goodness is, for Presbyterians, to be engaged in self-righteous arrogance.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
   Since goodness only comes from God, no one can be “good” without God.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
   Some religious requirements have nothing to do with God or morality; they are simply practical.

6. What is the source of ethics?
   God is the source of everything.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
   Someone can be moral and be an atheist.
8. *How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?*
   Spiritual discernment (none of this “let your conscience be your guide” thinking). This is a process of decision making arrived at by asking, “What does God want me to do? How does God want me to act?”

9. *Why do bad things happen to good people?*
   Bad things happen to everyone. “The rain falls on both the just and the unjust.”

10. *Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?*
   For Presbyterians, the only “religious offence” is against the Holy Spirit i.e. God. All other offenses are moral/secular.

11. *Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?*
    The elders of the church, i.e. those ordained both lay and clergy.

12. *Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?*
    Yes.

13. *What role should religion play in secular society?*
    The role of a prophet — in the biblical understanding of that term i.e. a prophet proclaims divine truth to power.

**Use of Force**

14. *Is killing ever justified?*
    The Presbyterian Church believes that during wartime, “killing” may be justified.

15. *Is war ever justified?*
    The Presbyterian Church, while promoting world disarmament, does believe some wars “justified.”

16. *Is violence against innocent people justifiable?*
    Never.

17. *Can someone be a conscientious objector?*
    Yes, and the church supports such a decision.

18. *Is force justifiable against children?*
    Never.

19. *Is force justifiable against a spouse?*
    Never.

20. *Is suicide ever justifiable?*
    The word used in Presbyterian policy statements is “euthanasia.” I quote: “Euthanasia is unscriptural and contrary to the Law of God.”
21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable? Martyrdom for a just cause is commendable. The church was built on the blood of martyrs.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another? Sounds like “A Tale of Two Cities.” This is a situation ethics question. The Presbyterian Church would be opposed to the death of any innocent individual. (However, see answer to question #34.)

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses? Presbyterians oppose the death penalty — for anyone.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable? While abortions and the rights of women to make their own reproductive choices are acceptable, “the ending of a pregnancy after a point of fetal viability is a matter of grave moral concern . . . and may be undertaken only in the rarest of circumstances when necessary to save the life of the woman, to preserve the woman’s health in circumstances of a serious risk . . . to avoid fetal suffering as a result of untreatable life-threatening medical anomalies, or in cases of incest or rape.”


26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations? No.

27. Are transfusions allowed? Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life? Presbyterians affirm the right of individuals to stipulate that technology shall not be used to prolong biological functions when there is no medical hope of restoration to a meaningful existence.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering? Appropriate measures (e.g. hospice) should be undertaken in the treatment of terminal illness.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death? No.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other? Yes.
32. Is genetic engineering permissible?  
No.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?  
Evolution that states God is the creator is acceptable.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?  
Yes.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?  
Yes.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?  
No; only God knows when it is all over.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?  
No.

38. Is sex only for procreation?  
No.

39. Is masturbation allowed?  
Yes.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?  
Yes.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?  
No.

42. Is transvestism immoral?  
Yes.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?  
Yes.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?  
Yes.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?  
No.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?  
Yes.
47. Is divorce acceptable? Yes.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue? Yes.

49. Are men and women separate but equal? Yes.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable? Alcohol, yes, if responsibly used. Drugs, not acceptable.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools? No.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs? No.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern? No.

54. Is gambling allowed? No.

55. Is smoking allowed? Presbyterians are urged “to refrain” from using tobacco.

References
The Book of Confessions, PCUSA
Book of Order, PCUSA
Presbyterian Social Witness Policy Compilation
THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH TRACES ITS ROOTS TO PETER, the leader of the apostles of Jesus, whose see was in Rome.

In 1870, the Vatican Council affirmed that when the Pope speak in his office as spiritual head of the Church with the intent of defining doctrine in regard to faith and morals, these decrees are divinely guaranteed against error and are final.

Half of all Christians are Roman Catholics. With over a billion followers, there are more Catholics than members of any other religion in the world.

Ralph Gallagher
Priest, Redemptorist Congregation
Ireland
Invited Professor of Moral Theology
Alphonsian Academy
Rome
Italy

**General.**

1. *What does it mean to be a good person?*
   To be a good person means trying to live in friendship with God and other people because this is the road that leads to happiness.

2. *Why be good?*
   A person should strive to be good because it is the basis on which they can reach their full potential as humans.

3. *Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?*
   Of course it is, as is obvious from the observance of life in general.

4. *Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion, i.e. can an apostate be a good person?*
   Apostasy is the total rejection of the Christian (not just Roman Catholic) faith. Such a decision has to be made with full knowledge, deliberation and persistence to be considered apostasy. Since it is possible to be morally good without being religious, apostasy is therefore to be judged as a denial of faith that does not, necessarily, lead to a denial of morality.

5. *Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?*
   Yes, because religion requires a belief in the Transcendent. One can be moral without this sort of belief, though belief helps one to be moral.
6. What is the source of ethics?
It is more accurate to speak of sources, which are mainly three: Sacred Scripture, the Tradition of the Church, and a consideration of the nature of the human person as the subject of free choice.

7. Can someone be a good person and an atheist?
Not everyone who claims to be an atheist has necessarily rejected all meaning to life. They may have rejected some particular understanding of the mystery of God. It is possible, therefore, that an atheist could be a morally good person.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
By following a properly informed and maturely developed conscience.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
We do not know the total answer to this mystery, but one element should be stressed. Because of original sin, personal sin and the social sin of unjust structures, many good people are maltreated by others, on a personal and social level. They are the innocent victims of human injustice.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
Because the virtue of religion is not the same as the virtue of morality, there is a difference since the offences are against differing objects.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
In the internal forum, nothing replaces the role of a personal conscience. In the external forum, moral rules are enforced by the Bishops, in communion with and under the primacy of Pope as the Successor of St. Peter.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
Obviously not, since we do not claim moral authority over those who do not belong to our Church.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
It should encourage an interest in politics and participation in current debates so that public life would be seen more in terms of a commonwealth of justice, charity and peace. The role of religion is to raise the questions of values, rights and the solidarity of people when those with public power ignore these.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
Killing with intent is never justified since it is against the Fifth Commandment: "Thou shalt not kill".

15. Is war ever justified?
With increasing rarity. In some limited circumstances of last resort war may be considered as a potential final option to right a grave injustice. All other peaceful options should first be fully explored, and no stone towards a pacific solution should be left unturned.
16. Is violence against innocent people ever justified?
   It is wrong in principle to hurt a person who, because innocent, is morally blameless in the situation.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
   Yes, and they should be encouraged to be so in societies dominated by the abuse of power.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
   No. Because of their innocence, children have the right to maximum protection and force against them is a violation of that innate innocence.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
   Because marriage is a community of life and love, the use of force goes against the nature of matrimony.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
   No. Life is a gift from God, and only God can reclaim the gift. However, because of the complex motivation that may lead a person to this drastic step, human moral judgment on the culpability of a person who has committed suicide should be reserved and discreet.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
   Martyrdom, understood as the supreme testimony to a central truth of the Christian Faith, is acceptable if it is undergone with the pure motivation of giving witness to the power of the Resurrection.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
   This is not allowed. The end that is wished for is indeed a good one, but the means chosen to achieve this end is wrong in itself since an innocent person has a sacred right to life.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offences?
   Capital punishment is to be avoided because it is both ineffective as a deterrent punishment and goes against the sanctity of all human life, from conception to natural death. While society has the right to be protected against unjust aggressors, this right should be safeguarded by bloodless measures.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
   Understood as the direct intentional killing of a person already conceived, abortion is never allowed.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
   Autopsies are morally permissible for legal inquests and for legitimate scientific research.
26. Are there rules about body modification, e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
Tattoos are allowable provided the limits of decency and good taste are observed. Cosmetic surgery is permissible, though it should not be done simply for vanity and, if expensive, consideration should be given to whether this is the most appropriate way to dispose of one's money. Amputations are allowable only for explicitly therapeutic medical reasons.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
They are, and could even be obligatory in some cases.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
One is obliged only to use ordinary means to prolong life. Life is to be cherished with ordinary human care from the moment of conception to that of natural death. To go beyond ordinary means is not morally required.

29. Should family and/or friends have the right to end suffering?
They do not have such a right. They have a duty to see that suffering is relieved for their loved one, but this never extends to ending suffering in the sense of terminating a person's natural life.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten natural death?
The moment of natural death is a decision in the hands of God. No one, whether the person themselves, medical assistants, or the State, can pre-empt that moment.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
Allowing one of the twins to die in such a situation is acceptable, because the intention of the operation is to save one life when, without the operation, no life will be saved. The unfortunate death of the second twin is the foreseen indirect consequence of an action to save life.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
Given the uncertainty of the present state of scientific research in this area, such engineering is not allowed.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
It is. The creation account of the Bible and the scientific explanation offered by evolution are answers to different question. Evolutionist science is interested in the origin and nature of the world we have: the Catholic religion is interested in the question of why there is a world of any kind and what is its final destiny.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Very much so. Respect for the integrity of creation is morally obligatory since animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are destined for the common good of present and future generations.
35. Do animals have any moral standing?
They do, though it is important not to confuse this with the moral standing of humans. Animals are God's creatures: by just existing they give glory to the goodness of creation. In this sense they have a moral standing, being an integral part of a universe that has a moral purpose.

36. Does your religion predict the end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
The world will certainly end, in the sense of being totally transformed into the Kingdom of God. When and how that will happen is not a human decision: it belongs to the realm of God. One presumes that the transformed world will be a Kingdom of peace, love and harmony.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
Because marriage symbolizes Christ's undivided love for the Church, sex outside marriage is considered contrary to that sacred covenant of love and is not permitted.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
In creating humans as sexual beings, God had a double purpose: to alleviate the loneliness of human existence, and to provide for the propagation of the species. Sex, therefore, cannot be limited to the single purpose of procreation.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
Masturbation, as an action, is not allowed. In assessing the moral weight of the action, sensitive attention should be given to questions such as acquired habit and psychological or other anxieties. These factors can lessen and extenuate the moral culpability involved.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
Presuming that we are talking of sex within marriage, the expression of sex should be left to the married couple. Sexuality cannot be reduced to genital sex, just as sex cannot be reduced to procreation. Any other expressions of sex that a married couple engage in should always be free from manipulation, violence or forced consent. Sex in such circumstances would be immoral.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyle?
Modesty is the virtue that dictates codes in these matters. Different cultures allow for varied expressions in dress and hairstyle. One should never offend the culture of another people by immodest dressing or inappropriate hairstyle, and our modesty in these areas is always to be balanced by the desire to avoid giving scandal to others.

42. Is transvestism immoral?
Because one should respect the consequences of having a defined sexual gender, one should dress only in ways appropriate to that gender. Thus transvestism is wrong.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
Homosexuality as the description of a person's sexual orientation is a statement of fact and is no more subject to a moral judgment than heterosexuality. Homosexuality as the description of sexual activity between persons of the same sex is officially regarded by the Catholic Church as intrinsically disordered.
44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?

As legal rights are constituted by a power higher than any single individual, the fact that a person engages in immoral behavior does not take away that right. Where applicable, the law should be applied to the resolution of immoral behavior, but always respecting the higher forum of law in itself and keeping in mind the common good of society.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the State?

Marriage refers to the union between people of opposite sex, so a gay marriage is a contradiction of the term 'marriage'. The State cannot recognize what cannot exist.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at the one time?

Marital fidelity implies faithfulness to one partner, so another spouse (or spouses) is logically excluded.

47. Is divorce acceptable?

While recognizing that divorce is a fact of life in most societies, it is not acceptable as a moral ideal because it contradicts the indissolubility that is at the core of Christian marriage.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?

As culture and society changes, the roles played by men and women inevitably change. These roles have a moral dimension at two levels: in respect of the individual natures of men and women, and in respect of the cohesion necessary for the common good of a society.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?

That men and women are equal in dignity is guaranteed by their being, both, created in the Image of God. They are separate in that they have a different gender, but being separate should be seen in terms of complementarities rather than division.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?

Drugs are acceptable only under properly authorized medical supervision. Alcohol is allowed, particularly if it a bonding between friends, but its abuse is immoral. Alcohol can be abused through excess, drunkenness or the misuse of money needed for more worthy purposes.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?

Speaking in general, yes. Prayers in public schools should not be used to enforce one religion on another person against their choice, nor should the use of prayers in schools be seen as a political matter only since the role of the Church is primarily to evangelize.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?

There is no fixed doctrine on this point. If religious schools or programs are subsidized it should be because of their public service. The Church should not accept such subsidies if it lessens the freedom necessary for the primary task of evangelization.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?

Religious and moral concerns arise from the way we eat food, not from the nature of the food itself. Gluttony and overeating are immoral.
54. Is gambling allowed?
In itself, gambling is allowed. It becomes morally unacceptable when it deprives someone of what is necessary for their own or others' needs. It is also necessary to point out that gambling can easily risk becoming a type of enslavement and even an obsession.

55. Is smoking allowed?
Moderate smoking is tolerated though the addictive quality of smoking makes it difficult to remain moderate and restrained. Because of the undeniable health risks, people should be encouraged not to smoke because it actively injures themselves and provides a passive hazard to others.

NOTE
Many of these questions have been treated at length in official documents of the Roman Catholic Church. For more comprehensive answers the reader could consult the following: *Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (General Editor, A. Flannery: Dublin 1977), *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City, 1997), *The Code of Canon Law* (Vatican City, 1983) and *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (General Editor, J. Dupuis: New York, 1996).
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS ADOPTED THEIR NAME IN 1861. It is an evangelical group founded in America in expectation of the imminent return of Jesus Christ.

About 1 million Americans are SDA’s. This represents only one-tenth of their total worldwide membership.

Sednak Yankson
Pastor, Canarsie Seventh-Day Adventist Church
Brooklyn, New York
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
To have a connection with God who alone is good and to produce fruits of righteousness. This is spelt out in Mica 6:8, “He hath shewed thee, O man, what [is] good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”
It simply is to be a Just Person.

2. Why be good?
In order to exhibit the characteristics of God. To represent God. The human heart yearns for the good, which he lost when Adam fell. We lost something that we once had before, which is the character of God.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion?
There is a desire in all to be good, but those who are sensitive to God; God is able to make them good.
One can be good according to the world, but not be saved.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
Apostate is one who has left The Faith and cannot be a good person, because he has denounced God; the very source of goodness.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
Religion mostly leads upwards but morality is mostly horizontal, dealing with person to person.

6. What is the source of ethics?
The source of Christian ethics is Divine, from God.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
A person who denies the source of goodness cannot himself be good, because he lacks the connection to receive it from God who alone is good.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?  
The 10 Commandments and the standard of Jesus.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?  
The sinful environment affects us all and there is no distinction. Bad things happen to all.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offense and a moral/ secular offense?  
Yes, religious offense is done against the principles of God. Secular offense is against governments or societies.

11. Who enforces the moral rules?  
God through the Church.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?  
No.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?  
Moral conscience.

14. Is killing ever justified?  
Our stand is not to kill. There can be justification before the state but not before God.

15. Is war ever justified?  
No, our ethics is based on Christian principles. War is not justified. Christ said turn the other cheek and trust in God.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?  
No.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?  
Yes, The Seventh-day Adventists are conscientious objectors.

18. Is force justifiable against children?  
No.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?  
No.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?  
No.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?  
Of dying for the Truth or standing for Jesus.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person to save the life of another?  
No.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offense?
Capital punishment disguises as justice but it also is incomplete justice.

It appears as if capital punishment achieves the balance real justice must achieve. You take life we take your life. This is a negative balance but true justice seeks to achieve a positive balance. The question of justice seeks to address not only the fate of the one who takes the life but most importantly the One whose life was taken.

To achieve justice for all, his life must be restored while the offender’s life must be reformed or transformed but no one must be left to remain in the same condition. It is incomplete justice to address the offender and to leave the victim in the same situation. But who can change the situation of the dead victim and bring him justice?

I admit such justice cannot come about by imperfect human systems or inadequate human capabilities. But justice delayed is not justice denied in a world that moves toward justice.

True justice must not all be negative, true justice must seek to create positive balance. Whereas it must seek to discipline the offender and cause him to change his ways so the offense should not occur again, true justice also must first and foremost seek to restore what the offender robed from the victim. The goal of justice is to restore the victim even beyond where he was before the offense was done to him, to where he could have been if he was left alone.

That’s why you can’t take life because you can’t make life or give life. Only God can do that. Only God can give and take life – He alone can bring about true justice, to restore all the innocent lives we have lost and punish the wickedness of men. That’s when there will be a real sense of true justice - until then justice delays – but justice delayed is not justice denied.

True justice is two pronged: it demands the reformation of the perpetrator and the restoration of the victim

Both the evildoer and the evil receiver need justice; one must be changed and the other must be restored so that evil will not be perpetuated. And justice is that great equalizer, the principle that restores equilibrium in the universe so that the world can move along in peace.

24. Under what circumstance, if any, is abortion allowable?
Abortion is never allowable.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstance?
Yes. To find the cause of death in order to convict a murderer and to stop a plague.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic, surgery, and amputations?
Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. We are not our own, for we are bought with a price. So we are told, Whatever we do, we should do so for the glory of God.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
Yes as the last resort.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
Life that is surrendered to Christ should not artificially be prolonged.
29. **Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?**
Decisions about death must be left to God the author of life.

30. **Does anyone have the right to hasten death?**
No.

31. **In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?**
Yes. By trying to save both lives if one dies in the process, it’s okay.

32. **Is genetic engineering permissible?**
We need to better understand the concept to make a sound judgment about it.

33. **Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?**
No.

34. **Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?**
Yes. Man is to have dominion over the earth.

35. **Do animals have any moral standing?**
Yes. Since God made them and God cares for the little sparrow there is morality about how we treat them. Misuse of them is sinful. Man is made the steward of God’s creation.

36. **Does your religion predict an end time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?**
Christ states no one knows the day or the hour? But it will be times of selfishness, evil will be rampant, spirituality will be bankrupt. It will be like in the days of Noah before the flood.

37. **Is sex outside marriage permissible?**
No. It’s sinful.

38. **Is sex only for procreation?**
No.

39. **Is masturbation allowed?**
Any sexual acts outside of marriage are sinful. Inside of marriage temperance should be observed.

40. **Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?**
Personal decision on relationship with God.

41. **Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?**
Yes, a conservative look, not flashy, or trendy, but dressed in modest apparel that which does not draw attention.

42. **Is transvestism immoral?**
Yes, according to the bible men should not appear as women (vice versa)

43. **Is homosexuality immoral?**
Yes, Jesus said men to take unto themselves wives.
44. **Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?**
   It is not our right to judge.

45. **Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?**
   Union could be by state law, but not marriage. Legitimate marriage according to the Bible is lawful between man and woman.

46. **Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at a time?**
   It is not ideal Biblically, but not immoral.

47. **Is divorce acceptable?**
   No, according to the bible, with one exception, that is fornication.

48. **Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?**
   Yes.

49. **Are men and women separate but equal?**
   Yes.

50. **Is the use of drugs and / or alcohol allowable?**
   No.

51. **Should prayers be allowed in public schools?**
   It should not be legislated, but individual conscience be respected.

52. **Should the state subsidize religious schools or program?**
   No, church and state should be separate.

53. **Is the food a person eats a religious and/ or moral concern?**
   Yes, both.

54. **Is gambling allowed?**
   No, our faith should be towards God.

55. **Is smoking allowed?**
   No, our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit.
**CONFUCIANISM**

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you

Confucius

CONFUCIUS (K'UNG FU TZU) WAS BORN IN 551 BCE. During the Han Dynasty Confucianism served as the state religion and in 59 CE all urban schools made sacrifices to Confucius. In the 7th and 8th century, shrines dedicated to Confucius were found throughout the empire and in the 12th century, a number of texts of Confucianism were assembled and recognized as sacred.

About six million people, found mostly in China and Korea, are Confucianists. However, as many as 250 million people are Confucianists in one form or another, as in China it is common to people to follow more than one religious tradition at a time.

Since Confucianism stresses the cultivation of virtue and the development of moral perfection rather than one’s relation to the natural world or to the afterlife, many practice Taosim and Buddhism, with Confucianism laying the framework for social relations. Most significantly, the Confucian approach to social ethics permeates the entire Chinese, Korean and Japanese cultures and continues to do so to this day.

Whalen Lai
Director, Religious Studies,
University of California—Davis
Davis, California
USA

General

1. *What does it mean to be a good person?*
   It is to live up to one’s innate humaneness (jen: the word for the highest good is also the word for “man”).

2. *Why be good?*
   Because as in Aristotle, the virtue of humaneness is man’s excellence, where he excels [over non-humans]; so it is to his own flourishing to be so; and because ultimately that is a gift from Heaven, Heaven being the source of all good.

3. *Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?*
   There are sages (very good people) who are not Confucians. Confucianism is not a religion in the sense that there is anything like a card-carrying Confucian. Rather, it is assumed that any good, humane person would be living up to the same internal “jen” standard, as it is known in China. (See #4 below.)
4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
   The belief in a personal Heaven (with a moral will and thus design for man) is not always a requisite. There have been Confucians who were humane despite their skepticism about a personal Heaven.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
   No. The Chinese term for religion (tsung-chiao) is a recent coinage; it means literally the teaching of a school lineage. Morality is jen-lun (human relationships) but nowadays also rendered as tao-te [as in Tao-te-ching] which means the Way (and its) Virtue.

6. What is the source of ethics?
   Heaven, the Way of Heaven, or simply the Way.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
   Yes, if by theism is meant the belief in spirits. Confucius has been called an agnostic for preferring to serve men instead of spirits; and for being reverent towards them — but keeping them at arm’s length. Because the proper study of man is man.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
   Traditionally by the rites which set down what is the proper and what is the improper behavior.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
   Confucius said in Analects 12:5 “Life and death is allotted; wealth and prestige is due Heaven.” Good people have met with misfortune as a matter of fact.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
    Morally, no. Unless one meant by religious offense certain specific taboos regarding behavior before the spirits. One should not make love before a shrine or in open field [“before heaven and earth”]. That is an ancient taboo — but as rules of decency, still observed. (One does not make love in the Church or in the public square either.)

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
    Within Confucianism, family elders and officials. In popular ghost stories, the gods and the ghosts — but most Confucian scholars would discount such lore.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
    Yes, but of course, non-Chinese (barbarians) need to acquire the civilized ways.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
    Again, “religion” is a modern term. Traditionally, Confucians who accommodate the Buddhist and the Taoist “teachings” would expect them to teach morality. By late dynastic times, an idiom went: “All three teachings (religions) in the end teach one thing: how to do good.” Benevolence Societies [society for doing good together] spread social charities.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
Yes. Heaven mandated that evil kings be deposed.

15. Is war ever justified?
So the Chou ruler raised war and revolted against the last evil king of the Shang dynasty. Confucius is heir to the Chou ideology of a (moral) Mandate of Heaven [granting rightful rule to the virtuous].

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
No. That is not the will of Heaven, deem father to all.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
Sages have opposed war. Two famous sages, Po I and Shu Ch’I, opposed the Chou raising that famous righteous war against the Shang. They later refused the honor granted them by the Chou king--and chose to starve to death. In practice, draft and corvee labor are mandatory for all subjects.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
No, the innocence of the child is presumed. No physical punishment before age two. (The mother for failing to properly coax the child might be reprimanded though.) After school age, especially after age six, caning is the standard. No sparing of the rod there. Literally up to marriage age!

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
Unfortunately it does happen in patriarchal China. It is done under justification of reprimand.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
Unfortunately, yes, when honor or loyalty is involved. Chastity has meant that to avoid a fate worst than death, women have been encouraged to protect their virtue that way.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
For a good cause. Very, very loyal officials would--most notably in rejection of foreign rule under the Mongols and somewhat under the Manchus.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
No such statement from Confucius on what amounts to voluntary manslaughter. Mo-tzu and the Mohists (they opposed Confucianism in the age of philosophers) did — on the basis of sacrificing the lesser for the greater good. There are, however, ritual rules instigating known cases in history: a few have sacrificed their own child to save the child of an elder family member [which I think is a bit too ritual-bound] or to cover up saving a son of a lord [being hunt down by evil enemies].

Mo-tzu opposed Confucius. A consequentialist, Mo-tzu would justify the sacrificing of what we would call an innocent as the lesser good if that would save more lives. [What we might compare now with a hostage situation for this is no easy decision.] Mo-tzu would also count the life of a commoner as being less than that of a lord. So, in war, we too would wager a troop to secure the safety of a general.
Generally, Confucians are not that “utilitarian” in calculating the “benefit” (end-result) of actions. But Confucians are ritualists; they accept as their “duty” the observance of certain priorities. So didactic case stories are told of how a father might sacrifice his own child to save another drowning child because the latter is a son to his elder brother. (I personally don’t think that is very realistic.)

A retainer however would pass off his child as his lord’s child — then being hunted down by the lord’s enemies — in order to save the bloodline of his lord. (Which is a plausible feudal reality. This last case might look like Mo-tzu’s argument, except Mo-tzu would measure the “actual good” a lord can do before saying he is worth more than a commoner.)

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?
Yes. And physical torture too. But the severity of punishment is not what Confucius opted for; he believed in government based on virtue, or moral example, or inspiring others to do good instead of simply coercing people with severe laws to avoid criminal behavior.

The Legalist philosophers were the one who pushed for severe law and they left their stamp on the imperial state. Basic rule like “a life for a life” holds. Death for high crimes. Lese majeste is worst. Collective responsibility meant that death falls on the offender and his whole family, up to nine steps removed. Whole clans can be wiped out that way. Dismemberment and scattering the parts would ensure no peace in the hereafter (no way to mourn and pacify the dead by his descendents).

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
In theory no: all life is sacred. In practice, female infanticide a-plenty for economic reasons. A girl child is a liability.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
Proper burial requires a wholesome body. I don’t think autopsies were performed even in forensic medicine.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos cosmetic surgery or amputations?
Wholesomeness is prized; deformity a curse. Tattoo is a custom among certain coastal people. (Japan is the interesting case: the Imperial Family must be physically intact. The commoner who became now the empress — she is still waiting for a boy child — she cannot marry into the imperial family until proven “whole”: had she pierced her ears in her USA college days, she would not be eligible.) Of course, plastic surgery and abortion now in Japan is a major business. Times change.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
Still tabooed. Chinese do not make good blood donors.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
Yes, yes, yes in religious Taoism. That is the whole purpose, whether it is by outer alchemy (with drugs, exercises etc.) or internal alchemy (via meditation, visualization).
29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
Not a problem before. Modern medicine so unnaturally delays the inevitable and prolongs thereby the pain. I don’t know of any inhibition to such a “right” nowadays.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
Religious suicide and altruistic suicide are possible.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
No such inhibition of choice known to me.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
No such inhibition.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
General evolution based on Change, Yes. Chuang-tzu the Taoist even aired a theory of evolution: about how at death, the human corpse produces maggots that changed and changed so that finally, “from the horse came man.” The idea of Man coming from Apes might not work as well as the idea that Chinese are ultimately descendents of the Dragon though.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
In theory, yes. Nature being sacred, esp. to the Taoists. But the real issue is “public vs. private” concern. A lack of public concern is detrimental to the ecology.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
Yes, they are metaphoric embodiments of virtues. The Chinese Unicorn is the most “humane” of all beings: Confucius’ mother sighted one before giving birth to the Sage. Animals became religious symbols for many things. But actual Chinese treatment of animals is not too different from others. Birds and crickets make better pets than dogs and cats. You just don’t kill your Water Buffalo — the farmer’s best friend and one to allow to die a natural death.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
For Confucians, it goes in Cycles. The combined solar/lunar calendar favors a 60 years cycle [when the almanac can be recycled]. Many peasant rebellions are timed to go with the beginning of that cyclical change.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
No, not for an unfaithful wife. But it is not an issue for males in traditional times. There could be concubines (second and third wives) easily procured from poor families (often time from household maids). Cities also provided pleasure quarters, although these had gone downhill after the Sung. Neo-Confucian moralism inveighed against them.
The issue is less the women but the offspring from such alliances, i.e. how to graft them into the patriarchal lineage. If the alliance is formalized (as concubinage), the offspring are counted (and supervised by the main wife).

Also relevant to question #44. There are no equal rights before the law here.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
No.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
Accepted with less hang-ups compared with the West.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
According to the Bedroom Art (erotic handbooks), that seems to be so.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
Yes. Dress codes change over time. Japanese kept the T’ang dynasty kimono which shows a lot of skin (esp. the erotic nape). Late dynastic China has women hiding all skins except hand and face, in shapeless gowns. Thanks to Neo-Confucian puritanism. (The fear of Mongolian rape of Han women led to driving the female indoors.)

42. Is transvestism immoral?
An abomination contrary to nature.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
Much laughed and mock at — but it was also a vogue among a cultural circle where it was born of (as in Shakespeare) men dressing up and doing feminine roles in the popular opera.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?
The whole issue of “rights” is modern Western, and so it would take some translating to answer the question. Even without immorality involved, there is no “equal” rights under the old imperial law. Some immoral professions (prostitutes etc.) being criminal would not have the legal protection to begin with.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
Too contrary to the principle of Yin-Yang. Not feasible by old clan rules; it would mess up inheritance. Gay relationships would be outside the recognized marriage.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?
Concubinage was the standard in gentry families. The practice actually grew in time because of the cheap cost for getting a low-class second or third wife.

47. Is divorce acceptable?
Yes. Mandatory if there is no male offspring.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
Yes, if not always on an equal field.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?
No way.
50. *Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?*

Drugs are standard Taoist medicinal cornucopia. Alcohol (distilled spirit more than wine) too. The Buddhist launched a campaign against the latter — and discovered Tea as substitute as a result. [Methodists copied them later.]

51. *Should prayers be allowed in public schools?*

Not applicable. Confucian schools would have had no use for Buddhist or Taoist prayers.

52. *Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?*

Again, not applicable due to lack of clarity in the state constitution. Church and state not so defined. The People's Republic of China would not support “religious” schools; British Hong Kong used to; not clear about Taiwan government would subsidize an accredited Catholic University like Fu-Jen. The whole People’s Republic of China suppression of the Fulan Gong movement tells of the limits of communist tolerance.

53. *Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?*

A religious concern, yes — to the extent that principle of Chinese medicine would apply. Taoists may and Buddhist must but Confucians do not have to observe vegetarianism.

54. *Is gambling allowed?*

Discouraged but extremely, extremely popular among Chinese. The idea of “unearned gain” should be stressed in Neo-Confucian work ethics as much as in Puritan work ethics, but unfortunately the old belief in Heaven granting fortune/misfortune to man remains so strong that “game of chance” is deemed perfectly okay as a means to test the whims of (Latin) Fortunas.

55. *Is smoking allowed?*

One of the very bad habits of the Chinese. First it was Opium and now it is the Cancer Stick.
HINDU

According to one's actions, according to one's conduct, so one becomes — the doer of good becomes good, the doer of evil becomes evil; a man becomes virtuous by virtuous action, sinful by sin.

_The Upanishads 900-600 BCE_

HINDUISM PERVADES MUCH OF THE INDIAN SUB-COCONTINENT and its approach to life infuses several cultures in south Asia. However, since many Hindus worship in homes and neighborhood temples, record keeping in some areas is non-existent and in other places very difficult.

Hinduism is roughly divided equally into two branches. Saivitism and Vaishnitism have similar origins in the Veda, but ascribe very different personalities to God. Saivites worship Siva, which adds yoga and mystical union to temple worship and devotional disciplines, and Vaishnavites, who worship Vishnu and the associated gods, stress devotional worship.

A billion people follow Hinduism. Most Hindus live in India, with nearly 85% of that country identifying with this religion.

_From Principle and Practice of Hinduism_
_Bala N. Aiyer, Bharatiya Bidya Bhavan, Mumbai, India_
_www.us-hindus.com_

The Ethical Values

The two great concepts, which have a bearing on Indian ethics, contained in the Vedas, are the Rita, the law of good or the Eternal Law, and Satya, truth. God is Ritavaan, the upholder of the Eternal Order, and He is Satya-dhama, the One for whom truth is the law of being. Anyone who acts in accordance with the law of truth and the law of Eternal Order is 'good'.

Dr. Radhakrishnan sums up the Vedic idea of moral life thus: "Prayers are to be offered to the Gods. Rites are to be performed... The life of man has to be led under the very eye of God. Apart from the duties owed to Gods there are also duties to man. Kindness to all is enjoined; hospitality is reckoned a great virtue. 'The riches of one who gives do not diminish. He who possessed of food hardens his heart against the feeble man craving nourishment, against the sufferer coming to him (for help), and pursues (his own enjoymet even) before him, that man finds no consoler.' Sorcery, witchcraft, seduction and adultery are condemned as vicious. Gambling is denounced. Virtue is conformity to the law of God, which includes love of man. Vice is disobedience to this law."

The Upanishads presuppose ethical excellence on the part of the student set on a study of spiritual knowledge. They do not, therefore, discuss elaborately the principles of ethics though, here and there, they do contain teachings about morals.
The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad sums up a whole ethical philosophy in three words: Daammyat, datta and dayadhvam — self-control, charity and compassion. (These are the three D's which T.S. Eliot uses in his poem 'The Wasteland' as the message from the ancient world to the conflict-ridden modern world.)

In the Taittiriya Upanishad the teacher exhorts the pupil to speak the truth, practise virtue, not to be negligent of virtue, welfare and prosperity, to honour the parents and the teacher and so on. The Chhandogya instructs the spiritual aspirant not to cause injury to any living creature. It stresses austerities, charity, truth-speaking, straightforwardness among others.

The Maitrayani Upanishad, one of the minor Upanishads, speaks of anger, jealousy, meanness, cruelty and rashness, among others, as vices to be avoided. The Upanishads also stress virtues such as chastity, austerity and silence.

Manu and Yajnavalkya, among the Hindu law-givers, stress the importance of 'Achara' or conduct. Dharma, which is traceable to the Vedic Rita, is exalted. Manusmriti proclaims: "Self-possession, patience, self-control, integrity, purity, restraint, intelligence, truthfulness, absence of anger -- these ten are the marks of Dharma." Manu points out that non-injury to other beings and truthfulness, among others, represent the essence of Dharma.

The whole of Dharma, says Yajnavalkya, consists of truthfulness, non-stealing, absence of anger, modesty, purity, intelligence, self-possession, self-control, restraint of the sense and learning.

Manu lists the virtues expected of the student, the householder, the renunciand, the priestly class and the ruling class. Respect for elders as one of the cardinal virtues is held up by him. Women, he says, must be honoured and mutual fidelity between husband and wife must continue till death (of both).
SAIVITE

SAIVITES STRESS RITUALS PERFORMED WITH STRICT OBSERVANCE as essential for liberation. A guru, who is seen by Saivites as the physical embodiment of Siva, and knowledge of one's identification with Siva as viewed the most efficacious route to liberation. Saivitism tends to stress the ascetic dimensions.

Sivasiva Palaniswami
Acharya, Himalayan Academy
Editor, Hinduism Today
Kapaa, Hawaii
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?

For the Hindu a good person is one who never hurts another in thought, word or deed. He or she centers life around God and guru, lives selflessly and is ever tolerant of others. More explicitly, a good person is defined as one who faithfully follows the ten yamas and the ten niyamas.

The Ten Classical Restraints:

Hinduism's ethical restraints are contained in ten simple precepts called yamas. They define the codes of conduct by which we harness our instinctive forces and cultivate the innate, pristine qualities of our soul. The yamas and niyamas are scriptural injunctions for all aspects of thought and behavior. They are advice and simple guidelines, not commandments.

The ten yamas, defining the ideals of chary, are:
1) ahimsa, "non-injury," do not harm others by thought, word or deed;
2) satya, "truthfulness," refrain from lying and betraying promises;
3) asteya, "non-stealing," neither steal nor covet nor enter into debt;
4) brahmacharya, "divine conduct," control lust by remaining celibate when single, leading to faithfulness in marriage;
5) kshama, "patience," restrain intolerance with people and impatience with circumstances;
6) dhriti, "steadfastness," overcome non-perseverance, fear, indecision and changeableness;
7) daya, "compassion," conquer callous, cruel and insensitive feelings toward all beings;
8) arjava, "honesty," renounce deception and wrongdoing;
9) mitahara, "moderate appetite," neither eat too much, nor consume meat, fish, fowl or eggs;
10) shaucha, "purity," avoid impurity in body, mind and speech.

The Vedas proclaim, "To them belongs yon stainless Brahma world in whom there is no crookedness and falsehood, nor trickery." Aum.
The Ten Classical Observances
Hinduism's religious tenets are contained in ten terse precepts called niyamas. They summarize the essential practices that we observe and the soulful virtues and qualities we strive daily to perfect.

Good conduct is a combination of avoiding unethical behavior and performing virtuous, spiritualizing acts. The accumulated wisdom of thousands of years of Hindu culture has evolved ten niyamas, or religious observances.

These precepts defining the ideals of kriya are:
1) hri, "remorse," be modest and show shame for misdeeds;
2) santosha, "contentment," seek joy and serenity in life;
3) dana, "giving," tithe and give creatively without thought of reward;
4) astikya, "faith," believe firmly in God, Gods, guru and the path to enlightenment;
5) ishvarapujana, "worship," cultivate devotion through daily puja and meditation;
6) siddhanta shravana, "scriptural listening," study the teachings and listen to the wise of one's lineage;
7) mati, "cognition," develop a spiritual will and intellect with a guru's guidance;
8) vrata, "sacred vows," fulfill religious vows, rules and observances faithfully; 9) japa, "recitation," chant holy mantras daily;
10) tapas, "austerity," perform sadhana, penance, tapas and sacrifice.

The Vedas state, "They indeed possess that Brahma world who possess austerity and chastity, and in whom the truth is established."

2. Why be good?
One is good in order to be and experience one's truest and innermost self. One is good before that realization comes in order to progress along the spiritual path, to rise toward divine illumination, to live so as to gain a high birth wherein the ultimate attainments of Pure Consciousness, Inner Light and God Realization may be personally experienced, and ultimate to be liberated.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
Yes, all genuine spiritual paths are honored by Hindus, and perfect goodness is available within these faiths.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
Yes, he may be a saint. There are good people in all religions. Hindus regard belief as far less instrumental toward our goodness than action. If one acts purely and believes in no formal dogma, he is superior to the true believer whose living example is flawed. There is no salvific power in mere belief, no matter how noble that belief.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
Yes, living well supercedes all claims of faith for the Hindu.

6. What is the source of ethics?
First, scripture, then the soul's innate super-conscious nature, then cultural and social edicts.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
Yes.
8. **How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?**
   Usually by your own heart and intuition, failing that by inquiring of illumined souls, swamis and Satgurus.

9. **Why do bad things happen to good people?**
   It is their karma. Actually, what appears to be bad is not. Even sufferings have a purpose, to grow and mature the soul. All sufferings are brought upon the soul by its own actions. Nothing is decreed from above or on high.

10. **Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?**
    Hindus regard religion as so intimately intertwined with the cosmos that this distinction would not be accepted. If you mean simple law, then there is a difference between offense to dharma and offense to county littering ordinances.

11. **Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?**
    Everyone, the community, but especially the elders and sages.

12. **Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?**
    Yes, to the extent that they are the laws of life, but not with regard to uniquely Hindu edicts or scriptural/cultural law.

13. **What role should religion play in secular society?**
    It should be engaged as fully as it can without imposing itself on other faiths. Religion should be an intimate and integral part of every dimension of human life.

**Use of Force**

14. **Is killing ever justified?**
    Yes, to protect oneself and family from attack, and by the official army and police in the course of their duty to keep the people safe.

15. **Is war ever justified?**
    Yes, to protect the state.

16. **Is violence against innocent people justifiable?**
    No.

17. **Can someone be a conscientious objector?**
    Yes.

18. **Is force justifiable against children?**
    For the Hindu, hurt or injury to another human being, whether by thought, word or deed is wrong. Non-injury, sometimes in the West more narrowly called nonviolence, is Hinduism’s prime ethical principle. To hit a child for any reason whatsoever is an act against this principle and totally unnecessary in the nurturing process.

19. **Is force justifiable against a spouse?**
    The same edict against force applies to a spouse. Part of this principle is based on the Hindu understanding of God, who is both the Creator of and imminent or present in every atom of
the universe, coupled with the Hindu understanding of Self as coterminous with Divinity. Thus, an injury to anyone, including one's spouse, is an injury to God and to Self.

20. *Is suicide ever justifiable?*
Only in the extreme circumstance of unrelievable suffering, and then only under two conditions: 1. Community involvement in the process and 2. Fasting to death is the only means allowed, none other.

21. *To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?*
Sacrificing one's life can be heroic and selfless but it does not earn a place in Heaven. It is of a lower order of sacrifice in Hinduism.

22. *Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?*
An innocent robber? How would this work?

23. *Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?*
Yes, for murder only.

**Science and Medicine**

24. *Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?*
One only — to save the life of the mother.

25. *Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?*
Yes, but highly discouraged.

26. *Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?*
No prohibitions.

27. *Are transfusions allowed?*
Yes, but not encouraged.

28. *Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?*
No.

29. *Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?*
No.

30. *Does anyone have the right to hasten death?*
No.

31. *In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?*
No.
32. **Is genetic engineering permissible?**  
The jury is still out, but most Hindu leaders oppose it.

33. **Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?**  
No.

34. **Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?**  
Very much so. Hindus revere nature.

35. **Do animals have any moral standing?**  
Yes.

36. **Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?**  
Time is cyclic in the Hindu view. Time and the universe will end, but another cycle of creation will follow, and another dissolution. At the end of these cycles, when the cosmos is withdrawn into God, all souls and creatures are one with That. There is no individual identity, unless you call the Divine such an identity.

**Behavior**

37. **Is sex outside marriage permissible?**  
No.

38. **Is sex only for procreation?**  
No. But on matters of sex, there are some Hindu lineages that are boldly prohibitive of non-procreative sex, homosexuality, masturbation, etc. But they are in the minority.

39. **Is masturbation allowed?**  
No rule exists against it.

40. **Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?**  
No.

41. **Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?**  
Yes.

42. **Is transvestism immoral?**  
No.

43. **Is homosexuality immoral?**  
No.

44. **Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?**  
Yes.

45. **Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?**  
No rule on this one yet in India
46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?
Yes, except kings could have more in the olden days.

47. Is divorce acceptable?
No. But separation is.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
Yes, in the sense that we have in our tradition the clear definitions of Stree Dharma and Purusha Dharma, the natural and different paths of women and men, coupled with distinctive duties. Certainly Hinduism regards the woman’s power of child bearing and homemaking, coupled with her motherly [and grandmotherly] transmission of the culture on to the next generation, as an ideal for the stability and strength of family, community and nation.

It also regards the man's duty to protect and provide for his family as a dominant theme of his dharma. While no scripture restricts the roles, they are culturally valued and encouraged. There is no moral deficit attached to a woman's work in the wider world, especially if she has raised her children or as yet has no children to raise.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?
Yes.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?
No, though wines and beers have a certain acceptance.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?
Not if it means the prayers of just majority faiths. Only if all can pray equally, and who can achieve that?

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
No.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
Yes, Hindus are vegetarians.

54. Is gambling allowed?
No.

55. Is smoking allowed?
Yes. But again the same traditions that restrain sexual behavior are against all alcohol and tobacco uses.
VAISHNAVITE

ARISING IN THE SECOND CENTURY BCE, Vaishnavitism is based on the concept of the non-duality of reality. Its goal is to experience Brahman, as manifested in Vishnu and those gods associated with Vishnu. The means for achieving liberation from birth and rebirth is complete devotion and surrender to God.

Venkat Kanumalla
Priest, Ranganatha Temple
Pomona, New York
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
In our scriptures, anyone who follows the scriptures is a good person. Just as a good police officer follows the rules that govern police officers, scripture tells us what to do.

The Vedas as the essential scripture, but it is too vast to learn. It has 64,00 verses. The Bhagavad-Gita is an abridged version. It contains 701 verses.

There are five major sins for Hindus: 1. steal another’s livelihood; 2. to get intoxicated; 3. sleep with another man’s wife; 4. kill a child; 5. kill a priest.

2. Why be good?
We believe that all actions have consequences. If you are good, good follows. You should be good for your own good.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
Yes. People can follow any religion. We think all religions teach the same. For example, Christianity teaches, Thou shall not kill. Our principle is “non-violence.”

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
We don’t question people about their religion. Our intention is to help anyone who wants to find God by surrendering to him.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
They go hand in hand. Generally, moral behavior is a pre-requisite for religious practice.

6. What is the source of ethics?
The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita and the Laws of Manu.
7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist? 
Yes, but very rarely. Generally, all good people follow some religion. But is it possible to be a good president and not follow the Constitution? You can be good when you follow guidelines. What is religion but following guidelines? A disciplined life is a religious life.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong? 
This is based on the scriptures.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people? 
Because of our actions in previous lives.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence? 
Sometimes religious and secular requirements are different. Occasionally there are conflicts between the two. When this happens, religious values take a higher precedent.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion? 
The scriptures guide moral behavior, but there is nothing like an enforcer in our religion. If you practice what the scriptures require, you are religious; if you don’t, you will experience the consequences in a future life.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone? 
Yes, because our religion is universal. Anyone can surrender to the Lord and receive salvation.

13. What role should religion play in secular society? 
Religious behavior is very personal. Society is a mixture of various religions, so one group can’t dictate to another. Religion shouldn’t interfere with the social life. Religion is a personal matter for those who believe in it.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified? 
Killing has to be looked at in two respects. For example, as a soldier you are rewarded with a gold medal when you get out of the army. But if you kill your neighbor, you’ll be sent to jail.

You must try to avoid killing if you can. Killing in self-defense is justifiable if you can’t avoid it.

15. Is war ever justified? 
Yes, the Bhagavad-Gita starts on the battlefront. So war is justified if it is to establish the right way of living. Nuclear bombs, for example, were created to stop all wars. Japan and Germany were aggressors in the Second World War and there was no way to stop them except through war. The dropping of the atomic bomb was justified.

If war is to punish a rogue country, it is permitted. If it is to take over another’s land, it is not.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable? 
No.
17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
Yes. No one should be forced into using force. It cannot be imposed on another. If your disposition isn’t for fighting, you shouldn’t be forced to join the army. No one should be compelled to take up arms.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
No.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
No. There is a saying, Your house will be ruined if you use force against your children and your wife.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
No, never. It is considered as bad as killing another person.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
We don’t go to extreme steps. If you follow it, others will see you example and also follow it.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
An innocent person should never be punished. At the same time we also preach that we can be forgiven even for grave offenses. If someone asks to be forgiven, he must be forgiven.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?
It is acceptable under extreme circumstances. It has to motivate by vengeance, preconceived and done for selfish gain. There are scriptures, which specify the conditions.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
None. Human life begins at the moment of conception. It is wrong to kill an innocent person. Killing a child is one of the worst sins.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
We believe in cremation, so there is no body on which to perform an autopsy. However, in an unnatural death the family doesn’t have the right to say no to an autopsy. The law prevails here.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
Body modification isn’t allowed for cosmetic purposes, but they are allowed for spiritual reasons, such as the marks on priests.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
Only to the extent of saving a life, not in order to prolong it.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
No.
29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
No. No one has that right. Mercy killings are not part of our religion.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
No. We don’t have the ability to give life, so we don’t have the right to take life.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
If the death of one of the children is certain if they aren’t separated, then it is permitted.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
Yes, if it is for the welfare of humanity and it does not take the life of the fetus.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
No. All species co-existed from time immemorial.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Yes. We worship wind, water and fire — anything that helps us with our living. We treat them all with respect and are obedient to them.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
Not only do we pray for humans, we also pray for animals. We believe in reincarnation, so sometimes we are animals ourselves, since the soul transmigrates from one body to another. That’s why religious Hindus are vegetarians.

We also treat the cow almost like a mother. A mother doesn’t always have milk, so we rely on the cow.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
The cycle of time never ends. If one age ends, another follows it. This happens every 4.32 billion years. This is based on our scriptures. It corresponds to the 12 hours of day and 12 hours of night for our creator. Some time our creator will also die but not the Supreme Lord.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
No.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
In the olden days it was like that, but we are different today. We are just like any other society.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
No, it is a perverted form of sex.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
Yes,
41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
Yes, but most people don’t follow them. The general population ignores them. In fact, today this is restricted only to practicing priests.

42. Is transvestism immoral?
This is a foreign concept to Indian civilization, so we have no comments about it.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
It is considered unnatural. Our religion speaks only about heterosexual matters.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?
Yes.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
It isn’t part of our culture.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?
Yes.

47. Is divorce acceptable?
Generally it is not, but it is allowable under extreme circumstances.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
Rules are meant to create harmony in the family and society. No one is to be suppressed.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?
The husband and wife can sit together and pray. There is no separation here.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?
No. Our religion practices controlling the senses, not activating them. We don’t want to add fuel to the fire.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?
Yes, but it should be left to the individual as to which prayer to say. But prayer is generally good, whether it is in the home or in school.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
Yes, but only to those schools that teach tolerance and compassion. Money shouldn’t go to schools that teach fanaticism.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
Yes. We believe that the foods we eat will decide your mental outlook and your spiritual behavior. We avoid meats and eggs because we practice non-violence, although we do take milk and yogurt because you don’t have to kill a cow to get this. We avoid onions and garlic because these aren’t conducive to spiritual behavior — they promote passion.

54. Is gambling allowed?
No, it is strongly discouraged. There are many examples where it has led to unimaginable disaster.
55. *Is smoking allowed?*
No.
Humanism

No one can lead a happy life if he thinks only of himself and turns everything to his own purposes. You should live for the other person if you wish to live for yourself.

Seneca

Humanism is a product of the Enlightenment, although elements of it can be found in ancient Greece and Rome. There are also traces of early Buddhism and Confucianism.

Most humanists are not affiliated with religious organizations and may even take an anti-religious attitude. However, there is a strain of humanism that is decidedly religious.

In the 19th century, groups in Germany established organizations resembling religious societies but that set aside theology in favor of values that stressed human agency. In the United States after the Civil War, the Free Religious Association brought together liberal clergy in the desire to find a common moral ground amongst all religions. And in the 1930s a group consisting mainly of liberal Protestant clergyman called for the creation of religious humanism.

Organized humanism is strongest in Norway and the Netherlands, where they represent nearly a quarter of the population. In Norway, youths celebrate a coming-of-age ceremony in Oslo City Hall and in Holland there are humanist chaplains in the military and in hospitals. In Belgian airports there are chapels for humanists.
ETHICAL CULTURE

FOUNDED IN 1876 BY FELIX ADLER, Ethical Culture (also known as Ethical Humanism) places the cultivation ethical relationships at the center of its religious outlook. It concerns itself equally with personal and social ethics.

Concentrated along the eastern seaboard of the United States, there are about 3,000 members.

Joseph Chuman
Leader, Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County
Teaneck, New Jersey
USA

General

1. *What does it mean to be a good person?*
   For the humanist to be good means following the commonsensical norms of decency toward others. It means striving to be honest, and to act toward others with integrity, honesty, compassion, fairness, and an attitude of benevolence and reasonable support. It involves at a deeper level recognizing the dignity of others and oneself and understanding the needs of human beings to realize their potentials.

2. *Why be good?*
   One needs to be good for several reasons. Perhaps the most important partakes of intuitive recognition that being good fulfills our highest purposes as distinctively human beings. We also need to strive to be good as a way of sustaining the stability of the social order in the service of preservation of our species and ourselves.

3. *Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?*
   Most definitely. Ethical Culturists hold that ethical striving and achievement is independent of theology. This sets us apart from other Western religions. One can be good whether one is an Ethical Culturist, or not; religious or irreligious.

4. *Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?*
   Yes. Again, the capacity to be good is independent of religion. One doesn't have to be an Ethical Culturist to be good.

5. *Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?*
   In Ethical Culture striving to live ethically is the touchstone of the religious life. Yet, Ethical Culturists would make a distinction between secular ethics and the ethical view of life held by an Ethical Culturist who understood Ethical Culture religiously. The distinction is one based upon the way in which such a person understood his or her ethics.

   In short, if one understands ethics as comprising the supreme end of life, then ethics and religion would be conflated. If a person, on the other hand, felt that ethics was important, but did
not identify it as life's supreme goal, and merely pragmatically, then there would probably be a
distinction in this person's mind, as there is for many humanists, between religion and morality.

6. What is the source of ethics?
   For Ethical Culturists there can be many sources of ethics. Among them are: An intuitive
   moral and social sense, perhaps combined with a sublime apprehension that how one lives is
   constitutive as our highest purposes as human beings. Among other sources are: human empathy,
   enlightened self-interest, an understanding of the cooperative rules that are necessary for a society
to survive and flourish.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
   Yes, as stated, moral behavior is not necessarily linked to a belief in God.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
   Through consulting one's conscience. But conscience is often not sufficient. One can
   arrive at a sense of right and wrong, when possible, through consulting the community upon
   whom one's action will have an effect to try to ascertain the consequences of that action. Finally,
   Ethical Culturists are encouraged, through education, to look to the collective moral wisdom of
   humankind.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
   There is no correlation between a person's moral achievement and character and acts of
   nature. In the realm of human relations the correlation may be tighter, but the social forces that
   impinge on a person's life have dynamics that are often well beyond the control of that individual.
   Though a purpose of Ethical Cultural is to create a more just world that will serve to narrow that
   gap, there are no necessary linkages, no guarantees. Ethical Culturists do not affirm this kind of
determinism, nor any social determinism.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offense?
   No, for Ethical Culturists, the moral is closely identified with the religious.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
   Within Ethical Societies moral violations should bring response from the rest of the
   congregation. Outside of our congregational life, it is conscience, and the strictures of the larger
   society.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
   Rules are not the only, nor primary, way in which we understand morality. We
   understand morality, or ethics, as a positive dynamic of life supporting other life. Certainly, a
   function of Ethical Culture is to teach and transform the broader society. We hope that our
   approach will be broadly adopted beyond our formal membership.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
   Religion plays its most important social function when it "speaks truth to power", i.e.
   holds up to society a higher plateau of moral values and calls society to reach for those values.
   This function has long been identified with "the prophetic tradition" in religion.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
   Yes, in self-defense, when killing an assailant is the only way to save oneself or others.
15. Is war ever justified?
The Ethical Culture Movement is not a pacifist movement, though it is pacifistically oriented and highly values peaceful, cooperative relations among peoples and nations. It sees war as a moral calamity and is committed to those conditions which will pre-empt and prevent war. While our national organization, The American Ethical Union, the national federation of Ethical Culture and Ethical Humanist Societies, called for an end to the Vietnam War, Ethical Culture has not taken a position against war per se.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
No.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
Yes. During the Vietnam War, Ethical Culture was very active in winning conscientious objector status on humanistic and non-theistic grounds.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
Yes, but violence is not. There are rare situations in which force must be used to protect children against doing harm to themselves or others. But such use must be strongly defensible.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
Overwhelmingly, no. But one can imagine rare emergencies in which one needs to use force in order to subvert a greater harm to the spouse (or other persons).

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
There are many kinds of suicides. Ethical Culture has generally supported euthanasia, including active euthanasia, provided that circumstances merit it, and the self-determination of the patient has been strictly safeguarded.

In more general cases, Ethical Culture does not view suicide as a sin, and has made no pronouncements against it. While suicide is most often the end of a tragic life or series of events, the approach of Ethical Culture is to be compassionate and not moralistic.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
Ethical Culture, which puts an extremely high premium on life, does not view martyrdom as a virtue. Yet, in its valuing of conscience, Ethical Culture might find commendable the giving of life's for a higher purpose in some extraordinary instances.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
This is one of those ethical conundrums that is extensively debatable. Though Ethical Culture has taken no position on this issue, it is fair to assume that since Ethical Culture values personal responsibility very highly, most of its members would find killing an innocent person for any reason abhorrent and to be avoided.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?
Ethical Culture has taken many positions calling for the total abolition of the death penalty.
Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
Ethical Culture is committed to the provisions of the Wade v. Roe decision. It is staunchly pro-choice.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
Yes.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
No.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
The self-determination and will of the patient is the paramount criterion here. Ethical Culture does make a distinction between upholding life per se and the quality of life. Ethical Culturists would factor qualitative values into their decision on their own behalf and when functioning as proxies for others.

Ethical Culture is also concerned about the inequality of high-end medical resources, but has taken no position in light of those concerns.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
Yes, but not recklessly or without due ethical considerations.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
Yes, again, this question relates to quality of life concerns as well as the propriety of suicide in certain cases.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
Yes.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
The Ethical Movement has not taken a position on genetic engineering. Generally Ethical Culture has been very supportive of scientific innovation — but with caution.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
Yes, Ethical Culture strongly supports the theory of evolution.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Yes, but more work needs to be done in expanding the humanistic focus of Ethical Culture to the wider environment.
35. Do animals have any moral standing?
Ethical Culturists will respond differently. Generally there has been a growing appreciation of the moral claims that animals make upon us.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
We would look to science and the best of cosmological speculation to answer this question.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
Yes. We have taken no position against it. Responsibility is most important here and not formal marital status.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
No.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
Yes.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
No.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
No.

42. Is transvestism immoral?
No. Ethical Culture has no position against it.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
No. Ethical Culture leaders preside over gay commitment ceremonies and have called for the legalization of gay marriage.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?
Yes.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
Yes, as noted above.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?
Ethical Culture has taken no position on polygamy. Many would probably identify with feminist arguments against it. From a human rights perspective, it would make an interesting debate.

47. Is divorce acceptable?
Yes.
48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
This is a vague question. Ethical Culture values egalitarianism. Where differentiated sex roles are a product of oppression, Ethical Culture views them as a moral issue.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?
It is unclear what "separate" means here. Certainly Ethical Culture views men as equal with regard to rights. There may be circumstances in which voluntary segregation of the sexes would be warranted. But contemporary Ethical Culture does not hold to the idea of naturally drawn separate spheres for men and women.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?
Yes. Responsibility, again, is the key concept. Ethical Culture is interested in the debate on the legalization of hard drugs, but has not taken a position.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?
Praying is allowed in the public schools. Ethical Culture is firmly against officially led prayer in the public schools.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
No. Ethical Culture has strongly upheld the wall of separation between church and state.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
No.

54. Is gambling allowed?
Yes. Ethical Culture has no position against gambling.

55. Is smoking allowed?
It is allowed, but there has been a marked decline in smoking among Ethical Culture during the past three decades. This results from health concerns for oneself and others.
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

BEGIN AS A DOCTRINAL DISPUTE WITHIN CHRISTIANITY, the first Unitarian church was established in central Europe in 1638. Unitarians stressed the unity of God and adopted a belief in Jesus as a normal human being. During the 17th and 18th century, other Christian groups in England evolved into Universalists, understanding God as love and at the same time rejecting eternal punishment. The two groups merged in the 1960s.

While Unitarian-Universalism is creedless, it believes in the inherent goodness of people.

There are over a half-million Unitarian Universalists, most of whom are in the United States.

Pat Hoertdoerfer
Minister and Director, Children, Family and Intergenerational Programs
Unitarian Universalist Association
Boston, Massachusetts
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
A good person is one who lives according to the seven Unitarian-Universalist Principles, especially the first and second principles — a person who affirms the inherent worth and dignity of every person and promotes justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. The Ethical imperatives of our faith oblige us to go beyond the secular laws of our society. As educator James Conant says "ethics are those ethical imperatives that prompt us to care when we need not do so, to act when it may be controversial, to serve when we would rather indulge ourselves."

2. Why be good?
Our seventh principle states that we respect the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are a part. Therefore our ethics are personal, social, and ecological. Our ethical responsibility is not merely to individuals we meet in daily living where love is the supreme value. We have obligations to the larger group, to community and national and ethnic/racial and economic groups, and ultimately to the world community. Justice is love distributed, a central concept in how humanity orders its communities. And now with our understanding of global ecology, we realize our moral responsibility to the earth itself and all its creatures. A sense of stewardship or trusteeship is required if we are to keep faith with the environment in which we are privileged to live.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
Yes, a good person is one whose conduct and character exemplifies the values and principles of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility.
4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
   Yes, as long as the person lives her/his life based on the core values of love, justice, and responsibility.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
   Religious requirements of Unitarian Universalists are the covenants we make with one another in our community. When we become members of a UU congregation we covenant to affirm and promote the principles of our faith, to honor the sources of our living tradition, and to enrich our faith with deeper understandings and inspired actions. Morality is the personal principles of right and wrong that guide an individual's character and conduct. Morality is derived from family values, cultural mores, societal norms, principles of a religious community, and national (and international) laws.

6. What is the source of ethics?
   The source of my ethics is twofold: the Golden Rule/Rule of Reciprocity found in every major religion and Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative. The Golden Rule demands concern with and responsibility for the well-being of others. This "do unto others" standard requires empathy, self-discipline, and love in seeking to help others when possible and to cause no harm to anyone. According to Kant the foundation of ethic is the ability to act rationally. From Kant's categorical imperative follows the rule of universality — behaving in those ways you feel appropriate for all people, at all times — and the rule of respect — all individuals are important and the well-being of each is a moral end in itself. In ethical decision-making the values of respect and reciprocity need the third dimension of responsibility in evaluating the action in our interdependent world. One's ability to empathize and one's ability to reason enable us to be true to our primary concern or ultimate reality — reverence for life and service to life.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
   Yes.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
   With my feeling instincts and my critical thinking I decide where the greater love is or where the least harm will occur. The five principles that guide my actions and my life are respect, reciprocity, responsibility, reason, and reverence. I strive to live by these principles and values.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
   We live in a world with the powerful forces of creativity and destruction embedded in every relationship. Within each human being there is the potential for good and evil; with every human relationship there is the possibility of joy and sorrow; between groups and nations there is the potential for peace and war. The powers of nature are benign and malevolent. When these powers interact, bad things can happen to good people and good things can happen to bad people, unintentionally or intentionally. It is imperative for good people to elicit the best in others and thereby enhancing the possibility of the world "bending toward justice."

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
    If I commit a religious offence, I break a UU covenant and fail to live the principles of my faith. If I commit a moral/secular offence, I break a national or international law, go against a cultural/societal norms, or fail to live my family values. Sometimes the principles of my faith call me to a higher law/principle of love and justice than the societal/national law.
11. *Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?*
The congregation with its system of governance has the final authority in matters of morality and ethics. Congregational polity rules the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.

12. *Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?*
I believe that the pluralism of our UU faith — the seven principles — is a good model for humanity.

13. *What role should religion play in secular society?*
Religion should offer an ideal for society: the Beloved Community of Love and Justice for all people. Religious communities can teach the use of reason in the responsible search for truth and practice reverence for life and service to life.

**Use of Force**

14. *Is killing ever justified?*
There are times when it is necessary to kill living creatures for food to survive. There is no justification in killing another human being.

15. *Is war ever justified?*
No. We must evolve as a species to live beyond our animal instincts to be people of reason and compassion.

16. *Is violence against innocent people justifiable?*
No.

17. *Can someone be a conscientious objector?*
Yes, two of my sons declared their conscientious objector status in the 1970-80s.

18. *Is force justifiable against children?*
If a child is doing something that would hurt or harm him/herself or others, authoritative guidance but not violence is justified.

19. *Is force justifiable against a spouse?*
No.

20. *Is suicide ever justifiable?*
No.

21. *To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?*
When someone is living the principles of their faith, for example Michael Servetus and Jan Hus or Mother Theresa and Mahatma Gandhi, martyrdom is exemplary.

22. *Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?*
No.

23. *Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?*
No.
24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
I believe that women have the right to choose to have an abortion because it's a woman's right to protect her future, her own health, and/or the future and health of others who already depend on her is more important than the unaformed and potential life in her uterus. Each person has the right to choose for herself the answer to this question.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
When there is the need to know why the person died — understanding circumstances of death, seeking to solve a crime, furthering medical research - autopsies should be allowed.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
It is only the mores and standards we have accepted in society that dictate the unwritten rules about body modification.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
No, I support the Living Will and the right of self-determination to die with dignity.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
They have a right and moral obligation to determine the capacity and informed consent through a Living Will and Durable Power of Attorney and to act in behalf of the dying patient's declarations.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
In the case of a terminal condition and the documents of the patient's Living Will and Durable Power of Attorney, family member may make decisions according to these documents.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
In this case I feel that if you can save one life by allowing the other to die then we must do what we can to save one life.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
Genetic engineering is a huge complex field in modern medical science. The important questions to ask in any case would be: by what means? to what ends? And to keep in mind the personal, social, and ecological principles of my UU faith in mind when making these choices and decisions is critical.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
Yes.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Yes, see question #2.
35. Do animals have any moral standing?
Yes, we need to respect animals as a part of the interdependent web of all existence.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
No.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
Yes, when that lovemaking experience is positive and life-enhancing, consensual and nonexploitative, mutually pleasurable and safe, based on mutual expectations and caring, and respectful valuing honesty and keeping commitments.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
No, people engage in healthy sexual behavior for a variety of reasons, including to express caring and love, to experience intimacy and connection with another, to share pleasure, to bring new life into the world, and to experience fun and relaxation.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
Yes, it is a lifelong form of sexual expression that is natural, special, and private.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
Sex between loving partners can be expressed in many ways, including kissing, fondling, massaging, oral sex and genital sex..

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
No, but there are cultural mores and societal standards.

42. Is transvestism immoral?
No.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
No.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?
People should have equal rights (respect for the inherent worth and dignity of every person) as long as their interpersonal behavior honors the values of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
Yes.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?
Yes.
47. *Is divorce acceptable?*
Acceptable yes, but often harmful to the family.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
Yes, in human relations justice, equity, and compassion are the ethical guidelines/principles.

49. *Are men and women separate but equal?*
Yes.

50. *Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?*
Yes, if used responsibly and causing no harm to self or others.

51. *Should prayers be allowed in public schools?*
No, let's recognize and honor the U.S. constitution and respect the separation of church and state.

52. *Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?*
No, let's honor the separation of church and state.

53. *Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?*
Yes, the choices that we make concerning food often reflect our religious values — vegetarian or vegan diets — and religious requirements — kosher food, sacred cows, no meat during Lent.

54. *Is gambling allowed?*
Yes, with responsibility to self and doing no harm to others.

55. *Is smoking allowed?*
Yes, with responsibility to self and doing no harm to others.
There is no virtue in much of their counsel: only in him who enjoins charity, kindness, and peace among men. He who does this to please God shall be richly rewarded.

*Koran*

Born in Mecca in 570 CE, Môhammed died in 632 CE. By the time of his death virtually all of the Arabian peninsula had adopted Islam.

The Five Pillars — the confession of faith that there is but one God, praying five times a day, the giving of alms to the needy, fasting during Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca — are common to all forms of Islam, as is the belief in Môhammed as the last of the great prophets of God. In addition, all Muslims accept God’s angels, the Day of Judgment, the idea of a hereafter and basic ethical principles.

What distinguishes Shi’â and Sunni Muslims are largely political and historical matters that center around the legitimate successors to Muhammad’s prophecy. The Sunnis regard the first four caliphs, those who carried on leadership after Muhammad’s death, as the legitimate heirs of the prophet; Shi’âs reject the first three caliphs and regard only Ali, the prophet’s son-in-law, and his followers as the divinely inspired successors.

There are well over a billion Muslims.

Islam has laid down some universal fundamental rights for humanity as a whole, which are to be observed and respected under all circumstances. To achieve these rights Islam provides not only legal safeguards but also a very effective moral system. Thus whatever leads to the welfare of the individual or the society is morally good in Islam and whatever is injurious is morally bad. Islam attaches so much importance to the love of God and love of man that it warns against too much of formalism. We read in the Quran:

"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in God and the Last Day and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask; and for the freeing of captives; to be steadfast in
prayers, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you made; and to be firm and patient in pain (or suffering) and adversity and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-conscious." (2:177)

We are given a beautiful description of the righteous and God-conscious man in these verses. He should obey salutary regulations, but he should fix his gaze on the love of God and the love of his fellow men.

We are given four heads: 1. Our faith should be true and sincere, 2. We must be prepared to show it in deeds of charity to our fellow men, 3. We must be good citizens, supporting social organizations, and 4. Our own individual soul must be firm and unshaken in all circumstances.

This is the standard by which a particular mode of conduct is judged and classified as good or bad. This standard of judgment provides the nucleus around which the whole moral conduct should revolve. Before laying down any moral injunctions Islam seeks to firmly implant in man's heart the conviction that his dealings are with God who sees him at all times and in all places; that he may hide himself from the whole world but not from Him; that he may deceive everyone but cannot deceive God; that he can flee from the clutches of anyone else but not from God.

Thus, by setting God's pleasure as the objective of man's life, Islam has furnished the highest possible standard of morality. This is bound to provide limitless avenues for the moral evolution of humanity. By making Divine revelations as the primary source of knowledge it gives permanence and stability to the moral standards which afford reasonable scope for genuine adjustments, adaptations and innovations, though not for perversions, wild variation, atomistic relativism or moral fluidity. It provides a sanction to morality in the love and fear of God, which will impel man to obey the moral law even without any external pressure. Through belief in God and the Day of Judgment it furnishes a force which enables a person to adopt the moral conduct with earnestness and sincerity, with all the devotion of heart and soul.

It does not, through a false sense of originality and innovation, provide any novel moral virtues nor does it seek to minimize the importance of the well-known moral norms, nor does it give exaggerated importance to some and neglect others without cause. It takes up all the commonly known moral virtues and with a sense of balance and proportion it assigns a suitable place and function to each one of them in the total scheme of life. It widens the scope of man's individual and collective life - his domestic associations, his civic conduct, and his activities in the political, economic, legal, educational, and social realms. It covers his life from home to society, from the dining table to the battlefield and peace conferences, literally from the cradle to the grave. In short, no sphere of life is exempt from the universal and comprehensive application of the moral principles of Islam. It makes morality reign supreme and ensures that the affairs of life, instead of dominated by selfish desires and petty interests, should be regulated by norms of morality.

It stipulates for man a system of life which is based on all good and is free from all evil. It invokes the people, not only to practice virtue, but also to establish virtue and eradicate vice, to bid good and to forbid wrong. It wants that the verdict of conscience should prevail and virtue must not be subdued to play second fiddle to evil. Those who respond to this call are gathered together into a community and given the name "Muslim". And the singular object underlying the formation of this community ("Ummah") is that it should make an organized effort to establish and enforce goodness and suppress and eradicate evil.
Here we furnish some basic moral teachings of Islam for various aspects of a Muslim's life. They cover the broad spectrum of personal moral conduct of a Muslim as well as his social responsibilities.

God-consciousness

The Quran mentions it as the highest quality of a Muslim: "The most honorable among you in the sight of God is the one who is most God-conscious." (49:13)

Humility, modesty, control of passions and desires, truthfulness, integrity, patience, steadfastness, and fulfilling one's promises are moral values which are emphasized again and again in the Quran. We read in the Quran: "And God loves those who are firm and steadfast." (3:146)

"And vie with one another to attain to your Sustainer's forgiveness and to a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which awaits the God-conscious, who spend for charity in time of plenty and in time of hardship, and restrain their anger, and pardon their fellow men, for God loves those who do good." (3:133-134)

"Establish regular prayer, enjoind what is just, and forbid what is wrong; and bear patiently whatever may befall you; for this is true constancy. And do not swell your cheek (with pride) at men, nor walk in insolence on the earth, for God does not love any man proud and boastful. And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice; for the harshest of sounds, indeed, is the braying of the ass." (31:18-19)

In a way which summarizes the moral behavior of a Muslim, the Prophet (PBUH) said: "My Sustainer has given me nine commands: to remain conscious of God, whether in private or in public; to speak justly, whether angry or pleased; to show moderation both when poor and when rich, to reunite friendship with those who have broken off with me; to give to him who refuses me; that my silence should be occupied with thought; that my looking should be an admonition; and that I should command what is right."

Social Responsibilities

The teachings of Islam concerning social responsibilities are based on kindness and consideration of others. Since a broad injunction to be kind is likely to be ignored in specific situations, Islam lays emphasis on specific acts of kindness and defines the responsibilities and rights of various relationships. In a widening circle of relationship, then, our first obligation is to our immediate family - parents, husband or wife and children, then to other relatives, neighbors, friends and acquaintances, orphans and widows, the needy of the community, our fellow Muslims, all our fellow human beings and animals.

Parents

Respect and care for parents is very much stressed in the Islamic teaching and is a very important part of a Muslim's expression of faith.

"Your Sustainer has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your lifetime, do not say to them a word of contempt nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor. And, out of kindness, lower to them
the wing of humility and say: My Sustainer! Bestow on them Your mercy, even as they cherished
me in childhood." (17:23-24)

Other Relatives

"And render to the relatives their due rights, as (also) to those in need, and to the traveler;
and do not squander your wealth in the manner of a spendthrift." (17:26)

Neighbors

The Prophet (PBUH) has said: "He is not a believer who eats his fill when his neighbor
beside him is hungry"; and: "He does not believe whose neighbors are not safe from his injurious
conduct."

Actually, according to the Quran and Sunnah, a Muslim has to discharge his moral
responsibility not only to his parents, relatives and neighbors but to the entire mankind, animals
and trees and plants. For example, hunting of birds and animals for the sake of game is not
permitted. Similarly, cutting trees and plants which yield fruit is forbidden unless there is a very
pressing need for it.

Thus, on the basic moral characteristics, Islam builds a higher system of morality by
virtue of which mankind can realize its greatest potential. Islam purifies the soul from self-
seeking egotism, tyranny, wantonness and indiscipline. It creates God-conscious men, devoted to
their ideals, possessed of piety, abstinence and discipline and uncompromising with falsehood. It
induces feelings of moral responsibility and fosters the capacity for self-control. Islam generates
kindness, generosity, mercy, sympathy, peace, disinterested goodwill, scrupulous fairness and
truthfulness towards all creation in all situations. It nourishes noble qualities from which only
good may be expected.

Reprinted with the permission of World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), P.O. Box 10845,
Riyadh 11443, Saudi Arabia
**SUNNI**

SUNNIS MAINTAIN THAT THE COMMUNITY IS THE GUARDIAN OF THE LAW and its authoritative interpreter. The name is derived from the Arabic *sunna*, meaning “practice.” It is essentially churchless and lacks clergy.

With over 900 million people, Sunnis represent about three-quarters of all Muslims. More Sunnis actively practice their religion than any other single group of adherents in the world.

Rashid Abdulkareem  
Researcher, Islamic Studies  
Instructional Supervisor, Saudi Ministry of Education  
Riyadh  
Saudi Arabia

**General**

1. *What does it mean to be a good person?*  
   To have sound faith, work according to it, call others for it, and be patient in all of that.

2. *Why be good?*  
   Because God (Allah) wanted us to be so, and we will be judged according to our faith and deeds. Life will prosper only through good works.

3. *Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?*  
   To be good means to meet the goals that has been set by God for your life i.e. worship of God.

   Non-Muslims could have some good, and could be good in worldly criterion. But the ultimate goodness is according to the Hereafter criterion.

4. *Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?*  
   The same answer for the above question. To add, goodness has different levels: personal, worldly, and religious.

5. *Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?*  
   Morality is a major part of true religion. Religion is for the good of human beings.

6. *What is the source of ethics?*  
   Revelation, reason, and/ or society.

7. *Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?*  
   No. See Q 3.
8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
By both reason and revelation. Things that are prescribed by God as right, we should accept as right. Sometimes we have to explore and test things to find out whether they are good or bad. There are general guidelines: Harmful things, for example, are always wrong. Harms here include personal, social, and religious harms.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
As a rule of thumb, everything that happens in this universe is by the permission of God (Allah) and based on His Wisdom. All things that God does are good, even if they appear to us as bad. So, evil is relative. That is, it is evil from certain perspective or to certain individuals.

“Bad” things happen to good people for different reasons: this might be for their benefit, on the long run. They might deserve it, but we do not know the reality.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
Could be. It is not necessarily that every moral or secular offence should be religiously so.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
Every Muslim should participate, to some extent, to that. However, formally, the state should be responsible for it.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
Yes.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
Society should not be secular.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
Yes. For criminals, and in self-defense.

15. Is war ever justified?
Yes, in self-defense, and in enforcing right. (or removing oppression)

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
No.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
A Muslim should obey the state (the ruler) only in doing good and right. The Prophet Muhammad said, No human being should be obeyed through the disobedience of the Creator. So a Muslim (including soldiers) should disobey the oppressive commands.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
“Kind” force in certain cases, at age of ten and up.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
Kind force, in certain cases.
20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
No.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
In the case of truth and right it is acceptable and sometimes recommended.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
No.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?
Yes. For compensation of killing, and for the extremely offensive crimes that threaten the society, such as adultery for the married spouse or rape.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
Before the baby complete 4 months, it is allowed for extreme medical needs. After the 4th month it is a human being and we should not kill it. (Some scholars say we can accept abortion in this case only if keeping the baby means the mother’s death.)

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
If there is a dire need for that, it's OK. Otherwise the dead person should be respected.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
Yes.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
Scholars differed in this matter. The majority say: yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
One has the right not to but them, but if they are put they should not be removed.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
No. But the patient has the right not to take the medicine.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
No, except for the martyr. Death is not something bad. If one dies for something good, then death is noble and good. It is not allowed to hasten death due to despair or hopelessness.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
Yes, if we are very sure of this. (There might be another view in this issue)

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
It depends upon the ends and on the reality of what is done.
33. *Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?*  
In some aspect of it yes. But for the origin of human beings, no.

34. *Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?*  
Yes. Corruption is forbidden on any level.

35. *Do animals have any moral standing?*  
Yes.

36. *Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?*  
Yes. No one knows the specific time. All mankind will be gathered and judged by God (Allah), the believers (Muslims) will go to Paradise and the disbelievers will go to the Hellfire.

**Behavior**

37. *Is sex outside marriage permissible?*  
No.

38. *Is sex only for procreation?*  
No, it is also for pleasure.

39. *Is masturbation allowed?*  
In time of urgent need only.

40. *Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?*  
No.

41. *Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?*  
Yes.

42. *Is transvestism immoral?*  
Yes.

43. *Is homosexuality immoral?*  
Yes.

44. *Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?*  
Yes.

45. *Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?*  
No.

46. *Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?*  
For the wife only.

47. *Is divorce acceptable?*  
Yes
48. *Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?*
   Yes.

49. *Are men and women separate but equal?*
   In terms of humanity, yes.

50. *Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?*
   No.

51. *Should prayers be allowed in public schools?*
   Yes.

52. *Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?*
   Yes.

53. *Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?*
   Yes.

54. *Is gambling allowed?*
   No.

55. *Is smoking allowed?*
   No.
SHI'A

ONCE CONSIDERED UNORTHODOX ISLAM, today Shi’as have been accepted by most Muslim councils.

Shi’a Muslims maintain that only divinely designated prophets and messengers of god and imams (the successors to prophets) are guardians of the law and its proper interpreters. Leadership is based on the idea of divine grace, as it is traced through Ali, Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law.

The Shi'a Muslims represent about 30% of all Muslims, with the largest numbers found in Iraq and Iran, with 95% of Iran's population being Shi'a Muslims.

Moustafa Al-Qazwini
Imam, Islamic Educational Center of Orange County
Costa Mesa, California
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
   To be follow the teachings of God and his messengers.

2. Why be good?
   To fulfill the goal of our creation.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
   Yes. But good also means that humans attain success in the hereafter and enter paradise.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
   No, since believing in my religion embraces the essential belief in God. An apostate can display a good public attitude, but he is doing an injustice to himself when he denies the existence of God.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
   No. But religions came to enhance and support the best of morality.

6. What is the source of ethics?
   God and reason.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
   He can be good in certain things. In helping himself and the people and being a harmless person, he can be good but he could be bad by being ungrateful to God and denying his existence and his favor upon him.
8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?  
Through reason and the message of God.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?  
There are many reasons for that. One is a test from God. Second is as consequence of their mistakes since they are not infallible. Third could be reminder from God for some acts.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?  
Yes. The first not only harms the society, but also invades God's rules.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?  
The believer himself.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?  
Why not? Yes, I believe it should apply to everyone since it comes from the Creator and Sustainer of everyone.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?  
Enhances spirituality and morality

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?  
Some killings are. When it is done to punish criminals such as murderers, it is justifiable.

15. Is war ever justified?  
Some wars are. When the war is to defend yourself, to restore law and order, to save people's lives, property, integrity, and to implement justice.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?  
No.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?  
Yes.

18. Is force justifiable against children?  
No.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?  
On very rare occasions, if it prevents a major harm to the family.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?  
No.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?  
It is acceptable when life and land of the people are in danger.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?  
No.
23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?
Yes. For killing.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
If the life of the mother is threatened during pregnancy and labor.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
To identify the reason of death.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
In case it's necessary, yes.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
If it doesn't harm, yes.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
No.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
No.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
Yes. In this case, both conjoined twins' lives are subject to death.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
If it doesn't harm, yes.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
Only in the physical side.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Yes.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
No.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
Yes. Sorry, no idea about time and it will be total chaos.
Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?  
No.

38. Is sex only for procreation?  
No.

39. Is masturbation allowed?  
No.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?  
No.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?  
Yes.

42. Is transvestism immoral?  
Yes.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?  
Yes.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?  
No.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?  
No.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?  
No, in certain cases.

47. Is divorce acceptable?  
Yes. When life becomes unbearable by both spouses or either one.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?  
Yes. The roles are fatherhood, motherhood, husband, and wife.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?  
Yes.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?  
No.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?  
Yes.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?  
Yes.
53. **Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?**

Yes. The moral concerns around eating are such as: the food in unlawful, meaning either not belonging to us (stolen) or not slaughtered Islamically which causes the prayers not to be accepted but God. The food does not only affect us physically, but spiritually as well.

54. **Is gambling allowed?**

No.

55. **Is smoking allowed?**

No.
Ismaili Bohra

The Ismailis are in the Shi’a tradition and are distinguished by following Ismail as the 6th Imam. There are today only 2 branches of Ismailis. The Nizari branch has a living Imam, the 49th in a series. The Mustalians (mainly Dawoodi Bohras) believe in 21 Imams.

Today there are six million Ismailis, mainly in Afghanistan, Syria, India and Yemen.

Mustafa Abdulhussein
Shaikh, Anjuman-e-Hamidi
Burnage, Manchester
United Kingdom

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
To follows the commands of Allah, to seek moral rightness in all things and make it a pursuit of life.

2. Why be good?
It is Allah's wish. And since He created and sustains the worlds, it is for the good of all to be good.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
Yes.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
No.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
Yes.

6. What is the source of ethics?
Allah's laws, based on the needs of creation for their salvation.
7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
Yes — moral righteousness can be found anywhere, even with the religiously misguided, though it is rarer there then those who believe in God.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
The decisions are based on two things - the morality accepted by society in which the issue is to be judged and more importantly, the moral code defined by Islam.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
What happens to people is not a matter of simple cause and effect, but a far more complex cause and effect involving pre-life events too. All we can say is there the Justice of Allah is all-perfect and flawless.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
Yes. Morality is sometimes man-defined and as such, though important, its violation is repugnant but not sinful.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
There is no enforcement.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
There is little difference between the two. Our religion makes the seeking of all moral value the main preoccupation of believers — therefore the two tend to converge. However, the purely religious morality of our religion is never enforced on others.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
Provide a moral code, at least.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
Yes — as capital punishment and war.

15. Is war ever justified?
Yes — for upholding righteousness and fighting oppression.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
No — it is sinful and morally abominable.
17. *Can someone be a conscientious objector?*
Yes — against social law but not against religion.

18. *Is force justifiable against children?*
Yes — for cases such as education.

19. *Is force justifiable against a spouse?*
No.

20. *Is suicide ever justifiable?*
No.

21. *To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?*
Only for the sake of fighting oppression.

22. *Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?*
No.

23. *Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?*
Only for murder.

**Science and Medicine**

24. *Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?*
To save the life of the mother.

25. *Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?*
No.

26. *Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?*
Cosmetic surgery is acceptable though vain, the others are not as they are mutilations.

27. *Are transfusions allowed?*
Yes.

28. *Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?*
No.

29. *Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?*
Only the patient — and in extreme circumstances where the patient is unable to communicate, the immediate family.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
No.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
The parents can decide either way.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
Yes — provided its use is purely medicinal.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
Only partly.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Yes.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
Yes.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
It does predict end of cycles of time and continuation thereafter, each cycle being defined by a general awareness and closeness to God — or otherwise. It also predicts a complete end of the universe.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
No.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
No. Pleasure too.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
It is frowned upon but not disallowed.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
Yes.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
    Yes.

42. Is transvestism immoral?
    Yes.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
    Yes.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?
    Yes.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
    No.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?
    Men may have more than one — women may not.

47. Is divorce acceptable?
    Yes.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
    No — more an etiquette and way of life.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?
    Yes.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?
    No.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?
    Yes.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
    Yes.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
54. *Is gambling allowed?*  
No.

55. *Is smoking allowed?*  
No.
NATION OF ISLAM

FOUNDED IN DETROIT, MICHIGAN IN 1930, the Nation of Islam is distinct from orthodox Islam in several ways, mainly over the question of whether Allah appeared in the person of W. D. Fard, the founder of NOI and whether Elijah Muhammad was a messenger of God (Allah). Its racially based theology has also been questioned.

In recent years, some changes in NOI have moved it closer to acceptance by mainstream Islam.

Estimates of membership vary from 10,000 to more than a half-million followers.

Hamid Muhammad
Volunteer, Nation of Islam Online
Phoenix, Arizona
USA

(The respondent notes that the answers may not represent the official position of the Nation of Islam, although the answers have been reviewed by NOI Online. The views are pretty much the general view of the Nation of Islam. \)

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
To be good means to live a life that is in submission to the will of God (Allah). What you do corresponds with the standard God (Allah) outlines in the Scriptures. Meaning, your good can be "good for nothing" unless it affects and reaches out to society/others positively. We also recognize the truths of the Holy Bible, especially with reference to "None is Holy/Good but the Father." This makes the point that as humans, we all fall short of the glory of God and must seek His grace (undeserved kindness).

2. Why be good?
Personal satisfaction, personal development, peace within self and in the society, and for the peace/well being of the society

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
Yes

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
Yes, you can still be good but the further away we move from doing God (Allah)'s will, the result is transgression. If you make a conscious choice to live contrary to the will of God (Allah) resulting in the breaking of peace, we call that sin—still you can still be innately good and redemption is still open to you.
5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
Most requirements are intended to protect and strengthen the morals of the community and of the person.

6. What is the source of ethics?
Ethics grow out of your values which come from your ideal(s) — also known as your concept of God (Allah). When people accept beliefs (which encompass values) these beliefs develop into standards, policies and/or laws which govern the community.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
Yes. Atheists believe in a God (Allah), they just don't realize it.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
You measure actions according to the standard of God (Allah) which He outlines in the Scriptures through the words, deeds, and lessons left by the servants of God (Allah).

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
Sometimes good people are at the wrong place at the wrong time. Sometimes so-called "bad" things are trials that every human being faces. Sometimes "bad" things happen as a part of God (Allah)'s master plan. Sura 57:22: “No misfortune can happen on earth or in your souls but is recorded in a Book before We bring it into existence.”

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
We define religion as a way of life. Thus, generally speaking, no.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
First, each person is encouraged and exhorted to enforce moral rules because each person instinctively knows what is right/wrong within themselves. As the Holy Quran states, each person has a self-accusing voice within which, if you pray and listen to that inner voice, it can be a deterrent and reminder of doing wrong. There are also captains in each mosque who also help enforce rules.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
Yes (if you mean everyone within the Mosque) Outside, of the Mosque, not necessarily.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
We see Islam as a world and a way of life and not a merely system of rules and regulations. Thus, the role of Islamic law should be to ascertain that each person's rights are protected even if that person is not Muslim (protect and ensure democratic principles).

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
Self-defense.

15. Is war ever justified?
For the good (protection) of the State. Muslims are taught in the Holy Quran to never be the aggressors
16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
Deliberate violence, NO. However, as stated above sometimes in war, innocent people get killed when they are at the wrong place at the wrong time.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
Yes.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
No, except light spankings (not abuse).

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
No.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
No. We understand what can drive a person to suicide. "Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem." (quote unknown)

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
If one voluntarily sacrifices his life or something of great value for the sake of a belief or principle, then this definition of martyrdom is acceptable. This is not to denote in any way bringing injury or harm to others. It means giving up or placing secondary one’s personal desires and agendas in order to strive and devote one’s life to a cause or belief bigger than oneself. It’s giving of one’s time and energy towards their beliefs or principles.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
Generally no, although there was a Muslim couple who was faced with giving birth to their baby while there was risk to the mother's life during a complicated pregnancy. She and her husband prayed and both decided to go ahead with the delivery of the baby. Fortunately, she lived.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?
Generally speaking, heinous murders. Still, we believe in redemption. We currently support a moratorium on the death penalty due to an uneven system of justice in the United States — especially towards people of color.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
When the mother's life is endangered, in cases of rape, incest.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
Yes, all circumstances especially if you are uncertain about the cause of the death

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
Tattoos are discouraged. It has been shown that tattoos can cause permanent liver damage due to the chemical substances. Cosmetic surgery is a personal decision. If amputation will save your life, by all means, do it!
27. Are transfusions allowed?
Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
Yes — this is also a family decision as to how far they will go.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
Yes, personal/family decision

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
In terminal cases, this is a personal/family decision

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
This is a personal/family decision.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
Yes.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
We believe Life began with a single atom which built itself up. Thus, we may be closer to Creationism. We don’t believe human beings resulted from evolution.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Yes, we should honor and protect Mother Earth and all of our surroundings

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
Not necessarily although we have a moral obligation as humans to not treat animals with cruelty, to respect the chain of life and to preserve animals, especially those that are on the extinct list.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
We believe we are living in the last days of the end of this world of injustice, but we don't believe in an end wherein the earth will blow up (smile) but in a replacement of world rulers. The end of the world of injustice can be seen in the desire of people for a more just and balanced society where freedom, justice and equality are the rule of the day.

The end of the world of injustice will take place after war has broken the power of the current rulers and there is an eventual replacement of world leadership. [Yes, we do believe in a World War 3].

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
No.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
No, also for men and women who are in a committed relationship to find comfort and intimacy in one another

39. Is masturbation allowed?
   It has not been forbidden, thus, it is a personal decision. Generally, all Muslims are encouraged to restrain their sexual passions (outside marriage).

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
   Yes, we do not believe in sodomy.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
   We believe men and women should dress modestly. That is, the body can excite the senses and should not be accentuated. We believe that our Supreme qualities and characteristics should be emphasized from what is in our heads and not body parts as is emphasized in the world we live in today.

42. Is transvestism immoral?
   We don't believe in transvestism.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
   We don't believe in homosexuality. This does not mean we would treat anyone who is a transvestite or homosexual disrespectfully.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?
   "Immoral behavior" is not defined here but nevertheless, yes, as long as that behavior doesn't affect the well being of people and society.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
   No, we don't believe in gay marriages

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?
   No, polygamy is accepted in the Bible and Holy Quran although with limits and rules. We believe polygamy is the exception rather than the rule and is acceptable under certain circumstances.

47. Is divorce acceptable?
   Yes, when all means to save the marriage are exhausted and under egregious circumstances.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
   No, more so a matter of function.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?
   Yes and no. Equal in the sight of God (Allah), equal with respect to rights but because we are different in make up, we cannot say that we are equal beings. Men and women have essential differences. For example, women can get pregnant, men cannot. We communicate different and sometimes gender affects how we respond to various circumstances. See Sura 33: 35, Holy Quran.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?
No, except medicinal drugs and the best wine, in moderation.

51. *Should prayers be allowed in public schools?*

Yes.

52. *Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?*

In the current society the rule is no but, it has been done as in a case in New York with a Hasidic Jewish school. If it will be subsidized for one, it should be done for all, otherwise, don't do it.

53. *Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?*

Our diet is based upon what is good/healthy for us physically and spiritually as humans and what will prolong life.

54. *Is gambling allowed?*

No.

55. *Is smoking allowed?*

No.
JAINISM BEGAN IN INDIA IN THE 6TH CENTURY BCE as a movement within the larger Hindu complex. Founded as a distinct movement by Mahavira (599-527 BCE), by the 4th century, Jainism had developed beyond a small monastic group and spread from central India to both the south and west, where it took hold amongst the merchant class. It reached its peak in the 12th century CE.

Despite its size, it has exerted considerable influence in India, as Jainism's emphasis upon non-injury was taken up as a central concern for both Buddhism and Hinduism itself.

About 4 million people identify themselves as Jains, almost all of whom live in India. Today there are small numbers of Jain temples, societies and schools found in England as well as the U.S.

From www.Jainworld.net

Jaina ethics is considered as the most glorious part of Jainism and it is simplicity itself. That is why some authors have described Jainism as Ethical Realism. In this ethics there is no conflict between man's duty to himself and to society. Here the highest good society is the highest good of the individual. According to Jainism the soul has to be evolved to the duty of helping others by example, advice, encouragement and help.

It is maintained that the first precept to a follower of Jainism is that he should possess and cultivate an intelligent and reasoned faith in that religion. This faith must be of right type and should be free from false notions about God, scriptures and preceptors. Such right faith or belief works as an inspiration for acquisition of right type in daily life. Hence along with laying down the path of salvation consisting of right belief, right knowledge and right conduct, Jainism has also prescribed the definite rules of conduct to be observed by its followers. All these rules of conduct are directed towards the main aim of achieving freedom of the soul from the karmic matter, i.e., attaining salvation. In view of this aim it is emphasized that Jaina ethics has for its end the realization of nirvana or moksa, i.e., salvation. To effect this end, the rules of conduct have to be observed and corresponding virtues have to be acquired.

It is pertinent to note that the scheme of Jaina ethics that is, the rules of conduct have been so designed that all persons would be in a position to follow them. Accordingly, the rules of conduct prescribed by Jainism have been divided into two categories, viz., 1.those prescribed for sravakas, i.e., householders or laymen, and 2.those prescribed for munis, i.e., ascetics.
The rules of the first category are termed as sravaka-dharma or sagara-dharma and those of the second category are known as muni-dharma or anagara-dharma.

It is obvious that the rules laid down for the laity or householders are less rigid than those prescribed for ascetics because the householders have not renounced worldly activities for eking out their livelihood. The obvious reason for this differentiation is that a householder has to look after his family and adjust himself to the social and political conditions in which he lives. An ascetics, however, has no such limitation as he abandons all of them with the sole aim of pursuing a spiritual path. He can observe the vows fully as he is in full control of his senses and is in a position to curb his passions quite easily due to his religious learning and spiritual discipline.

Further, the followers of Jaina religion have been traditionally divided into four groups: sadhus or munis or yatis, i.e., the male ascetics; sadhvis or aryikas, i.e., female ascetics; sravakas, i.e., male laity or male householders, and sravikas, i.e., female laity or female householders.

Obviously, this division of followers of Jaina religion has been done according to sex and the strictness with which the members practice the injunctions laid down by Jaina religion. The rules of conduct prescribed for the first two categories of ascetics were almost identical and were to be observed with more strictness. Similar rules were enjoined upon the last two categories of laity but these are allowed to be practiced with less degree of strictness and according to one's own capacity. In each group the conduct was regulated by vows which every member was required to observe in his or her daily life.

Since the aim of the rules of conduct and vows prescribed for the sravakas and sravikas, is self-purification, it is but natural that they should be classified on the basis of their capacity. The sravakas is a term used to designate a layman. The sravaka is defined as srnoti iti sravakah, that is, the sravaka is a layman who srnoti, i.e., listen to and accordingly follows religious precepts. Obviously, the term sravka is used for a Jaina householder who has faith in his religion and is accustomed to put into practice the precepts of religion according to his capacity.

It is common experience that men and women differ in their capacity for intellectual grasp and firmness of will. Some Jaina thinkers have accordingly adopted a three-fold division of the sravakas as follows:

1. Paksika sravaka is a layman who has a paksa, i.e., inclination, towards ahimsa, i.e., the basic principle of non-injury to living beings. He possesses samyaktva, i.e., firm faith in Jaina religion, and practices the mula-gunas, i.e., the basic or primary virtues of a Jaina householders, and also the anu-vratas, i.e., the small vows, prescribed for observance by a Jaina householder, and is assiduous in performing the puja, i.e., worship.

2. Naisthika sravaka is a layman who pursues the path upward through the pratimas, i.e., the stages of householder's life, till he reaches the last, that is the eleventh stage. At this nistha, i.e., culminating point, he quits the household life and practices ten kinds of dharma, i.e., virtues of the ascetics. It would seem that if he backslides he is downgraded to the stage of a paksika sravaka.

3. Sadhaka sravaka is a layman who sadhayati, i.e., concludes his human incarnation in a final purification of the self by carrying out sallekhana, peaceful ritual death by fasting.
In view of his two-fold categorization of sravaka-dharma and muni-dharma, let us see the ethical code or rules of conduct prescribed both for the householders and the ascetics.

Ethical code for Householders

The ethical code prescribed for layman or householders is divided into the observance of twelve vratas or vows; eleven pratimas or stages in householder’s life, six avasykas or daily duties; and general principles of appropriate conduct.

As these rules of conduct for layman form the core of sravaka-dharma, it is necessary to have a proper understanding of these observances.

Twelve Vratas or Vows

Vratas or a vow is a solemn resolve made after deliberation to observe a particular rule of conduct; it is made before a saint on his advice or voluntarily to protect oneself against possible lapses of conduct. The object is to control the mind and mold one's conduct along the spiritual path. The rules are such as are intended to protect the society from harm by projecting oneself on the righteous path. A vow affords stability to the will and guards its votary from the evils of temptation or of unguarded life; it gives purpose to life and healthy direction to our thoughts and actions. It helps the growth of self-control and protects against the pitfalls of free life.

It is laid down that a layman should try to avoid the following five aticharas, i.e., shortcomings, of faith before he begins to observe the vows which mark the first stage of right conduct: sanka, doubt or skeptic; kanksa, desire of sense pleasures; vichikitsa, disgust of anything, for example, with a sick or deformed person; anyadrsti-prasamsa, thinking admiringly of wrong believers; and anyadrsti-samstava, praising wrong believers.

The householders are expected to observe in their daily lives the following twelve vratas or vows consisting of: (A) five anu-vratas, i.e., small vows; (B) three guna-vratas, i.e., multiplicative vows, and (C) four siksa-vratas, i.e., disciplinary vows.

These vows form the central part of the ethical code and by their observance laymen can maintain constant progress in their spiritual career aimed at the attainment of final liberation.

Anu-vratas

The main five vows of the Jaina are as follows: (i) ahimsa, abstention from violence or injury to living beings, (ii) satya, abstention from false speech, (iii) asteya, abstention from theft, (iv) brahmacharya, abstention from sexuality or unchastity, and (v) aparigraha, abstention from greed for worldly possessions.

As regards the extent and intensity in the observance of these vratas it is stated that if these vows are strictly observed they are known as mahavratast, i.e., great vows and naturally these are meant for the ascetics. Laymen, however, cannot observe vows so strictly and therefore they are allowed to practice them so far as their conditions permit. Therefore, the same vratas, i.e., vows when partially observed are termed as anuvratas, i.e., small vows.
Again, for fixing of these five vows in the mind, there are five kinds of bhavanas, i.e., attendant meditations, for each of the vows, and every person is expected to think over them again and again.

Further, every person must meditate that five faults meant to be avoided in these five vows are in fact pain personified and are of dangerous and censurable character in this as well as in the next world.

Moreover, every person must meditate upon the following four virtues which are based upon the observance of these five vows: maitri, friendship with all living beings; pramoda, delight at the sight of beings better qualified or more advanced than ourselves on the path of liberation; kearny, compassion for the afflicted; and madhyasthya, tolerance or indifference to those who are uncivil or ill-behaved.

Furthermore, the observance of the five anuvratas, i.e., small vows, and refraining from the use of three 'makaras' (three M's) namely madya (i.e., wine), mamsa, (i.e., flesh or meat) and madhu, (i.e., honey) are regarded as eight mula-gunas, i.e., the basic or primary virtues of a householder. For minimizing injury to living beings, complete abstinence of win, flesh and honey is advocated, and every householder must necessarily possess these eight primary or fundamental virtues.

Guna-vratas

In addition to five main vrata or vows, a householder is enjoined upon to practice three gunavratas, i.e., the multiplicative vows, which increase the value of the main vows. These three gunavratas are: (i) digvratas, taking a life-long vow to limit one's worldly activity to fixed points in all directions, (ii) desavarta, taking a vow to limit the above also to a limited area, and (iii) anarthadanda-vrata, taking a vow not to commit purposeless sinful actions, or to abstain from wanton sinful activities.

Siksa-vratas

Along with the five anuvratas and three gunavratas, a householder is required to practice four siksa-vratas, i.e., disciplinary vows which are devised to prepare an individual to follow the discipline prescribed for the ascetics. The four siksavratas are: (i) Samayika is taking a vow to devote particular time everyday to contemplation or meditation of the self for spiritual advancement, (ii) Prosadhopavasa is taking a vow to fast on four days of the month, namely, the two eighth and two fourteenth days of the month, (iii) Upabhoga-paribhoga-parimana is taking a vow everyday limiting one's enjoyment of consumable and non-consumable things, (iv) Atithi-samvibhaga is taking a vow to take one's food only after feeding the ascetics, or, in their absence, the pious householders.

It may be noted that three gunavratas and four siksavratas are grouped together and are known as silavratas, i.e., supplementary vows because these vows perform the work of supplementing or protecting the five main anuvratas just as towns are protected or guarded by the encircling walls built around them.

Thus the five anuvratas, the three gunavratas and the four siksavratas constitute the twelve vrata or vows of a householder. There are five aticharas, i.e., defects or partial transgressions, for each of these twelve vows and they are to be avoided by the observers of these vows.
In addition to the above twelve vows a householder is expected to practice in the last moment of his life the process of sallekhana, i.e., peaceful or voluntary death. A layman is expected not only to live a disciplined life but also to die bravely a detached death. This voluntary death is to be distinguished from suicide which is considered by Jainism as a cowardly sin. It is laid down that when faced by calamity, famine, old age and disease against which there is no remedy, a pious householder should peacefully relinquish his body, being inspired by a higher religious ideal. It is with a quiet and detached mood that he would face death bravely and voluntarily. This sallekhana is added as an extra vow to the existing twelve vows of a householder. Like other vows, the vow of sallekhana has also got five aticharas, i.e., partial transgressions, which are to be avoided by a householder.

The most significant feature of these twelve vows is that by practicing these vows a layman virtually participates, to a limited extent and for a limited period time, in the routine of an ascetic without actually renouncing the world. It is obvious that such practices maintain a close tie between the laymen and the ascetics as both are actuated by the same motive and are moved by the same religious ideals.

The Eleven Pratimas or Stages

A layman who is desirous of attaining to greater heights in ethical and spiritual progress can do so by regulating his way of life. The word pratima is used to designate the stages of ethical progress in a householder's life. By treading the path of progress, a layman acquires capacity for spiritual advancement. The pratimas or stages are closely connected with the twelve vratas or vows prescribed for laymen.

Further, the householder's life has been divided into eleven pratimas or stages. These pratimas form a series of duties and performances, the standard and duration of which rise periodically and which finally culminate in an attitude resembling monkshood. Thus the pratimas rise by degrees and every stage includes all the virtues practiced in those preceding it. The conception of eleven pratimas reveals in the best manner the rules of conduct prescribed for the laymen. Hence, the pratimas are like the rungs of ladder: a layman desirous of spiritual progress must mount the ladder step until he reaches the top, that is, the highest stage of spirituality as a layman.

The eleven pratimas or stages laid down for householders are as follows:

1. Darsana Pratima: The householder must possess the perfect intelligent and well-reasoned faith in Jainism, that is, he should have a sound knowledge of its doctrines and their applications in life. He must be free from all misconceptions and also from attachment to worldly pleasures of every kind.

2. Vrata pratima: The householder must observe the twelve vows, that is, five anuvratas, three gunavratas and four siksavratas, without transgressions of any of them. He must also keep up the extra vow of sallekhana. Such a householder is called a vrati.

3. Samayika Pratima: When the observance of the twelve vows is satisfactory, the householder should perform samayika which temporarily assimilates him to the status of an ascetic. Samayika consists in worshipping regularly, in general for forty-eight minutes, three times daily. Here worship means self-contemplation and purification of one's ideas and emotions.
4. Prosadhopavasa Pratima: This is a judge of fasting and it involves fasting regularly, as a rule, twice a fortnight in each lunar month. The entire period of fasting has to be spent in prayer, study of scriptures, meditation and hearing of religious discourses.

5. Insufficiently cooked vegetables and foodstuffs and should also refrain from serving such food to others. Similarly, he should not trample upon any growing plant or pluck fruits from a tree. According to the Svetambara texts this vow is ranked seventh in the list of Pratimas. Unboiled water as well as liquids that contain salts are also prohibited.

6. Ratri-Bhojana-tyaga Pratima: In this stage the householder abstains form taking any kind of food after sunset. This practice is extended to include abstinence from taking any kind of drink also at night. According to the Svetambara texts, the sixth stage refers to abraham- varjana pratima wherein the layman is prohibited from having not only sexual contact but also being alone with his wife and engaging in conversation with her.

7. Brahmacharya Pratima: The householder in this stage must observe complete celibacy, maintain sexual purity, put an end to all sexual desires and even avoid the use of all personal decorations which would lead to sexual desires. According to the Svetambara texts, abraham-varjana pratima is the sixth stage requiring similar restrictions on sexual life.

8. Arambha-tyaga Pratima: The stage contemplates has to make further advance in this stage. He must refrain from all activities like commerce, agriculture, service etc. exercised directly or indirectly for livelihood. This he has to do with a view to avoid himsa, i.e., injury to living beings, as far as possible. If he has children, he must give them all their shares and must use what is left with him for his maintenance and for giving as charity to others. In this stage the Svetambara texts, however, do not seem to prohibit activity exercised indirectly through agents or servants for the sake of livelihood.

9. Parigraha-tyaga Pratima: This stage contemplates the abandonment of all kinds of attachment. The householder should give up ten kinds of worldly possessions, viz., land, house, silver, gold, cattle, grain, clothes, utensils, maidservants and male-servants. Even in matters like food, shelter and clothing, he should keep just enough for his mere requirements. In a way he should train himself generally to bear the hardships incidental to a life of asceticism. Hence this stage is essentially one of preparation for the eleventh stage. The Svetambara texts use the word presya-tyaga pratima to denote this stage. It requires the householder to lay down the burdens of worldly life and stop carrying on any activity through servants and agents. He reduces his requirements to the minimum and cherishes a longing for final release.

10. Anumati-tyaga Pratima: A householder in this stage has to increase the vigor of his living in the direction of asceticism. As such he should give up all his activities like trade and agriculture, his attachments to property and his concern with any of the family affairs. He should not express either consent or dissent towards any of the activities or functions carried on by any of the members of his family.

11. Uddista-tyaga Pratima: This is the highest stage of discipline for a householder. Here he abandons his family house, goes to a forest or a lonely place for shelter and adopts the rules laid down for the guidance of ascetics. He will not accept invitation for food. This is the highest stage of a Sravaka and hence he is called Uttama Sravaka.
According to Svetambara texts, the Uddista-tyaga Pratima is the tenth stage and the eleventh stage is called the Sramana-bhuta Pratima. In this stage the householder observe according to his capacity the rules of conduct prescribed for the ascetics.

A householder is advised that according to his ability and environment he should proceed stage by stage and that he should observe the rules of discipline that are prescribed for each stage. It, therefore, follows that the progress which a householder can achieve would finally depend upon his own convictions and faith in the Jaina philosophy. Psychologically, there cannot be a sudden change in life from the stage of material attachments to the stage of renunciation. That is why the eleven stages of discipline involving practice of vigorous mental and spiritual austerities is quite practical and worthy of realization by every aspirant. The final stage of a householder is, thus, a preparation for asceticism. He practically performs all the austerities and awaits his initiation into asceticism.

It is obvious that these eleven stages are scientifically conceived and practically graded. The graded steps have to be climbed one after the other only after the householder has been firm in the preceding step or steps. The climbing commences with the 'Right Belief', and progress is achieved only when he is prepared to observe the more difficult vows and rules of conduct. Thus through these eleven stages a householder is fully prepared for practicing the severe course of ascetic life.

Six Avasyakas

Apart from the observance of twelve vratas, i.e., vows and eleven pratimas, i.e., stages, a householder is also required to perform six Avasyakas, i.e., daily duties. As regards the nomenclature of these six Avasyakas, i.e., daily duties, there is a difference of opinion among different authors. Accordingly, the six daily duties of a householder are commonly listed as follows: Devapuja gurupastih svadhyayah samyamastapah, Danam cheti grhasthanam satkarmani dine dine, that is, the six daily activities or duties of householders are: worship of God, worship of the preceptor, study of scriptures, practice of self control, practice of austerities, and giving gifts.

General Principles of Appropriate Conduct

On the basis of the rules of Right Conduct laid down in Jaina scriptures, the prominent Jaina Acharyas or saints and thinkers have enunciated a number of general principles of appropriate conduct as guidance for putting them into actual practice by the sravakas or householders during their entire career as members of the Jaina community. These principles are also termed as Sravaka-gunas, i.e., qualities of an ideal householder. In this connection among the relevant Svetambara Jaina texts, the important treatise entitled Yoga-sastra composed by the renowned Acharya Hemachandra presents a list of the thirty-five attributes of an ideal sravaka or general principles of appropriate conduct of sravakas:

1. Nyayasampannavibhavah : Possessed of honestly earned wealth.
2. Sistachara-prasamsakah : Eulogistic of the conduct of the virtuous.
4. Kulasila-samaih sardham anyagotrajaih krtodvahah : Wedded to a spouse of the same caste and traditions but not of the same Gotra.
5. Prasiddham desacharam samacharan : Following the reputable usages of the country.
6. Avarnavadi na kvapi rajadisu visesatah : Not denigrating other people, particularly rulers.
7. Anativyakte gupte sthane suprativesmike aneka- nirgamadvaravivarjita-niketana : Dwelling in a place which is not too exposed and not too enclosed, with good neighbors, and few exits.

8. Sat-acharaiah krt-sangah : Attached to good moral standards.
10. Upaplum sthnam tyajan : Eschewing a place of calamity.
12. Vyyam ayochatam kurvan : Spending in proportion to one's income.
13. Vesam viitanusaratah kurvan : Dressing in accordance with one's income.
14. Astabhii dhiguniyah yuktah : Endowed with the eight kinds of intelligence.
15. Dharman anvaham srnvvan : Listening everyday to the sacred doctrine.
17. Kale bhokta satmyatah : Eating at the right time according to a dietary regime.
18. Anyonya-pratibandhena trivargam sadhayan : Fulfilling the three-fold aim of life, that is, dharma, artha and kama - without excluding any of its elements.
19. Yathavat atithau sadhau dine cha pratipatti-krt : Diligent in succoring the ascetics, the righteous and the needy.
22. Adsaka-layoh chryam tyajan : Avoiding action which is inappropriate to time and place.
24. Vratasthajna-vaardhanam pujaka : Venerating persons of high morality and discernment.
27. Visesajna : Discriminating.
31. Sadaya : Compassionate.
32. Saumya : Gentle in disposition.
33. Paropakrti-karmatha : Ready to render service to others.
34. Antarangari-sadvarga-parihara-parayana : Intent on avoiding the six adversaries of the soul.
35. Vasikrtendriyagrama : Victorious over the organs of sense.

On the same line among the Digambara texts, the reputed work entitled Sravakachara, i.e., Rules of Conduct for the householders, composed by the most revered Acharya Amitagati has given the following list of eleven gunas, i.e., attributes of a parama-sravaka, i.e., best householder :

2. Dhira : Steadfast.
5. Vatsala : Tenderhearted.
7. Heyadeya-patistha : skilled in discerning what is to be accepted and what to be eschewed.
8. Gurucharanaradhanodayata-manisa : Ready in mind to adore guru's feet;
9. Jina-vachana-toya-dhauta-svantah-kalanka: Having the taints on one's heart washed clean by the Jina's words.

Thus it is clear that both the Digambara and Svetambara texts have been very particular about impressing on the minds of Sravakas their responsibility to lead proper religious life and to become useful members of society.

As regards these principles of appropriate conduct for laymen it can be said in general that if the householder would carefully observe these principles of conduct, he would come into the possession of following qualities which every true gentleman should possess. He would be serious in demeanor, clean as regards both his person and clothes, good-tempered, popular, merciful, afraid of sinning, straight-forward, wise, modest, kind, moderate, gentle, careful in speech, sociable, cautious, studious, reverent both to old age and ancient customs, grateful, benevolent and attentive to business.

Mehool Sanghrajka
Head Teacher, Shri Chandana Vidyapeeth
London
United Kingdom

**Preamble:**

1. The prime teaching of Jainism is non-violence towards any form of life.

2. Jainism as a religion has salvation as its objective not worldly life. In its early days, it also stressed an almost unconditional emphasis on renunciation — even today asceticism is still seen as the ideal.

3. Jainism believes that the religion will change and adapt to the needs of the time and place in which it is practiced and hence the social/moral/ethical rules and codes have changed over its long history.

4. There are no commonly accepted Jain views on worldly matters and hence the views here are my own.

5. Jain laity have prescribed a set of 12 'minor' vows (as opposed to the 5 'major' vows of a monk) — however, in practice, very few people formally accept them.

6. Jainism believes in the many-sidedness of reality and hence I should state that I have answered the questions below from the perspective of the Jain scriptures — which may not be reflective of practice today.
7. The Jain religion does not believe in a creator God. In fact, it preaches that all souls have the capacity to achieve omniscience or "godhood" and achieve liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth.

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
A good person is one who through mind, speech or body neither causes, asks others to cause nor approves others causing harm/violence to any form of life (human, animal, plant, microorganisms).

Therefore Jains are generally vegetarian and do not usually participate in business or other activities that include any form of violence.

2. Why be good?
Each living being (human, animal, plant, microorganisms) contains a unique, individual soul that is undergoing transmigration in the cycle of birth and death. By harming another soul, you are in fact causing inflow and bondage of 'karma' to your own soul that keeps your soul in the worldly cycle and prevents you from attaining liberation.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
Yes. The definition above is somewhat 'universal' and has no specific reference to Jainism. The only aspect that is 'Jain' is the two specifics: that life is human, animal, plant, microorganism, and that all forms of life contain a unique 'soul' that is distinct from the body. In its reincarnation, the soul takes birth in any form of life - dependent entirely on its karma.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
Belief in the soul, the forms of life and the transmigratory cycle due to karma is defined as 'faith' within the Jain religion. As stated above, a 'good person' is one who is non-violent. But without 'right faith', his actions are seen to be misguided as he is seen to be acting without 'right knowledge'.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
The first five vows of lay Jains are: non-violence, truth, non-stealing, limitation of possession/attachment to worldly things and control of passion/monogamy. These constitute 'morality' and are the characteristics of a Jain.

6. What is the source of ethics?
The Jain path to liberation consists of having 'Right faith, right knowledge and right conduct'. Conduct is prescribed by the 12-vows of a layperson. In addition to the 5 vows above, the rest are concerned with penance, atonement, serving monks/nuns, etc; designed to both develop mental strength to progress along one's path as well as foster detachment from worldly attachment and passion.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
In some respects, all Jains are atheists in that they do not believe in a creator God. 'Good', as described above, is not linked to 'Jain' belief. 'God' in Jainism is that soul that has achieved liberation. Jains believe that all souls are capable of liberation.
8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
Generally, anything that is done with a 'right' intention is good and anything that is done through passions (anger, pride, deceit, greed) or causes harm/suffering to any form of life is wrong. Specifically, 'right action' is that which removes 'karma' from your soul and helps it on its path to liberation. Conversely, anything that binds karma to your soul is 'wrong action'.

Jains accept that worldly life involves violence.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
Everything that happens does so as a result of fruition of 'karma'. This karma is carried by the soul birth after birth (shedding of all karma is therefore liberation). When bad things happen to a person, it is because he has bound such karma in this or a previous life, possibly by carrying out a similar action himself.

There are many Jain stories that show that a person inflicting pain/suffering in one life faces a similar fate in another life himself.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
Not in lay Jainism. Jains have developed many rules about monastic life and conduct, with various 'punishments' for breaking rules/vows. These offences have not in general been carried into lay Jainism.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
Within the monastic society, the 'Acharya' or leader or the monastic group will enforce rules.

There is no equivalent for lay Jains. Jains are taught that through their actions they will bind karma and they alone will enjoy the fruits of that karma. There is no person/body/church that gives judgement/punishment — it happens automatically!

The major Jain rituals/practices are usually centred around atonement and the need to confess/realise one's sins.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
Yes. Since they all centre around non-violence to any form of life, they are indeed universal.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
The Jain religion is perhaps unique in that it defines the purpose of human life: to achieve liberation from the karmic cycle. By definition it therefore sets a moral and ethical code.

This is perhaps the role of religion in any society.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
Yes, in self-defence using the minimal force necessary.
15. Is war ever justified?
Yes, in self-defence using the minimal force necessary.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
No never. Indeed, violence towards innocent animals is also not justified.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
Yes. when they object to any form of unnecessary violence.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
When occasional minimal force is applied in order to teach/discipline, it may be justified. 
Unnecessary violence is never justified.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
No.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
The definition of 'suicide' is necessary here. Somebody taking their life out of passion
(and usually in the form of a violence - use of gun etc) is never justifiable.
However Jainism teaches of a 'controlled death', when one knows that the time is near,
through controlled fasting - in order to die 'in control' of one's mind and faculties since it has
great karmic benefits. Also as Jains strongly believe in reincarnation, this is seen as a process of
transmigration, not death. It is however, most certainly not seen as 'suicide' since it is neither out
of passion nor carried out in a violent way.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
In their long history, Jains have never fought holy wars. They have also not believed in
an active practice of converting non-Jains to Jains. Therefore, there are no 'traditional' martyrs.
However, those who live by Jain tenets (especially monks), undergoing great penances
and dying a 'controlled death' are seen as great martyrs.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
Killing an innocent person is never justified. Since in Jainism all living beings are seen as
souls, and since all souls are equal, killing one for another can never be justifiable.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?
There are no Jain states in the world. Jainism has flourished mainly in India where capital
punishment does not exist.

From a non-violence point of view, it cannot be justified and from a purely philosophical
perspective, Jains believe that, through karma, each person suffers for his crimes — if not in this
world, then in the next. Therefore, there is no need for a man-made remedy. But this is idealistic.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
Ideally none — since this is seen as violence against an innocent life. However, questions
of mother's well being and rape raise other social issues — which are outside the question of
emancipation and hence not well covered.
25. *Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?*
Jains believe that once a person dies, his soul leaves his body and in an instant is reborn in another. Therefore the dead body has little/no use and is usually cremated with almost no ceremony. Therefore autopsies are not of any consequence.

26. *Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?*
Jains believe that the body is temporary and the soul is permanent. The two are distinct and separate. The body is seen, in scriptural terms, as the source of illness, disease and suffering and hence there are no rules about maintaining it/preserving it.

27. *Are transfusions allowed?*
Yes — see 26.

28. *Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?*
Jains believe that life ends when the "Ayu" or lifespan-karma runs out. Therefore it is not possible to prolong life.

It may be possible to prolong the life of bodily organs, but if the soul has left the body, then there is no 'consciousness'.

29. *Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?*
See 28. Death can only occur when the "Ayu" or lifespan-karma runs out.

30. *Does anyone have the right to hasten death?*
See 29. It is not possible to hasten death. {note: it may appear that someone has hastened death — by suicide for instance — in reality, however, death was always going to occur at that time and the 'suicide' is no more than an instrument to effect that.}

31. *In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?*
There are many perspectives to this question: Firstly, if there is one soul or two in the body. (Practically — one mind or two). If one, then there is not death in separation.

Secondly if there are two, then separation on the basis of preserving one life rather than killing two is permissible — act of compassion.

Thirdly, there is the argument that after separation (and before) death is determined by karma — as is the conjoined body.

32. *Is genetic engineering permissible?*
Genetic engineering, like other scientific developments, is possibly nothing more than human egoism — belief that we can create/control. In the end, its results and consequences are their own — as seen by our inability to control aids, mad cow, TB etc., etc.

The question of interfering with God's creation does not arise, since there is no God. Souls attain bodies due to their karma and suffer as a result of that karma. Although we believe that we can do things, in the larger scale of things we really have little or no control.
33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
Yes—the universe has its own dynamics and undergoes constant change due to its nature.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Yes—plants and vegetation, as well as microorganisms in earth, fire, wind and air, are all said to contain life/souls that are identical to our own. Therefore, destruction of the environment is violence that takes life.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
Animals also contain souls and hence should never be subjected to pain, cruelty etc. Jains are usually vegetarian. Jains are also renowned in India for setting up animal sanctuaries for old or sick animals and birds.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
Jainism says that the universe has ascending and descending time cycles and so regenerates and goes through periods.

We are currently in the 5th period (out of 6) of the descending cycle called "misery"—both lasting some 21,000 years (possible not consistent with the current definition of 'year'). The 6th is called "great misery" after which life will again start on the ascending cycle.

Human will undergo untold suffering as we pass through these two periods before the end of the half-cycle.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
The lay-vow of celibacy says that one should be content (in mind, speech and body) with one's own wife and should not indulge in 'abnormal', or excessive sex.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
See 37. Apart from procreation, sex is seen as a result of passion/desire of the mind and therefore accepted (within rules above) as a necessary evil!
Passion is seen as the general source of sin and violence.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
See 37.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
See 37.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
No. Jains however live closely integrated within the larger Hindu society in India and therefore follow the 'Indian' moral and social codes of dress and behaviour.
42. Is transvestism immoral?
Within 'Indian' society, transvestites (male eunuch dressed as a woman) are commonplace but excluded from society. Jains similarly have excluded them from Jain society as outcasts.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
See 37. Homosexuality is not considered 'normal behaviour' in Indian society and not usually openly practiced.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?
Yes. The law is universal and all people are equal.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
Jains do not have a prescribed marriage ceremony and most Jains get married according to Hindu custom. From answers above, it will become clear that India and Indians have not generally been faced with this issue and so have not developed strong views towards it. From the answer to Q 37, homosexuality does not fit into the Jain vow of lay celibacy and hence cannot be condoned.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?
Yes. See Q 37.

47. Is divorce acceptable?
Since there is no 'Jain' marriage, then there is no 'Jain' divorce. The view taken is that of general 'Indian' society — that it is acceptable under certain conditions of violence, adultery etc.

Due to family and society pressures, and the views of tolerance and acceptance of one's own fate (due to karma) divorce is still not commonplace in Indian society. It is seen as a matter of shame for the family.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
Both men and women can attain liberation in (Svetambara) Jainism and hence soteriologically are equal.

The roles of men and women in society is defined by Indian social custom rather than by religious or moral issues.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?
Yes. See 48.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?
Any addiction weakens the mind and leads to a state where one acts without control. In this state one is prone to strong passions and to act violently. It is this aspect that Jainism preaches against from the viewpoint of liberation.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?
Yes — as long as students are free to participate and pray in whatever manner they choose.
52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
Yes — for people and society to progress spirituality, ethics, morality and conduct are an essential component that should be taught from an early age. The state should encourage such teaching as long as it is taught within the context of tolerance and harmony.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
Yes — by eating meat, one condones violence towards animals. By eating food that is 'rich' one becomes full of passion and desires and by eating too much, one becomes weak and lethargic.

Food is there to sustain the body and hence should be simple and limited. It should be produced with minimal violence.

54. Is gambling allowed?
See Q 50.

55. Is smoking allowed?
See Q 50.
JUDAISM

Man should perform his duties to his fellow men even as to God.

*Mishnah: Shekalim*

JUDAISM IS THE OLDEST OF THE THREE MAJOR monotheistic religions in the western world. Its roots are in the 2nd millennium and was codified into the Mosaic Law around 400 BCE. After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, Judaism became mainly rabbinically based.

There are three main branches of contemporary Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. There are also mystical and humanistic forms of Judaism that are relatively minor.

Worldwide there are between 12-17 million Jews, divided about equally between Israel and the United States. Perhaps as many as a quarter of this number consider themselves to be non-religious Jews but understand themselves to be part of the Jewish people.

Arthur Gross Schaefer
Reprinted with permission from Reform Judaism magazine, published by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

There are Eleven Core Jewish values. The following is brief description of each:

**Honesty**
We are commanded by our tradition to be truthful and to correct misimpressions. "Thou shalt not steal." (Exodus 20:13) We are also taught that one should speak out against all forms of slander, defamation, and misrepresentation, whether of an individual, a group, a people, a race, or a faith. "They that deal truly are God's delight." (Proverbs 12:22)

**Integrity**
One is required to be consistent in words and actions. We often tell our children that it is wrong to lie and then teach them to do so through our actions. Integrity implies completeness, a consistency in word, action, and conviction. "Mark the person of integrity, and behold the upright." (Psalms 37:37)

**Brit**
Keeping one's word is a sacred statement of one's spiritual commitment to be in a covenantal relationship with the Divine. This means mirroring God by fulfilling the letter and the spirit of our commitments to others.

**Loyalty**
Being in a trusting relationship means that one is willing to publicly take uncomfortable stands to support one's friends. We are expected to be loyal to God, to our parents (Exodus 20:12), to our tradition, and to those with whom we have developed a trusting relationship.
Tzedakah
We are taught to give charity, to refrain from excessive judgments, to contribute directly to the needy, and to extend kind words. Tzedakah involves both justice and righteousness. Isaiah 1:17 states: "Seek justice and relieve the oppressed."

Chesed
One is to practice acts of mercy, acts of chesed (kindness and compassion), even when it may not be convenient. As God has dealt with us in mercy, so we should deal with others. "Show mercy and compassion, every one to your neighbor." (Zach. 7:9)

Respect for Human Dignity
Our notion of the infinite worth of human life stems from the fact that all people are created "in the image of God." Therefore, each individual is deserving of respect as a unique creation of the Divine.

Respect for Law
Jewish tradition has always demanded good citizenship, which requires following fair laws and showing regard for the decision-making process of the community in which we live. "The law of the state is the law." (Talmud, Gitten 10b) However, this does not demand blind obedience to the community's laws where they are in conflict with other ethical values.

Accountability
Our tradition holds us answerable to God and to others for our inactions as well as our actions. "Judaism does not say, 'Thou shall believe' but 'Thou shall do.'" (Moses Mendelssohn) "Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor." (Leviticus 19:16)

Taking Responsibility
Ethical people accept responsibility for their decisions and set an example for others. One is responsible whether the act is intentional or inadvertent. (Mishnah Baba Kamma 1:2)

Tikkun Olam
While we cannot solve all the world's ills, we are commanded to help those who are less fortunate, including those who labor under conditions of oppression and exploitation. The concept of tikkun olam, literally "repair of the world," has come to stand for our Jewish commitment to make the world more merciful. Within our communities there are many shattered spirits, broken holy vessels. Our mission is to help repair those spirits and to share whatever God has given us with those less fortunate.
CONSERVATIVE

STANDING BETWEEN REFORM AND ORTHODOX approaches to Judaism, Conservative Judaism began in German in the mid-19th century. It remains open to slow changes within Judaism without radically altering Jewish practice.

Nearly 40% of America's nearly 6 million Jews identify themselves as Conservatives, making it the largest of the three main groupings of American Judaism.

Michael Katz
Rabbi, Temple Beth Torah
Westbury, New York
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
A Jewish legend imagines a balance scale in heaven. As each person dies, they appear before God, the Supreme Judge. All of their good deeds are poured onto one side of the scale, and all of their bad deeds are placed on the other side. If the good deeds outweigh the bad, that person is considered a Tzaddik — a righteous or good person. If the bad deeds outweigh the good, they are considered a Rasha — a wicked, or evil person.

2. Why be good?
First, because being good (or more properly, doing good) is a Mitzvah — a commandment of God. Secondly, because human beings are considered God's partners in the ongoing creation of the world. Our task is Tikkun Olam — the repair or the fixing of all that is broken or wrong with the world; in so doing, we make the world a "heaven on earth."

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
Yes. Judaism posits that there are 613 commandments that a Jew must observe. But it teaches that there are the Seven Commandments of the children of Noah- 7 basic things that non-Jews are expected to observe. (It is easier for a non-Jew to be a good person than for a Jew to be one!)

4. Can an apostate be a good person?
In the Midrash, the Rabbis imagine God saying to the Jews: "Would that you rejected Me, but followed My ways." For reasons of history, politics, and sociology, Jews have always seen apostates as "traitors" to their people. But from the point of view of Jewish theology, the key is that one do good deeds. (However, an apostate turning against his or her own people and doing something to harm them — as was often the case throughout Jewish history — would undermine the notion of the apostate doing good).

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
To traditional Judaism, there was no difference between Ethics and Rituals — both were mitzvot, commandments from God. Often, the point of a ritual was to elicit ethical behavior).
Reform Judaism broke with this unity, and divided mitzvot into ethical injunctions and ritual laws. Ethical injunctions were obligatory and eternally binding; ritual laws were voluntary, and often disparaged and discarded.

6. What is the source of ethics?
Ethics come from the Written Law — the Torah, which comes from God, and from the Oral Law, the Talmud and the Midrash, which is the word of God as interpreted by the Rabbis.

7. Can an atheist be a good person?
Judaism would view an atheist as mistaken; denying God was seen as a sin. But an atheist could clearly live an ethical life by doing ethical deeds, which originate with God.

8. How do you decide right and wrong?
We follow the Torah, which tells us right from wrong. For questions that are not explicitly stated in the Torah we consult the Talmud and the Codes of Law, or we turn to the Rabbis who counsel us and teach us what is right and what is wrong.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
There are several answers to this problem in Jewish theology. The most basic answer was that bad things come as a punishment for doing wrong. Others questioned the fairness of terrible evil happening to innocent people. Another answer was that bad things come as a way of testing us, or of refining us. Another approach was to see no connection between God and what happened to a person: God gave humans free will, and humans can choose to do evil to one another; accidents and disease are random events.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral offence?
For religious offences, we must ask God for forgiveness; for moral offences (against other people) we must turn to those we offended and ask their forgiveness and make restitution to them.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
There is no enforcement; issues of good and evil, reward and punishment are strictly between God and the individual. Jews differ as to whether this is worked out in this world, or in the next.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
Ideally, yes. But there is to be no coercion. The prophet Isaiah saw the Jewish people as "a light unto the nations"… that is, that the Jews were to bring the teachings of God to the world, serving as a model for other peoples to follow. But at the same time, Jews did not have a mission to convert others; Jews were merely to teach others.

13. What role should religion play in a secular society?
Ultra-Orthodox Jews reject all aspects of secular society, and attempt to live in their own segregated world that tries to keep out secular values. For all other Jews, the secular world is accepted, even embraced. Yet there is much in secular society that is considered bad or inappropriate. Religion serves as the conscience, teaching what is right and what is wrong. Religion would push us to try to infuse the ordinary, secular world with meaning and morality, and with an aspect of holiness. Religion reminds us that the world is special, a gift of God to us, and as such, should be treated with care. Religion reminds us that all peoples are created in the image of God, and therefore are sacred, and are to be treated with respect.
Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
   The Hebrew original of the Ten Commandments says LO TIRTZACH, which means You Shall Not Murder. Killing is justified when it is for self-defense. The Talmud teaches: "If someone comes to kill you, rise up and kill him first."

15. Is war ever justified?
   The Bible talks about wars the Israelites were to wage against the inhabitants of the land of Canaan-later to be Israel. But the underlying theology was that God was the ultimate owner of all land, that God gave the land to the Israelites, and God commanded them to displace the other nations by means of warfare. Modern Jewish theology would clearly take a very different view about warfare, seeing it as justifiable only as a means of self-defense, or as a way to protect people who were being attacked by an oppressor.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
   No.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
   Judaism rejects the notion of pacifism: if one's own life or if the life of another was threatened, it would be a mitzvah-an obligation—to fight and protect the innocent. To sit back and allow evil to triumph and kill others would be a sin. One could, of course, object to an immoral war—but NOT on the grounds that Jews may not kill under any circumstance.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
   The Bible preached "spare the rod and spoil the child." In the ancient world corporal punishment was part of the conventional wisdom concerning how to raise a child. Modern Jews would clearly reject the notion that hitting a child was an acceptable means of education or discipline.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
   No.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
   Judaism posits that our lives and our bodies belong to God; they are not ours to do with as we please. Therefore, suicide is wrong. It is viewed as an act of desperation undertaken by a mentally sick person. There are, however, a few extraordinary cases discussed in Jewish law where suicide does take place: A wounded King Saul who wanted to avoid being taken captive, to be tortured and humiliated by the enemy; the Jews on Masada who committed mass suicide rather than be captured by the Romans and turned into slaves; the teenage schoolgirls who took poison rather than be used by the Nazis as prostitutes.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
   Traditional Judaism taught that there were three issues that one had to die over, rather than transgress: Murder, sexual immorality, and idolatry. In other words, if an enemy demanded, under threat of death, that a Jew commit murder, or adultery, or worship other gods, then the Jew was obligated to sacrifice his or her life. Throughout Jewish history, many Jews chose death over forced conversion.
At the same time, there were many Jews who chose to outwardly convert while attempting to secretly practice their Judaism. In modern times, martyrdom was rarely a choice; the Nazis, for example, offered no alternative to the Jews (whose dying because they were Jews is also recognized as martyrdom).

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
No. The Talmud teaches: "Who says that this one's blood is redder than the other's?"

23. Is capital punishment acceptable?
The Bible clearly speaks about capital punishment. "Whoever sheds the blood of a person, by a person shall his blood be shed." The death penalty was given for other transgressions as well (adultery, for example). By the time of the Talmud (1st-5th centuries) the Rabbis had developed a very different approach. An execution once every seventy years was deemed excessive. The policy in the State of Israel (capital punishment was used only for the most heinous of crimes—genocide, and has only been used once in 55 years) represents the current Jewish attitude.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances is abortion allowable?
The strict view is that abortion is allowed only if the mother's life is at stake. The more lenient view is that abortion is allowed if the mother's welfare is at stake (this would include her mental welfare; if having the baby would cause her great mental distress, then the abortion would be permitted.)

25. Are autopsies allowed?
In general, no. The body is considered a sacred vessel and is not to be desecrated. However, if the legal authorities require it, then it would be permitted. Also, if performing an autopsy might lead to the direct saving of another life, then Jewish law would permit it.

26. Are there rules about body modification?
Judaism considers the body as God's; we are not permitted to desecrate it. Tattoos are forbidden by the Torah. It would be permitted to modify the body for health reasons.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
Judaism holds that we must do all that is possible to prolong life. However, we are not obligated to prolong death. Thus, if a person is in the stage when death is immanent, then heroic measures need not be taken to prolong life. At such a stage we are allowed to let nature take its course and to let the person die. Clearly, it is not always so simple to determine the line between prolonging life and prolonging death, and knowing exactly when death is immanent is also difficult to establish. We fall back on the sacred value of life, and on our compassion.

29. Should family/patients have the right to end suffering?
Traditional Judaism would have the individual or their proxies do all that is necessary to prolong life. The patient or the family would, in consultation with the doctors, be able to say: Death is immanent; we need not take any more heroic measures.
30. **Does anyone have the right to hasten death?**

We may not take any active steps to bring about death. We may passively bring on death by deciding not to take any heroic measure if death is immanent.

31. **In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?**

My sense is that you could separate the twins, knowing that one will probably die; but Jewish law probably wouldn't allow the active killing of one twin to save the other.

32. **Is genetic engineering permissible?**

The literature on this issue is just emerging now. This is a very complex question: There are aspects of such engineering that would be permissible according to Jewish law, since it would be done to save life or improve quality of life. But there are other aspects that are very troubling and would probably be prohibited.

33. **Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?**

The Torah describes God as the Creator, and speaks about a creation in six days. But the description of Creation in the Torah does not have to be read as an historical document. It is read as a poetic description of the creation.

The six days are understood as six stages, or periods of time. And in fact, as you read the biblical account, the story moves from the simple to the complex. In other words, the Creation story in Genesis is compatible with the scientific explanation of Evolution.

34. **Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?**

Yes. God created the Earth and entrusted it to our care. We are responsible for maintaining the Earth- tending God's garden, as it were. While we may make use of it while we tend it, we may not abuse it, or destroy it, or pollute it — for it belongs to God.

35. **Do animals have any moral standing?**

We have an obligation to care for animals (farm animals must be fed before their human owners sit down to eat); we have to make sure that they are not abused or suffer undue pain (the Jewish dietary rules require that an animal be killed in a humane way). But we are allowed to eat animals, and use them for our own needs and purposes. We do not consider them as having a "soul" as human beings do.

36. **Does your religion predict an end of time?**

Traditional Judaism speaks about "the Days of the Messiah — a time when God will send a human being who will bring about a period of peace on Earth. While Judaism speculated about the end of days, it never spelled out definitively when this will be, and what will happen.

Some sources speak about a Final Judgement; others talk about a resurrection of the dead. There are also varied descriptions of a Heaven, and a Hell (called Gehinnom). Some mystical Jewish sources even speak of reincarnation.

At different periods of history, each of these different ideas (or more than one of them connected with another) became accepted. But Judaism by and large concentrated on this world, not the next one.
Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
Traditional Judaism believes that sex is only proper within a marriage. Extra-marital sex is adultery, a major sin. Pre-marital sex is viewed as inappropriate.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
There are two purposes for sex: 1) Procreation, and 2) Pleasure between a husband and wife.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
Traditional Judaism sees masturbation as a sin; Liberal Judaism sees this as a very normal aspect of human sexuality.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
Husband and wife are permitted to engage in any sexual activity that they mutually agree to.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
For women, traditional Judaism prescribes modesty (no bare or exposed arms, legs, or bosom); married women traditionally covered their hair. For men, the head was to be covered, and ritual fringes (tzitzit) were worn as a reminder of God's commandments. Some Jews (especially Hasidic) wore their hair in payis (side-curls at the top of the sideburns).

42. Is transvestism immoral?
The Torah teaches that men should not wear women's clothing, and women should not wear men's clothing. This was probably to discourage the intermingling of the sexes, and the immorality that may have occurred.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
The Torah saw homosexuality as an "abomination." That view has been maintained by traditional Judaism because same sex relationships were seen as going against God's plan for sex leading to reproduction. Liberal Judaism questions whether the Torah understood homosexuality (as we are only beginning to understand it today) and is much more tolerant of gays and lesbians.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law, even if they engage in immoral behavior?
Yes.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
Traditional Judaism would say no; liberal Judaism would say yes.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at a time?
The Torah allowed men to have more than one wife (but women to have only one husband). In the early Middle Ages, Jewish law for Ashkenazic (European) Jews prohibited polygamy, though Sefardic Jews (those from Spain and Arab countries) continued to practice it until the mid 20th century.

47. Is divorce acceptable?
While divorce is seen as a tragedy, it is nevertheless accepted as a reality when a relationship has broken apart.
48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
To Liberal Judaism, they are.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?
Traditional Judaism believes that men and women have different roles to play in life: Women are in charge of the home and raising the children, while men are in the "outside" world making a living. Different roles are reflected in the synagogue service, as well as in the study house. Liberal Judaism is egalitarian, rejecting the separate roles for men and women.

50. Is the use of drugs and alcohol allowable?
The first principle is that we must do no harm to our health or our lives. Thus, any dangerous substance is not permitted. Second, Jewish law respects and follows the law of the local government. Third, Judaism teaches that (most) substances in and of themselves are neither good nor bad; they are neutral. How we use them is what makes them good or bad.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?
Traditional Judaism believes that Jewish children should go to Jewish parochial schools, where prayer is a part of the daily routine. Liberal Judaism in America believes very strongly in the separation of Church and State and accordingly, would not be in favor of prayers in public schools.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
Traditional Judaism would be in favor of such support; Liberal Judaism would not.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious /moral concern?
The Dietary laws (kashrut) are a major part of the Jewish religion. A good deal of kashrut is based on a concern for the pain and suffering of animals.

54. Is gambling allowed?
Jewish law saw gambling as a negative activity that called into question the trustworthiness of those involved.

55. Is smoking allowed?
Since smoking is harmful and deadly, it is forbidden.
ORTHODOX

Basic to Orthodox Judaism is the centrality of Halakah and the belief that the Jewish people exist primarily to serve and keep the Torah. Orthodoxy is divided into those who accept western culture and generally supportive to Zionism, and those who limit contact with western culture to whatever extent possible and rejects the secular character of Israel.

Moshe Ben-Chaim
Rabbi, Mesora.org
Cedarhurst, New York
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
   It means following God's code of morality as outlined in the Torah.

2. Why be good?
   God gave us each a soul. Our primary goal is to discover truths and use those truths to perfect ourselves. This is the will of God, as this the “good.”

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
   Not unless the Gentile in question is following the law God gave for gentiles. Otherwise, one cannot have the objective "good".

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
   No, it is not possible. One must follow the objective “good,” the “good” defined by the Torah.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
   The source must be identical i.e., originating in God's commands found in the Torah.

6. What is the source of ethics?
   God's Torah.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
   Impossible, as good means one partaking in God's will.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
   What matches up to God's set of morality. Without an objective system, there is no way to define objective good. You are asking, "can there be objectivity without objectivity." A contradiction.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
   The righteous person will encounter mishaps in his life, even with much foresight and planning. Nonetheless, he has one other factor to safeguard him, (Proverbs, 3:25,26) "do not be
frightened by the sudden terror, or the stormy destruction of the wicked when it comes. For G-d will be your confidence, and He will keep your foot from entrapment".

The righteous person has G-d as his source of virtue, and as his Protector. We also read, (Psalms, 34:10, Ibn Ezra) "The righteous do not fear that harm or lack will come to them even through their own actions." Also, (Psalms 34:20,21) "Many tragedies befall the righteous, and from them all G-d saves him. He (G-d) watches all of his bones, not even one is broken". This means that world order continues to operate, but G-d utilizes direct providence to shield the righteous from all mishap and tragedy.

This last statement now begins to enlighten us of G-d's system. It states that not even one bone is allowed to be harmed, provided the person is a tzaddik. This means that G-d does not allow harm to befall a perfectly, righteous person. However, if one is not on this pristine level, he is not shielded from harms way. It is the suffering of this latter individual which generates the question of why the good suffer.

Talmud Sabbath 55a discusses G-d's justice so clearly outlined in Ezekiel 18: "There is no death without sin, and no suffering without transgression." Ezekiel teaches that there are 3 types of man; 1) one who is evil, 2) one who was evil but repented, and 3) one who was evil and repented fully. It is this third type of man which Ezekiel teaches that G-d protects from all harm. He is not only granted life, "chayo yichyeh", now that he repented like the second man, but it states of this third man, "lo yamus", "he will not die". Meaning, the fully, penitent individual has nothing to fear in life. No harm will ever befall him. Maimonides states that when we see someone suffering, it has come upon him due to his own misdeeds.

This concept makes sense to our minds, as a punishment delivered by G-d is always a corrective measure, and one who has no faults needs no correction and will go without suffering at all. His actions at times are not within our grasp. When encountering circumstances beyond our understanding, our overall appreciation for the perfection of the Torah and G-d's justice should not be diminished by our ignorance.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offense and a moral/secular offense? Both violate God's Torah, but there may be difference in punishments. They also have their source in different parts of man's psyche. Religious offenders usually seek out security (idol worship secures rain, health, etc.) while moral offenders seek to satisfy desires (viz., sexual impropriety).

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
If one cannot enforce them upon himself, then the courts and police.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
To Jews only.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
Religion does not recognize "secular society." Society was taken into consideration when God designed the Torah.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
Yes, for food, defense, destruction of evil.
15. **Is war ever justified?**
Yes, for defense, destruction of evil.

16. **Is violence against innocent people justifiable?**
No.

17. **Can someone be a conscientious objector?**
No.

18. **Is force justifiable against children?**
   It does not have to be a "physical" force. "Verbal" force such as rebuke without anger is appropriate and can be used according to the level of a child's understanding and with the child's best interest in mind. This is not so easy and a parent must be aware of his/her own motives of rebuke. If physical force is warranted, then it should be done. King Solomon taught, "spare the whip, ruin the child", which means to say that refraining from punitive measures will spoil children.

   It is for this very reason that in one passage, Adonyahu, King David's son, was described to have rebelled and had taken over the kingdom, he was also described as handsome, and that David never rebuked him. I believe it teaches us that due to his good looks, David pitied him and never rebuked him, and this resulted in a child who knew nothing of disappointment. He therefore rebelled without fear of punishment.

19. **Is force justifiable against a spouse?**
   "Physical" force used against a spouse due to one's own anger is not justifiable. However, "verbal" force such as rebuke if done with the spouse's best interest in mind is justifiable. Again, a spouse must be aware of his/her own motives regarding rebuke.

20. **Is suicide ever justifiable?**
   No. Only the giver of life can take it away.

21. **To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?**
   Only when one is faced with being forced to violated idolatry, adultery or murder. Then one must give his life and not violate, provided the coercer desires the Jew to do such acts for the purpose of his violating God, not merely for the coercer's immediate needs.

22. **Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?**
   Only if the innocent person is the fetus, then it lacks full human status, and may be killed to spare the mother. But once its head exits the mother, you cannot kill it. It is a full human.

23. **Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?**
   Many offenses require capital punishment, as a means of deterring others, and ridding society of evil influences.

---

**Science and Medicine**

24. **Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?**
   Safety of the mother.
25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
   They are not, we demonstrate thereby that even our bodies are God's, and not ours to mutilate.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
   Health allows whatever is needed. Tattoos are prohibited as they are idolatrous in origin, Cosmetic surgery may be allowed if it eases a distraught state of mind.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
   Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
   Yes, in general.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
   No. But one may pray to God to end one's misery as the Rabbis had done on one such occasion.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
   Only the courts as accepted punitive measures outlined by God's Torah, individuals in defense of one's life, he may kill another if that is what is needed.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
   I am not certain, as the question here is not simply can you save one, but can you kill another. Even though both will die later, perhaps you cannot kill one now. However, we do learn that one who is about to die does not have full human status, therefore, killing him is not considered equal to killing another. But perhaps it might be permitted if you are not certain of the one you are killing.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
   I do not know.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
   Man was created with eternal life. Animal was created from dust and returns to dust—there is nothing eternal in animals creation. Therefore, evolution from animal to man is not possible according to Judaism.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
   Yes. We are not allowed to destroy produce trees with no cause, for example.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
   Only that killing for pleasure (hunting) is not allowed. But animals do not have rights.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
   We do not predict an end to time.
**Behavior**

37. *Is sex outside marriage permissible?*
   No.

38. *Is sex only for procreation?*
   No. After menopause sex is still permitted, as is when the woman is already pregnant.

39. *Is masturbation allowed?*
   Not for men. Spilling seed is prohibited.

40. *Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?*
   No, anal sex may be performed, but not as a regular practice.

41. *Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?*
   Yes, we do not copy idolaters’ styles. Many of our laws exist to distance us from violating codes of monothelism.

42. *Is transvestism immoral?*
   Yes. If we understand the basic idea that, “Male and female He created them,” then transvestism has no appropriate place. It distorts the separateness of God’s two human creations and also leads to sexual promiscuity.

43. *Is homosexuality immoral?*
   Just as in the above answer, homosexuality too, distorts human creation. In addition, the spilling of seed which is prohibited also leads to sexual promiscuity and no offspring can result from this union.

44. *Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?*
   Yes. One violation is limited to its own sphere. But some violations require death, so equal rights would not exist in such a case.

45. *Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?*
   No. The Jewish state should not recognize same sex marriages as it is contrary to the ideal that the union of man and woman is how marriage is defined.

46. *Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?*
   Permission from the original wife was always sought by our Patriarch's who took on additional wives. In the marriage framework of our Patriarch's, additional wives were taken and no violations were incurred. Are you asking if a person can have a male and a female spouse? Judaism does not allow for this. More than one spouse of the opposite sex? The Rabbi's in their most thorough investigation were against this.

47. *Is divorce acceptable?*
   Yes, and needed many times.

48. *Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?*
   No, they are philosophical.
49. Are men and women separate but equal?
Yes.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?
Drugs may not be prohibited in many cases but they do incapacitate one's thinking. Alcohol is not only permitted is acceptable quantities, but required for gladness on the holidays. But drunkenness is prohibited.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?
Recognition of reality should be in all schools, and this must start with knowledge of the Creator. Otherwise, all other knowledge loses its purpose without knowing where it came from, and who we are to come to appreciate as the Source of knowledge. Knowledge should culminate with the appreciation of the Designer.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
Not a Judaic issue.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
Laws of Kosher exist to temper one's appetitive drive according to Maimonides. Such tempering sets the stage for one to be calm enough emotionally so as to spend hours engaged in study. The same applies to sexual laws.

54. Is gambling allowed?
Yes. No philosophical or moral violations exist. However, we learn that a regular gambler cannot act as a witness. Perhaps, his lifestyle is demonstrable of one who feels he is subjectively better than others, and entitled to more than others. Thus, he gambles as he really believes he will win. This subjectivity is contrary to the requirements of testimony, to be an objective witness.

55. Is smoking allowed?
Yes. A single cigarette does no measurable bodily damage, and therefore each act of smoking a single cigarette cannot be prohibited.
SCIENTOLOGY

And we of the Church believe that the laws of God forbid man:
To destroy his own kind;
To destroy the sanity of another;
To destroy or enslave another's soul;
To destroy or reduce the survival of one's companions or one's group.

L. Ron Hubbard

SCIENTOLOGY FOCUSES UPON SPIRITUAL AWARENESS AND LEAVES TO MEMBERS to reach his own conclusions concerning the nature of God and what lies in store after this lifetime. Like many Eastern religions, salvation in Scientology is attained through personal spiritual growth and enlightenment.

Scientology was founded in 1952 by L. Ron Hubbard. The first Church of Scientology was established in 1954 by some of Mr. Hubbard’s students. Today, the religion reports more than 3,000 churches, missions and related organizations and is present in more than 100 countries.

Lynn R. Farny
Minister, Church of Scientology International
Los Angeles, California
USA

NOTE: Every individual has an urge and determination to survive. Pursuit of survival is the common denominator of all life. Ultimate survival would be the attainment of total spiritual freedom and awareness as an immortal spiritual being. At the opposite end of the spectrum is total destruction and degradation, again as an immortal spiritual being. This degradation is caused by the spiritual pain accumulated by a being through the commission of harmful acts and experiencing harmful acts caused by others. Thus, while man is basically good, his aberrations cause him to do evil deeds.

Consider that these two extremes represent the opposite poles of a spectrum. All life exists along this spectrum between these two extremes. The extremes, as absolute values, can only be approached but never obtained. For an individual, the drive for survival embraces eight distinct divisions known in Scientology as dynamics. The dynamics are best conceived as concentric circles with (1) self in the middle and extending to (2) family and sex, (3) groups, (4) mankind, (5) all life forms, (6) the physical universe, (7) spirituality and (8) infinity or the Supreme Being.
The first dynamic, self, is the effort to survive as an individual and to fully express one's individuality. The second dynamic is creativity. Creativity is making things for the future and the second dynamic includes any creativity. The second dynamic contains the family unit and the rearing of children as well as anything that can be categorized as a family activity. It incidentally includes sex as a mechanism to compel future survival. The third dynamic is the urge to survive as a member of a group.

A company, a political party, a church, or a social organization are all examples of the third dynamic. The fourth dynamic is the urge for survival of man as a species. All of the races of man together constitute the fourth dynamic. The fifth dynamic is the urge to survive for all life forms (animal or vegetable) and anything directly and intimately motivated by life. The sixth dynamic is the urge for survival of the physical universe and reflects the drive of the individual to enhance the survival of all matter, energy, space and time (the component parts of the physical universe). The seventh dynamic is the urge toward existence as a spiritual being. The eighth dynamic is the urge toward existence as infinity. This is also identified as the Supreme Being. Thus, this dynamic can be called the infinity, or God, dynamic.

As noted earlier, the dynamics can be conceived of as a series of concentric circles in which the first dynamic would be the center and each new dynamic would be successively a circle outside the preceding circle. The individual, then, expands from the first into the other dynamics as his responsibility increases. For example, a baby at birth is not perceptive beyond the first dynamic, but as he grows and his interests expand he can be seen to embrace other dynamics, beginning with his family (second dynamic) with an awareness and appreciation of mother and father, to his school (third dynamic) and associating with other children, etc.

An individual's ability is increased by improving his survival across the dynamics. As he becomes more capable and more aware, he becomes more able to control and influence all of his dynamics. The goal of Scientology is to help an individual survive to the greatest level across all of his dynamics from the first and ultimately to the eighth. In Scientology, the concept of God is expressed as the eighth dynamic — the urge toward existence as infinity, as God, or the Supreme Being. As the eighth dynamic, Scientology’s concept of God rests at the very apex of universal survival.

The Church of Scientology has no set dogma concerning God that it imposes on its members. As with all its beliefs, Scientology does not ask individuals to believe anything on faith. Rather, as one's level of spiritual awareness increases through participation in auditing and training, he attains his own certainty of every dynamic and, as he moves from the seventh (spiritual) dynamic to the eighth, will come to his own conclusions concerning the nature of God (or the Supreme Being or infinity) and his relationship to it. Scientology seeks to bring one to a new level of spiritual awareness where he can reach his own conclusions concerning the nature of God and what lies in store for him after his present lifetime. Thus, like many Eastern religions, salvation in Scientology is attained through personal spiritual growth and enlightenment.

Ethics and Morals: The subject of Ethics is the use of reason in the contemplation of optimum survival along all eight dynamics. Morals, on the other hand, are rules of conduct laid down by society to govern behavior that has been found to be contra-survival to that society. At the uppermost levels, a moral code could be completely ethical. But as one descends downward, a moral code could depart from true ethics and become an arbitrary inhibition to survival.

Good v. Evil/Right v. Wrong: Those actions that enhance survival on the majority of the eight dynamics of life are good, and those that destroy or deny these aspects of life are evil. Good
may be defined as more constructive than destructive. Evil may be defined as more destructive than constructive. The same definitions apply to right and wrong. The most ethical act would be one which resulted in the greatest good to the greatest number of dynamics and which cause the least harm to the fewest dynamics.

**General**

1. **What does it mean to be a good person?**
   Being a good person means trying insofar as possible to govern one’s conduct on the basis of the greatest good for the greatest number of dynamics. Man is basically good. So, by nature he can be nothing else. But because of his mental and spiritual aberrations caused by painful experience (both receiving pain and causing it in others), he is capable of great evil and there are people in the world who have been consumed by this evil to the point where their basic goodness is buried. It is still there, but it is buried. These are a small minority, though, less than 20 percent, with only two and a half percent truly dangerous.

2. **Why be good?**
   Because that is the only way in which anyone can achieve spiritual enlightenment and ability. Harming your fellows and doing evil things ultimately degrades and harms you and will totally block any chance of spiritual enlightenment. It leads only to pain and death.

3. **Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?**
   Yes. All people are basically good and most are not actively dramatizing the evil inside them. A great many people are able to maintain a standard of conduct through adhering to a positive moral code, whether through their church or the standards of the societies in which they were raised. Thus, it is possible to be a good person whether one is a Scientologist or not.

4. **Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?**
   Even apostates are basically good, so yes. But I would be less than honest if I didn't also say that we also believe that the harm such a person does by attacking the source of their salvation would damage them spiritually. It would not change their essence, though.

5. **Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?**
   Religious requirements are one source of morality, but it is possible to have a thoroughly moral code of conduct that is secular.

6. **What is the source of ethics?**
   As above, the source of ethics is the exercise of one's reason in the contemplation of optimum survival along all eight dynamics.

7. **Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?**
   Yes, but they are cutting themselves off from one eighth of their existence by denying the existence of Supreme Being, so their decisions are going to be flawed to that degree.

8. **How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?**
   I decide based on an evaluation of the course of conduct that will create the greatest good for the greatest number of dynamics. Now, this requires that one assume responsibility for all sides of the equation. It can be very easy to con oneself that an essentially bad act "helps" the
dynamics. It takes an extreme amount of responsibility and discipline to examine each dynamic from its own point of view.

9. **Why do bad things happen to good people?**

Several reasons (not exhaustive): a. Because the physical universe is a dangerous place and it is possible to run into situations where the impact with it is more than a body can survive. b. Their own personal aberrations predispose them to having bad things happen to them. c. There are many people in the world, all pursuing different purposes. It is possible that these purposes can collide and create problems for the participants. d. By failing to take full responsibility for the consequences of one's own acts, one is set up to experience harmful things. e. It is possible to be the adverse affect of a connection with one of the two and a half percent of the population who is dedicated to destruction.

10. **Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?**

Yes. There are offences within Scientology that have no equivalent in secular society.

11. **Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?**

We encourage each individual to enforce the ethics and morals of Scientology. We also have a full Ethics and Justice system to help resolve disputes and enforce our moral codes. This system is administrated by our mother church, Church of Scientology International (Note, we do have specific moral codes of conduct, as well as the concept of ethics I discussed above.)

12. **Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?**

While on a personal level I would certainly like it if they did, it is not really necessary, as long as whatever moral code people follow is an ethical one. The definition of ethics and the operation of the eight dynamics apply whether one is aware of them or not. Thus, the standard would be whether a given moral code enhanced the survival of the dynamics of its adherents. If it did, it would be perfectly fine. For example, the Rule of St. Benedict upon which most Catholic monasteries were founded can be severe, but it is certainly moral. Kosher dietary rules made a lot of sense in the context in which they arose and are still an improvement over conditions you find in many places. Both sets of rules differ from my religion, but I would consider both of them to be ethical and moral.

13. **What role should religion play in secular society?**

All religions should work together to help people in society by improving the quality of their day-to-day lives. They should help people in need, help the poor and disenfranchised, provide aid in disasters. This is regardless of whether those helped adopt a particular religion or not.

**Use of Force**

14. **Is killing ever justified?**

Yes. One kills other life forms for food, clothing and shelter. Killing another person would be a great evil. And while murder would never be justified sometimes taking another life might be necessary, such as in self-defense, or in the defense of a loved one. Also, if one developed a cure for a disease and saved thousands of patients, but killed one patient in the process, it would still have been right to develop the cure.

15. **Is war ever justified?**
War is the dramatization at the level of society of great personal evil and aberration. It will not solve aberration. Morally, it is wrong. But ethically, it may be necessary if it removes an even greater evil. (We come to a point here, where the choices are not black and white, but shades of gray, thus making the contemplation of the most ethical course of action, more difficult).

16. *Is violence against innocent people justifiable?*
   No.

17. *Can someone be a conscientious objector?*
   Yes. If they have a moral objection to war, whether religiously motivated or not, they should not be compelled to fight.

18. *Is force justifiable against children?*
   No.

19. *Is force justifiable against a spouse?*
   No.

20. *Is suicide ever justifiable?*
   It might be if your sacrifice permits others to live, such as in the case of a soldier who dives onto a grenade to save his fellows. But generally, no. And certainly it is not justifiable as a means of escaping the consequences of your acts. For one thing, there is no escape, since you come back in your next life with the same problems. For another, you are causing others too much pain.

21. *To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?*
   In no circumstances is the type of martyrdom we see today in some extremist organizations acceptable. But standing up for what you believe in, even at the risk of your personal safety would be ethical and moral.

22. *Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?*
   No.

23. *Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?*
   This is an area in which you will find as many Scientologists holding one view as the opposite. While the Church itself is apolitical and does not enter the political debate on this issue, I can say that purely as a spiritual matter, capital punishment does no good. The executioner hastens his own degradation by committing the ultimate harmful act on another person and the person killed has added more aberration to carry with him next lifetime. Thus, at best, it is shortsighted and ineffective, at worst, barbaric.

**Science and Medicine**

24. *Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?*
   This is a matter of personal choice of those involved in evaluating their decision in terms of the greatest good for the greatest number of dynamics. The Church takes no official position.

25. *Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?*
Yes, unless the person while living voiced a personal objection to having one done on his remains. Some people are so attached to their bodies that they would be really upset after they die to watch it being cut apart. Others would want the people they left behind to have the answers as to why they died; these people would permit this process if it were necessary to solve a mystery as to why they died. Generally, though, Scientologists prefer cremation. It provides a cleaner break with one life in preparation for the next.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
   No.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
   Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
   This is a personal choice of those involved, based again on the greatest good for the greatest number of dynamics. There are circumstances where the answer would be yes, and those where the answer would be no. At some point, though, if you are prolonging agony with no hope of recovery, you are actually preventing the person from obtaining a new life by artificially prolonging this one and are doing them more harm than good. At that point, it is probably best to let go. But that is a personal decision.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
   Same answer.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
   I would say no, but the actual answer is the same as the answer to the previous two questions. So, there again you have one of those areas where the choices are shades of gray.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
   The killing of one is a burden to be borne by the person who made the decision to do it. However, in that it enabled someone else to live, it would be easier to take responsibility for having done it.

   Ultimately, to me the answer is yes. But take the circumstance where both twins are of a mental capacity to participate in the decision and neither of them wants to be the one to live if the other dies. Do you force the decision on them, knowing that the one who survives would consider himself a murderer all his life, or grant them the respect to determine their own fates?

   Again, there are no easy answers here — no easy push-button solutions that permit one to escape full responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions. Whatever decision is arrived at, the participants would use the formula of the greatest good for the greatest number of dynamics to decide and then accept full responsibility for having done what they have done.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
   Certainly, as long as it is pursued responsibly and within strictly defined ethical standards.
33. *Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?*
   Yes, although we do not hold with the view that evolution was accidental. It is possible (and, indeed, very likely) that some intelligence was directing the process.

34. *Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?*
   Yes, very much so. The fifth and sixth dynamics are two of the dynamics involved in life and must be cared for and taken into account when making decisions.

35. *Do animals have any moral standing?*
   Yes. They are life forms, too, even those whose purpose is to provide food for other life forms. As the highest life form on this planet we have a responsibility to care for the other life forms and for the planet itself.

36. *Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?*
   We do not have an end-time legend.

**Behavior**

37. *Is sex outside marriage permissible?*
   Among our clergy, absolutely not. Among our parishioners we only insist on constancy with their partners, while we try to increase their responsibility to the point where they see that it is more ethical and moral to formalize the relationship with a wedding.

38. *Is sex only for procreation?*
   No. It is also a source of pleasure in a relationship.

39. *Is masturbation allowed?*
   No.

40. *Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?*
   It is not particularly an issue one way or another unless someone becomes obsessed with the sexual act to the point it becomes destructive of themselves or another.

41. *Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?*
   No.

42. *Is transvestism immoral?*
   It is certainly a misalignment of the second dynamic and to that degree will throw the other dynamics out of alignment.

43. *Is homosexuality immoral?*
   Same answer. It is a misalignment of the second dynamic and to that degree will throw the other dynamics out of alignment. Then again, so are some heterosexual practices, such as promiscuity. We do not discriminate against potential parishioners because of sexual orientation. We help people to lead better lives.
44. *Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?*
   Yes, of course.

45. *Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?*
   The Church is apolitical and takes no official position on this issue.

46. *Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?*
   Yes.

47. *Is divorce acceptable?*
   Yes, although given the circumstances it might be unethical and immoral.

48. *Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?*
   I would say more of an ethical issue than a moral issue.

49. *Are men and women separate but equal?*
   They are equal, period. Biologically, they have different roles in the reproductive process, but socially, they should have equality.

50. *Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?*
   Medicinal drugs only. No recreational drugs or mind-altering psychiatric drugs. Alcohol in moderation only.

51. *Should prayers be allowed in public schools?*
   It is up to the people to decide the degree of separation between their churches and their governments. However, I will add that we favor a separation between church and state. Traditionally, government control of religion has been used throughout history to perpetuate barbarisms on people. Thus, the two should be separate.

52. *Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?*
   Whether it does or not is up to the people to decide. But if it does, it should make the subsidies available to all religions equally and be free from oppressive government controls. That is why we favor a separation of church and state.

53. *Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?*
   Generally not.

54. *Is gambling allowed?*
   There is no specific prohibition against it, except that it would be forbidden where it is unlawful and I don't know any Scientologists who engage in it, really.

55. *Is smoking allowed?*
   Discouraged, but not prohibited outright. Most of our churches, though, are non-smoking facilities.
SHINTO

The Spirit of Great Nature may be a flower, may be the beauty of the mountains, the pure snow, the soft rains or the gentle breeze. . . . When people respond to the silent and provocative beauty of the natural order, they are aware of their harmony with nature. . . . They are living according to the natural flow of the universe and will benefit and develop by doing so.

Yukitaka Yamamoto, 96th Chief Priest of the Tsubaki Grand Shrine

SHINTO IS THE INDIGENOUS JAPANESE RELIGION that acquired its name in the 6th century CE as a way of distinguishing it from Buddhism, which was introduced to the island nation at that time. The two ideograms that make up the name literally means The Way of the Gods.

Only 3 million Japanese identify themselves as Shintoists. Nevertheless, approximately 80-90 million Japanese visit a shrine at least once a year at one of the nearly 100,000 recognized shrines in the country.
Shinto was originally a natural religion which became into existence in a village community. So the concept of a sin or of ethics is also formed according to the value system of the community: that is to wish prosperous continuation and development of the community. It is the same consciousness to hold rites and festivals.

Accordingly the Shinto concept of the sin and also the concept of the Shinto ethics have no identical difference from the secular sin or social ethics which is taught through the social education in order to support the continuous development of the community.

Historically, it was the time of Emperor Suiko, the 33rd Emperor (593-628) when Japan started to rise as a nation, forming its administrative structure, from the stage of a united clans under the emperorship. It was between the eras of the 38th Emperor Tenchi and the 40th Emperor Tenmu (661-686) when Japan could proceed a step father to become a state with a centralized government. The form of the Shinto rituals is considered to be established at this time including Haraekotoba. In this Haraekotoba, which was chanted for a purification ceremony at that time and is still chanted, the sins are listed and they are categorized into two: Amatsu-Tsumi and Kunitsu-Tsumi.

At this time, Ritsu (or the criminal law) and Ryo (or the administrative law) were established under the influence of the Chinese Law of the Tang Age. It is convenient to see these laws in order to look at the Shinto concept of the sin and those sins which were prohibited by the secular laws. The most grave sin was called Amatsu-Tsumi described in the Oharae is those deeds which were committed by Susanowo-no Mikoto, the brother deity of Amaterasu Ohmikami, the supreme Kami. According to the myth, he was so rejoiced by being able to prove that he had no ill feeling against his sister deity, Amaterasu Ohmokami, that he committed vulgarity such as destroying the paddy fields. Niinamesai (Rice-crop rite), the weaving shop where the cloths for the deities were woven and also several other violent mischievous. It means that all these deeds were against divine festivals. It is described in the myth that because of the vulgarity, a part of Susanowo’s assets was taken away from him and purged from Heaven.

According to the Ritsu, these deeds correspond to the sixth sin which is described as one of the grave eight sins: the sin to destroy a shrine and steal divine objects. Stealing of the symbolic object of the divine spirit was ruled to be condemned to the capital punishment and other destructive deeds were ruled to be condemned to exile. These punishments almost correspond to those which was given to Susanowo-no Mikoto.

The other sins described as Kunitsu Tsumi include injury, murder including infant murder, incest, poisoning, cursing. At the same time, natural hazard brought by thunder, the birds,
and the reptiles (creeping things) are included in Kunitsu Tsumi. It means that all human deeds and natural hazard which endanger continuity of a community are considered to be Kunitsu Tsumi. These human needs were punished by the law as crimes at the time of Ritsu (the criminal laws). In the case of natural hazards, people tried to wipe off the evil elements by holding religious rites.

Traditionally in Japan, a religion has never had its own commandments which are different from the secular laws mentioned before. The religion has always put its main value on the continuity and development of a community. It is a historical fact that, since the secular laws were established. Shinto has performed as a religion which believes in the rites of purification in order to pacify negative forces both man and nature have, and to strengthen positive forces for constructing a better community.

The ethical nature of religion in the Japanese nature of religion in the Japanese society has not been changed basically even by the Meiji Restoration (1868) when Japan started to have contact with the western world in order to modernize the country. The secular statutes provides with sins and regulates punishments against them. On the other hand, Shinto does not have any prescriptions expressed in the negative form of ‘Should not’ but has the teaching by the emperor who is the central figure to execute divine rites, have been considered to be the base of ethics.

The Imperial Rescript on Education written by Emperor Meiji was its concrete expression. The virtues listed in the Imperial Rescript were firstly the loyalty towards the country, then, the ethics which should be observed in a family, that means, appreciation and respect for parents, to have an amicable relation with brothers and sisters, to have harmonious relationship of a couple. Then it goes with harmonious relationship in a society. Trust in friends, discretion and modesty, fraternity, intellectual development and to contribute in a society with this intellectual ability. It can be safely said that Shinto is a religion to believe that man should directly succeed the activities of Kami.
NOTE: Many of the questions are not necessarily relevant to the ways of Shinto. In addition Shinto is not theologically integrated due to the absence of a "Bible," although Kojiki, Nihonshoki and Rituryo are more-or-less regarded by Shintoists as their sacred literature. The answers, therefore, ought to be interpreted loosely.

Y. A.

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
   To be responsible to the community.

2. Why be good?
   To be happy and to make others happy in the community.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
   If one belongs to another community and responsible to that person's community, he/she certainly can be a good person, provided that he/she is reflexive of his/her own being and others.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
   If one changes one's affiliation, possibly he/she could remain a good person. An apostate may be in a difficult position to be reflexive.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
   Little, if any.

6. What is the source of ethics?
   Whether or not an action is contrary to social perpetuity.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
   Not relevant.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
   In reference to the peace of society and the welfare of human being.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
   It depended on the way of thinking.
10. *Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?*
Not relevant.

11. *Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?*
Communal and traditional consensus beyond personal egoism.

12. *Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?*
There are situations in which moral rules may conflict and a single rule does not apply.

13. *What role should religion play in secular society?*
The concept of secular society itself is too Western and modern.

**Use of Force**

14. *Is killing ever justified?*
Yes, provided it is necessary for the perpetuity of the community.

15. *Is war ever justified?*
The same as above.

16. *Is violence against innocent people justifiable?*
The same as above.

17. *Can someone be a conscientious objector?*
Yes, provided that his action does not jeopardize the fortunes of the community.

18. *Is force justifiable against children?*
Yes and no, acceptable on condition that it is necessary to discipline him.

19. *Is force justifiable against a spouse?*
In principle, no.

20. *Is suicide ever justifiable?*
Yes, on condition that one's honor in the community is so maintained.

21. *To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?*
To the extent that one's martyrdom supports the perpetuity of the community.

22. *Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?*
No.

23. *Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?*
Yes, for the capital crimes that destroy the order of the community.
Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable? Yes, in case of rape and other unsocial causes of conception.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances? Yes, if it is for the sake of clarifying the causes of death and advancing social welfare.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations? No, but it is not regarded desirable.

27. Are transfusions allowed? Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life? Every possible measure are considered test-worthy.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering? In principle, no.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death? In principle, no.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other? Every attempt should be taken to save the life of the two.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible? No agreement on this issue.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion? In principle, yes.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic? Yes.

35. Do animals have any moral standing? Yes.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans? No.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible? Yes, though not recommended.
38. Is sex only for procreation?
   No. It is an element of love.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
   Not an important issue.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
   Not an important issue.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
   Yes, especially in relation to rituals and social events.

42. Is transvestism immoral?
   Not necessarily.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
   Not an important issue.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?
   Yes, as the legal rights and religious morality are defined on different dimensions.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
   Not discussed.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?
   Fundamentally no agreement.

47. Is divorce acceptable?
   Yes.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
   Yes and no.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?
   Yes.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?
   Alcohol yes, drugs no.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?
   Secular law of Japan prohibits it but not a few devotees wish its revival.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
   No, though schools with religious affiliation are supported by the state on condition that they suffice the secular provisions and conditions and refrain from sectarian instructions and religious practices during regular school hours.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
   Yes, if one is a priest and during the ritual period.
54. Is gambling allowed?
Not prohibited, but secular state law prohibits it.

55. Is smoking allowed?
Yes.
SHINREIKYO

Do not despoil the other, the other is your parent's body; the merging of you and the other creates the future you.

Annotated Divine Teachings of Kyososama

SHINREIKYO, FOUNDED IN 1947 BY Kanichi Otsuka, known as Kyososama, the revered founder, is a Shinto-related religion. It describes itself as a transcendent religion with actual proof of miracles.

Shinreikyo was officially sanctioned as religious organization as different from any other religion by the Japanese Ministry of Education in 1952.

Shinreikyo reports about 100,000 members.

Kazuhiko Hosokawa
Priest and Head of Shinreikyo Information Center
Tokyo
Japan

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
A person is good when he or she does good to others.

2. Why be good?
Because he or she helps others live in happiness and good health.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
Yes, but the Shinreikyo faith helps people do much good.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
Yes. It is possible.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
Absolutely yes.

6. What is the source of ethics?
The very source is the Divine way or the fundamental principle of the universe.
Kyososama, founder of Shinreikyo, has provided us with the following teaching:
"The Divine Way of Shinreikyo is the universal principle which penetrates time, space, and the three states of existence. Everything is created based on this principle. Whoever goes against this will perish. Whoever goes with it will be led to true happiness and lasting prosperity. Disease, accidents, and calamities depend on whether you are in accordance with the Divine Way or not. Therefore, the Divine Way of Shinreikyo is the absolute and unique way that everyone should act in accordance with."

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
   This question is not appropriate to all religions. For example, a Buddhist is an atheist from a Christian viewpoint, but can be very religious in his or her faith in dharma.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
   Shinreikyo members decide them in accordance with the following teaching of Kyososama.

"In the universe, everything moves and, therefore, exists. Movement always produces pairs of opposites such as backward and forward, good and evil, and inside and outside. If a thing goes well, that is good. If it goes badly, that is evil. There is no definitive evil or good in things. It depends on the direction of their motions. . . . To follow the Divine Way is good, and to go against it is evil."

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
   Even good people can experience bad things, for example, illness and car accidents, because of carelessness, fatigue, overwork, and so on. In addition, even though good people think themselves good, sometimes they might not be good from the viewpoint of Kyososama, God incarnate. That is a big difference between Kyososama and a man. Often people do bad while they believe they are doing good. When you are a member of Shinreikyo, such a member led by a lot of Divine teachings of Kyososama can recognize what is really good.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
    Yes.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
    Kyososama taught us the way of living in accordance with the Divine Way. His teachings contain some moral rules, and we follow them.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
    Yes. Shinreikyo teaches people basic moral rules that human beings should obey.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
    In accordance with the Divine Way and where people live in cooperation and co-prosperity.

**Use of Force**

14. Is killing ever justified?
    Yes, for example punishment.

15. Is war ever justified?
    Only for self-defence.
16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?  
No.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?  
Yes.

18. Is force justifiable against children?  
Yes, but only for educational needs.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?  
No.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?  
No.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?  
Not acceptable.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?  
I think the question is too violent.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?  
Yes. It is acceptable for extremely violent murder.

**Science and Medicine**

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?  
We do not allow it.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?  
We, Shinreikyo members, should avoid autopsies because we believe they have evil effects on the departed soul of a dead person.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?  
No.

27. Are transfusions allowed?  
Not prohibited. However they are not necessary to Shinreikyo followers, because the Divine Power of Shinreikyo can cure diseases without using any medical treatment.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?  
Yes, but they should be minimized and only under inevitable circumstances.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?  
No. A Shinreikyo follower can be free from suffering if he or she and the family pray for help to Kyososama.
30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
No. When a Shinreikyo follower passes away from this world, he or she goes up to paradise peacefully. As proof of salvation, there is no rigor mortis, no death spots nor putrid smell. The body temperature does not drop even for 12 or 24 hours after the last breath. In Shinreikyo this kind of event is called Sublime Transmigration. This is the ideal death for humans and has been very rare even among saints and high-ranking priests in traditional religions.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
If their parents join Shinreikyo and have sincere faith in the God of Shinreikyo, they do not need an operation and can experience a miracle.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
It depends on how you use it.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
There are various theories of evolution. They are hypothetical and have not been proven. Whether hypothetical or proven, it is under the control and result of Divine power.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Yes.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
No.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
Our religion does not predict the end of time. However, Kyososama taught us that the world is undergoing a great transformation from an age of darkness and destruction, to an age of light and peace: that is, from "Night," to "Day." In the 21st century, human beings will enter the age of spiritual "Day," and experience unimaginable changes. These changes can be likened to the accompanying the birth of a child. A fetus in its mother's womb lives in darkness and its freedom is restricted.

When the right time comes, it will be born into this world of light and freedom. At birth all the surrounding conditions change drastically and in a short time: breathing, nourishing, excretion and so forth. Just as the fetus cannot imagine the world to which it will be born, we cannot imagine the world of spiritual daylight. The unprecedented miracles occurring at Shinreikyo are the signs of the arrival of a new age. At Shinreikyo, models of the new world, though for now on a small scale, are being constructed one after another.

A teaching of Kyososama says that if you want to find out more about the new world, you must come to Shinreikyo, see rightly into what is happening, and correctly understand the deep meaning behind these events.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
Undesirable.
38. *Is sex only for procreation?*
Yes.

39. *Is masturbation allowed?*
Neither allowed nor prohibited.

40. *Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?*
Yes.

41. *Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?*
Nothing in particular.

42. *Is transvestism immoral?*
Not immoral but unhealthy.

43. *Is homosexuality immoral?*
Yes.

44. *Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?*
Yes.

45. *Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?*
No.

46. *Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?*
Yes.

47. *Is divorce acceptable?*
Yes, but only in inevitable cases.

48. *Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?*
Yes. A moral and natural one.

49. *Are men and women separate but equal?*
Men and women are biologically separate, but equal before the law.

50. *Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?*
The use of drugs (opium, LSD, etc.) is prohibited. It is allowable to drink alcohol, and we use sake (rice wine) in rituals as divine offerings.

51. *Should prayers be allowed in public schools?*
It depends on kinds of prayers. For example, in Japan, before eating meals we say "Itadakimasu," join our palms together and make a little bow. This originated from Buddhist prayers, but today it has become just part of Japanese customs. This kind should be allowed.
52. *Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?*
   Yes, but in an impartial way.

53. *Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?*
   No. This is just a health concern.

54. *Is gambling allowed?*
   Yes.

55. *Is smoking allowed?*
   Yes.
Sikh

Truth is high, higher still is truthful living.

Guru Nanak Dev-Ji

NANAK, BORN A HINDU, FOUNDED SIKHISM over 500 years ago in the Punjab region in northern India. He repudiated the caste system and the authority of the Brahmins and taught the oneness of God. Release from the cycle of reincarnation comes through devotion.

Ten gurus followed Nanak with he final living guru having died in 1708. The religion was reformed in the 20th century, and in 1931 Sikh scholars and theologians produced the Reht Maryada, the official Sikh Code of Conduct, guidelines against which all Sikhs can measure themselves.

There are about 20 million Sikhs today, most of whom live in the Kashmir region between India and Pakistan.

From Gobind Singh Mansukhani

Gateway to Sikhism
Revised: 03 Oct 2001

Every religion provides a code of conduct for its followers, and Sikhism is no exception to this rule. There is no formal list of commandments and prohibitions in the Sikh Scriptures. But they have been tabilized in the "Rehat Maryada." The Gurus by their words and deeds guided their followers to a holy and purposeful life. Guru Nanak declared: “Without virtuous living there can be no devotional worship.” (AG, 4) He elaborates this idea through the homily of the love of a bride for her groom. The good wife adorns herself with patience, contentment and sweet speech in order to win the love of her husband. Then gives up anger, covetousness and pride, so that she may enjoy bliss with her lord. Hence, morality is the basis of spiritual life. Holiness and altruistic action go together. The perfect man will always try to help others.

The sources of Sikh Ethics are the Guru Granth Sahib, the Dasam Granth, compositions of Bhai Gurdas, Janam-sakhis, Rahit-namas and The Sikh Rahat Maryada as issued by the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar. The Sikh principles of conduct and dynamic participation in secular matters are based on the stories and poems (hymns) contained in this literature.

Concept of Virtue

It is difficult to define virtue or morality. Dictionary definitions cannot possibly cover its entire dimensions, but they all agree on "Righteous action and honorable conduct." In the Sikh credo, virtue in its essence is love. That universal love which finds expression in the brotherhood of man and in respecting the common man. This love is the source of selfless service and
charitable work. It drives out ego, which is the root of conceit and exploitation. In its real sense, virtue means the love of God and His creation. Guru Gobind Singh declared: "Only those who love God unite with God." So basically, any action which takes one nearer to God is virtuous.

Guru Nanak says: "All meditations, disciplines, happiness, repute and respect O Musan, I will sacrifice again and again, for a moment of love." (AG, 1364) Putting it in different words, all that is pleasing to God is virtuous and holy. According to the Gurus, fasting, mortification, asceticism, poverty are not virtues, for they affect the body adversely, as do an over-regard for eating, drinking, dressing and amusement. The Guru lays down a simple rule, namely, "Shun those things which cause pain or harm to the body or produce evil thought in the mind." This rule is basic to the Sikh way of life.

Sikhism believes in divine justice and the morality of the world order. Evil will ultimately fail, though it may often seem to succeed for a while. God alone is the Perfect Judge; He cannot be deceived by hypocritical acts or any cunning of man. He reads all hearts and knows every person's innermost motivation. Goodness is to be rewarded and wickedness punished. Ultimately Truth alone will prevail.

Sikhism does not regard altruistic acts or good conduct as ends in themselves. These are a means to achieve the goal. Man's divine spark is dimmed only by his ignorance or indifference to the force and suddenness of the temptations that constantly beset him; it is this in-built weakness that leads to his surrender to such forces and pressures. It is only by association with good and virtuous people that he will feel encouraged to "gird up his loins" and face the challenge of life.

Another important touchstone or yardstick for man is the quest for "The Truth." The Gurus considered Truthful living to be better than only a belief in "The Truth." Many people swear by truth, knowing very well that they are following the path of falsehood or cant. Such double-conduct is found not only in political leaders, but also in men of apparent goodness and piety. The Gurus insisted on overcoming these negative forces before one attempted purity of conduct. The Guru says: "Shun vice and run after virtue; those who commit sins wilt have to repent; Those who cannot distinguish between right and wrong will, sink in mud repeatedly. Shun greed, give up calumny and falsehood, then you may come to 'The Truth.'" (AG, 598)

A common human weakness is to criticize the vices of others, without trying to eradicate them in one's self. One should endeavor to correct himself, before he criticizes others. Generally he finds excuses and compulsions for his own defects and lapses. This means that he is not true to himself. Progress follows where one can see oneself objectively. Sikhism itself enjoins positive action and moral conduct. It must originate from good motivation and tend to further the right objective. We do many traditional things, little realizing that they have no meaning or value.

Concept of Sin

The general concept of sin is that it is "action in willful disobedience of the Will of God or the Commandments of the Scriptures." According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, "Sin is not the violation of a law or a convention, but of the central source of all finiteness through ignorance or an assertion of the independence of that ego, which seeks its own private gain at the expense of others." Amongst Christians there is the concept of 'Original Sin.' This refers to the disobedience of God's order by Adam and Eve in eating the fruit of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. Sikhism has no such belief. Man is essentially of divine essence. However, on account of his self-assertion or ego, he ignores his divine source and then pretends to act in sheer ignorance. He then thinks
that he is distinct from God and builds around himself, like the spider's web, a shell of the ego (haumai) which makes him forget the God in himself. Man's building up of this separate identity and his own self-conceit cause him to do things which then set in motion a chain-reaction.

Man's ego takes many forms. The most obvious is selfishness or pride due to position, power, money or knowledge. It promotes a sense of superiority within him and also a sense of a disregard for others. This alienates him from his fellow men and leads to sin and exploitation. Egoistic actions are like chains round the neck of the individual. Egoism is the root of man's evil thought and action. The Guru says: “The Lord has produced a play on the role of egoism. There is one mansion and five thieves who do evil within.” (AG, 1096)

The five thieves mentioned above are the five major vices in Sikhism, namely, Lust (Kam), Anger (Krodh), Greed (Lobh), Worldly attachment (Moh) and Pride (Ahankar). Some of the others sins mentioned by the Sikh theologians are atheism, inertia, deceits, slander and ingratitude. Guru Gobind Singh further laid down four prohibitions, which are regarded as "major sins" for the Khalsa. Additionally some minor sins are mentioned in the Rahat-nama.

Is it possible to undo or escape the consequences of one's sins? Some methods of atonement are provided by some religions by way of confession, sacrifice, austerities or fine. Generally speaking, the minor sins are said to be forgiven by holy works, prayers and voluntary community-service. There is no particular penance provided by the Sikh Scriptures. Remembrance of the Holy Word or God's Name washes away the pollution of sin. Similarly association with saintly beings removes the stain of sin: "Listen, my friends, to the benefits of attending in the company of saints: Filth is removed millions of sorrows vanish and the mind becomes pure!" (AG, 809)

Individual Ethics

Dutifulness

For which the world is the field of action. The Gurus called it Dharamsal—a place for the performance of one's duties and righteous deeds. Duties imply obligations to oneself, to the family, to society, to one's country and humanity at large. Some duties are mentioned in the Scriptures and some are laid down by the State. Man has to obey both, because if he infringes them, he will reap the consequences thereof.

Man's duties as an individual: Firstly, he must look after his body and his health. He must avoid that food and drink which will impair his physical or mental well being. Moderation is the principle which should guide one's choice in this field. Secondly, man must develop his mind through education and training and be able to earn his living. He must support his family (and his near relatives). Married life is the normal state for an individual, unless they are either physically or mentally retarded. One must earn his living by fair and honest means. The amassing of wealth by the exploitation of labour is forbidden in Sikhism. Thirdly, one must serve others as far as possible, share one's food and also support projects of public welfare. Voluntary service to the poor and sick are recommended by the Gurus. There are also certain dues required of an individual as the member of an organisation. For example Khalsa Sikh has to maintain the Five K's and follow the Khalsa discipline.

Man's duties to others: The basic principle is that one must so conduct oneself that he sets an example which others can follow. In any event they should behave to others as they expect others to behave towards them. The duties to others may also depend upon the holding of a particular office. As a member of the human family others must be treated with consideration.
Neither slander others nor cause mischief nor harm to them. He should be kind not only to his neighbors, but to one and all. He should be ready and willing to help those who are less fortunate than himself and participate in projects of social concern like orphanages, widow's homes and institutions for the care of the sick and the handicapped. There is also a duty to one's superiors like parents, teachers and the head of the community or the State. One must respect national leaders, obey one's parents and teachers. Seek the advice of the family elders in cases of need. Teachers should be respected for they give knowledge through precept and example. Similarly, one must show courtesy and consideration to the aged and the handicapped.

The duties to equals or peers include politeness and cordiality in one's dealings with them. Frankness and fairness will play a large part in oiling the smooth flow of social life. The duties to one's subordinate include trying to understand their problems and being able to sympathize with them in their times of crisis or distress. It is one's duty to help any who seek one's help, even those who on account of shyness may not ask for aid.

Prudence

Certain religions exclude social morality and the betterment of the environment from the sphere of duty. Sikhism believes in moulding one's environment for moral goals. The Gurus paid a lot of attention to social reform, particularly in abolishing cruel practices like untouchability, infanticide and suttee. Prudence lies in considering what is right or wrong for society or the social group as a whole. Man has the faculty of discrimination and he also has the capacity to distinguish between good and bad. There are choices or options open to man in many cases and then he must exercise his intellect to find out what is in favor of human sociability and the public good. Sometimes the choice may be difficult, as for example, traditional practice versus moral compliance. In such a case the choice should fall on the ethical option or the one which promotes the quality of life. The Gurus protested against the tyranny of their Rulers and the corruption of bureaucracy, as well as caste prejudices and rivalries. They exposed the priestly class for their greed and hypocrisy.

It is man's duty to monitor his own environment and raise his voice against inequality and injustice. He must use his power of reason for the betterment of society and the improvement of his surroundings. Prudence would even seem to recommend force, for a good purpose or a moral issue. Similarly, the social practices which promote inequality among men, the segregation of sexes, superstition and pollution, were condemned by the Gurus. They took steps to remove these promoters of inequality and myth. The begging mendicants pretending to holiness were dubbed as social parasites. The Gurus emphasized the use of reason in demolishing social ills and abuses.

Professional duties pertain to the relationship which a professional person has with his client, for example the duty of a doctor to his patient, of a lawyer to his client, of a merchant to his customer, or a landlord to his tenant. Besides there are also the duties of elected representatives or of holders of honorary position like the President of a mutual-benefit Society or the Secretary Trustee, of a temple or a charitable organization. The general duty of a professional is to discharge his function sufficiently, and with a sense of responsibility and sincerity. He must safeguard the interests of his client and give him the necessary truthful guidance and direction. A doctor's duty to his patient is very delicate, for he is dealing with a human being in trouble, therefore he must give him his undivided attention and greatest professional devotion. He cannot afford to be indifferent or negligent. Similarly it is the duty of a lawyer or attorney to offer sound advice, to his client. He must not prolong the case to make more money or do any thing to obstruct the course of justice. Many litigants get dissatisfied with their legal counsel, because the latter have adopted unfair means to gain advantage from them. Honesty and fair play are the tests of professional competence.
With regard to elected or fiduciary positions, the duties are even more onerous and sensitive. There is an element of morality in such appointments. The representative is duty bound to pay attention to the wishes of the electorate or the people he is supposed to serve. As a trustee he must safeguard the interest of the entire group which elected him. He must look after the assets and property of any Trust, as if these were his own. Though law regulates the nature and functions of office-bearers it is important that people in power perform their functions, impartially and with care and integrity. Office bearers must act consciously in the interest of their beneficiaries and man's duty to speak out against the malpractice.

Justice

Justice as a virtue implies respect for the rights of others. It also stands for fairness and impartiality. The neglect or violation of the rights of others is a moral lapse. The Guru condemned the usurpation of another's right as unreligious like the eating of pork by a Muslim or beef by a Hindu. Delay and the denial of justice, is generally due to greed and selfishness. Justice must be done with a good heart, and not by shedding crocodile tears. Justice lies in apportioning correctly, what is the due of others, even if they have not the courage to ask for it.

In a wider sense, justice means the non-exploitation of others. Unfortunately in our modern competitive society, exploitation is sometimes condoned on the grounds of the survival of the fittest. Trampling on the rights of others is justified as an ingredient of ambition and go-getting. It is generally agreed that many get rich as quickly as they can, even when this cannot be done without employing dishonest and underhand means. Making a quick buck is an art which involves cunning and trickery. Moreover, in our present-day society, the rich or the strong often get away with it. The Gurus censured the Rulers for looting the peasants and compared it to 'Devouring men at night.' Moreover, justice in its real sense connotes equity and not legalisticism. It forbids preferential treatment to any person, religious or social group. Justice in its essence manifests selflessness or the conquest of the ego, and is one of the means for self-realisation.

Tolerance

People belonging to different region and faiths have different customs, habits and manners. It is therefore necessary that the individual should not be upset by them. He must accept non-conformity and diversity as an inescapable fact of life. However, this does not imply that he should change his stand because of others. He must remain firm in his own convictions and make no compromise on principles; he must control any feeling of prejudice or violence when he sees people whose manners or customs are not to his liking. Racialism is a prevalent disease among the most civilized societies today; it is in fact a form of superiority writ large. The golden principle of tolerance demands 'live and let live.' Tolerance puts a human and charitable construction on the apparently peculiar conduct of others. The tolerant person does not feel angry or upset. He keeps his cool in times of excitement or anger. Even if he feels mentally disturbed he will not show his impatience or annoyance. Just as a sensible person tolerates the foolish behavior of a child, in the same way, the tolerant person will be able to stand ignorance or lack of politeness in others. Why should one expect that others will always behave to us as one wants them to behave? Tolerance accepts dissent and even opposition. This quality is particularly needed by Rulers and religious teachers, because without it, they are likely to allow or condone many follies and atrocities against those who differ from them.
Temperance

Self-control is necessary in desires, words and actions. It is generally agreed that man's mind runs after lower things as a matter of course. The Guru says: “The mind seeks evil things, but through the Guru's Word, it can be controlled.” Such control is not to be violent or mortifying like the practices of Hath-Yoga, but mental control through a process of harmony and moderation. Thus man's faculties are rightly channelized and gently guided. This method is natural Sahaj and not forced or punitive. Guru Amar Das has advised in his Anand how to regulate the human organs of action for high and noble tasks. The eyes, the ears, the tongue, the hands and feet are to be used for good purposes to act at the right moment. Temperance is like a fence which prevents one from straying into the wilderness. It is the golden mean between self-indulgence and rigid regimentation. Temperance is just the right way for the householder. He should enjoy the normal comforts and amenities of life, but at the same time, he must keep his passion and desire under control. This self-regulation would result in a balanced and harmonious existence.

Sikh Virtues

The virtues recommended by the Scriptures are many, but five of them, corresponding to the Five vices are regarded as major virtues. These five are Chastity, Patience, Contentment, Detachment and Humility.

1. Chastity

Chastity or continence, is emphasized in Sikhism, because in the human body lies the divine presence and as such, the body has to be kept clean and perfect. Those things which harm the body or cause sickness and disease have to be scrupulously avoided. Sex is to be limited to one's wife. Pre-marital or extra-marital sex is forbidden to a Sikh. He should consider females older to him as his mother, equal to him as a sister, and younger than him as a daughter. He should never entertain evil thoughts in the company of women. Marriage is a sacrament and the purpose thereof is companionship and help on the spiritual path, rather than sexual enjoyment. The marriage ideal is summed up in the maxim: 'one soul in two bodies.' Fidelity to one's married partner is the essence of continence. Monogamy is the rule in Sikhism.

In order to avoid evil thoughts, one should keep away from obscene books, nasty plays and films, and sexy music. Drinking of alcoholic beverages and wines or the wearing of scanty or flashy dresses and dancing of men and women together is prohibited for the Sikhs. The Guru says: “0 Lust! You consign people to hell and to the cycle of transmigration, You cheat all minds, influence the three worlds an destroy all contemplation and culture; Your pleasure is momentary, you make one fickle and poor and punish the high and the low; I have overcome your fear by associating with saintly persons and taking shelter with God!” (AG, 1358)

Even in married life, sex is to be mutually regulated. Those who are spiritually inclined, consider the sublimation of sex into divine love as a great virtue.

2. Patience

Patience implies forbearance in the face of provocation. Some say that it is natural to be angry, but one should think twice before giving vent to anger. Patience gives moral courage to bear the unexpected, such as sudden hardships and sorrows. Guru Amardas says: “There is no
greater penance than patience, no greater happiness than contentment, no greater evil than greed, no greater virtue than mercy, and no more potent weapon than forgiveness.”

It may be noted that saints and great means are tested through the fire of suffering, though they have not done any thing to deserve that suffering. The challenges of life are intended to evaluate the mettle of man. Even the performance of duty may involve the facing of difficulties and personal injury, but that is no excuse for shirking one's duty. One must pray for God's help and grace to overcome the difficulties.

There are people, who are in a position to injure or even to crush their opponents with the power they possess, but they control resentment and anger, because they firmly believe that if another loses his head, they should not lose theirs. Moreover patience keeps their mental faculties in balance. Their minds are tranquil. They do not cry or rail bitterly against their enemies or at God for their misfortunes or deprivation. They maintain their peace of mind and keep calm when faced by threats or tragedy: “Patience is the sustenance of angelic beings!” (AG, 83)

3. Contentment

Contentment is an attitude of mind that accepts victory or defeat in the same way. A contended man is active; he tries his best to go forward, but he does not despair if he cannot achieve what he wants. Contentment has no place for fear, fatalism, inertia or sloth. Guru Nanak tells us of a contented person in the following lines: “They (the contented ones) do not tread the path of evil, but do good and practise righteousness; They loosen worldly attachments and eat and drink in moderation.” (AG, 467)

The contented man is free from envy, jealousy and greed. He is frugal and thrifty. He may have his ambitions, but he knows that every one does not get every thing. The Guru says: “No one feels satisfied without contentment.” (AG, 275)

Contentment does not mean a compromise with poverty and privation. In the modern world, the common man has opportunities for self-advancement and affluence. He must develop his own potentialities and work hard to move forward; at the same time, he should not become proud through his achievement or feel frustrated in case of failure. God is the ultimate arbiter of man's destiny, and He will not leave 'an iota of a man's effort uncompensated.' Unfortunately, in this modern competitive world, one seems to keep multiplying one's needs and commitments, in order to keep up with the Jones, thus only adding to one's tensions and difficulties. The contented man knows the limits of his own needs and so does not feel frustrated if he is unable to get what his neighbor or friend has, in spite of his best efforts.

Truly conceited people realise the distinctions between means and ends. Wealth and position are the means and not the ends of life. If one has a large amount of wealth, then some must be devoted to the benefit of the community and for altruistic purposes. The hoarding of wealth and the prestige of office are not to be used as means for self-aggrandisement or inflation of the ego.

4. Detachment

Detachment implies an ever-increasing non-attachment to all things of a material nature. It does not imply renunciation or asceticism or indifference to the world in which we live. It implies devotion to duty and the performance of the chores of daily life. The Sikh serves the family and the community, but he does not get deeply involved in their problems. His attitude is
that of a nurse attending a patient. She ministers to their care and comfort, but maintains her
distance. Similarly, a Sikh has to live the life of a family man — at the same time, he ought to
adopt an attitude as that of a trustee in reference to his near and dear ones. Bhai Gurdas explains
this attitude thus: "The Sikh is the living yogi, for he lives unattached in the midst o Maya." (Var, 29-15)

Guru Nanak has given the example of the lotus in the pond that is unaffected by the mud
or the movement of the water. In the same way, the 'detached' individual keeps him self away
from worldly things. They live in the world, but are not involved in worldliness. They keep their
heads high and look to a more spiritual goal.

Here is a story which reveal how detachment is possible in normal life. A Ruler once
asked a saint to tell him how he could practice detachment. The holy man told the king that he
had just one week more to live, that his death would occur after that period. The king believed the
holy man, and fearing death, led a good life, doing his duty, avoiding evil things and constantly
thinking of his coming death. After the week when he did not die as forecast, the holy man
returned to the King's palace and asked him how he has passed the seven days. The king replied
that he had spent that period like a traveller in an inn. He had done his duties as usual, but his
mind was not involved in the routine. He had avoided doing any thing wrong, fearing that God
would call him to account after his end. He had also prayed as much as he could during this
period. The holy man told the king that this was what was meant "practising detachment in life."

5. Humility

The individual alone, must overcome his own ego and pride. This is most easily done on
the path of humility, regarding oneself as the lowest of the low and considering all others as being
superior. The humble man will serve others without material motive or the expectation of reward.
He does this through his love of God and man. God is present in every living soul, and therefore
to injure the feelings of another person is to hurt the God in him. Those who are vain and the
haughty have an inflated ego and as such do not mind exploiting their fellow men. Even some
holy men are not free from pride and prejudice. Guru Tegh Bahadur warned pious people of that
pride, which is subtle and unobtrusive. Modesty is generally appreciated as a virtue. A tree laden
with fruit bends downward. Humility is not depreciation of oneself, but rather a recognition of
one's own faults and of how much one falls short of the ideal. It was a practice among the Sikhs
before Guru Gobind Singh, to greet each other by touching the other's feet. This was an
expression of the Sikh's humility. In the Sikh religion, the opportunity to touch the feet of saintly
beings or even the dust of the feet of the congregation, is regarded as a great blessing. The Gurus
in their compositions have called themselves 'unworthy and without merit.' This reflects their own
sense of humility. Guru Ramdas says: “O my Master. I am silly, save me, 0 my Lord-God! Thy
slave's praise in thine own glory!” (AG, 166)
Introduction

As one of the youngest of the 'world' religions Sikhism can be defined as the way of life or the religious path of those who call themselves Sikh. The word 'Sikh' means someone who is on the path of learning. Sikhs believe in one God and are disciples of the Guru. In the broader Indian context the term 'guru' signifies any spiritual preceptor or religious teacher. For Sikhs, however, the term 'guru' is restricted to a three-fold signification: (i) God as the true Guru (satguru); (ii) the ten historical gurus from Guru Nanak (b. 1469 CE) to Guru Gobind Singh (d.1708 CE); (iii) the Sikh scripture or Adi Granth also known as the Guru Granth Sahib.

There are almost eighteen million Sikhs worldwide. Fifteen million reside in India (80% of these in the state of Punjab) with almost three million dispersed in flourishing and vibrant communities throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore.

Broadly speaking, the religious and cultural roots of Sikhism can be traced to the Punjab, a fertile agricultural region in Northwestern India, some six centuries ago. Primarily, though, Sikhs trace their religious origins to the teachings of one man, Guru Nanak, along with his nine successor Gurus: Angad, Amardas, Ramdas, Arjan, Hargobind, Har Rai, Har Krishan, Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh, and more broadly to a tradition of saint-poets (the so called sants) a tradition to which Nanak added his own unique signature.

The principles of Sikh religiosity are enshrined in the Adi Granth (or Guru Granth Sahib) a unique volume which contains, in addition to the writings of the Sikh Gurus, compositions by Hindu and Muslim mystics. The ecumenical nature of the Adi Granth clearly suggests that Guru Nanak, far from holding other religions to be untrue or worthless, rather intended pluralism and difference to be at the heart of Sikh religiosity. This is especially evident in the multiplicity of names of God used by the Sikh Gurus — some taken from the Hindu tradition (e.g. Ram, Mohan, Hari, Shiv, Isar, Brahma) others from the Islamic tradition (e.g. Rabb, Allah, Khuda, Sahib) - although the nature of God is stressed emphatically as One.

Despite the ideologically fluid - one might even say anti-ideological — nature of the Adi Granth, the representation of Sikhism underwent major revisions in the hands of a neo-colonial Sikh reformist movement (the Singh Sabha) during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This movements was essentially a response to increasing proselytisation by Christian missionaries and right wing Hindu organisations like the Arya Samaj to the misrepresentation of Sikhism by Indologists. The resultant modification of Sikhism can also be seen as its response to being inserted into a global modernity whose main medium of representation was English. Consequently what we read today as "Sikh ethics", "Sikh theology", "Sikh history" are basically responses by modern Sikhism to the demand for such categories, which strictly speaking, are not native to the Sikh and broader Indic tradition. Thus in formulating a response to questions concerning "Sikh ethics" today, one must learn to differentiate between the kind of response that relies on the Adi Granth for guidance, and one that is an ideological representation.
1. **What does it mean to be a good person?**

The word 'good' has relatively little meaning in Sikhism unless it is understood in relation to the problem of self-centredness. Thus one might be deemed good in the sense that one diligently follows one's own value system (which for Sikhs today involves reciting the Adi Granth and living according to the *rahit maryada* or Sikh Code of Conduct) and respects the value systems of others. But according to the Adi Granth one might still be a *manmukh* (self-centred individual), whereas the aim in Sikhism is to achieve the status of *gurmukh* — one whose ego-centrism has been shattered and for whom dualities such as 'good' and 'evil' are meaningless. Becoming a *gurmukh* involves the transformation of one's self by overcoming the five psychological vices: *kam* (lust), *krodh* (anger), *lobh* (greed), *moh* (attachment), *ahankar* (pride).

2. **Why be good?**

   For one's own peace of mind and to promote harmonious relations with others.

3. **Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?**

   Yes, since one can be outwardly religious but still be no closer to overcoming the *manmukh* stage. Overcoming *manmukh* existence involves a transformation of one's mind. According to Sikh scripture there is no reason why this cannot be done by followers of other religions as long as they focus on self-transformation.

4. **Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?**

   No, if apostasy means giving up the distinction between *manmukh* and *gurmukh*.
   
   Yes, if apostasy means loss of belief in external symbols and rituals.

5. **Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?**

   They are more or less intertwined.

6. **What is the source of ethics?**

   The source of ethics is the Sikh scripture: Adi Granth or Guru Granth Sahib. The code of conduct for initiated (Khalsa) Sikhs is essentially informed by an interpretation of this text.

7. **Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?**

   Yes since the basis of Sikh religiosity has little or nothing to do with the categories 'theism' or 'atheism'.

8. **How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?**

   By using one's faculties of reasoning. When this is not enough Sikhs will invariably take guidance from the Guru Granth Sahib either directly by listening to *hukamnamas* or by seeking the advice of those skilled in the scriptural interpretation.

9. **Why do bad things happen to good people?**

   Sikhism teaches the equal acceptance of good and bad as part of the happening of *hukam* (divine will or order, the way things are). Only a *manmukh* will lament if bad things happen to him or her and celebrate the good. A *gurmukh* will endeavour to remain in a state of mental equipoise (sahaj).
10. *Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?*
No. Sikhism does not recognise any overt distinction between religion and secularism.

11. *Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?*
Strictly speaking rules cannot be enforced by anyone and in practise the whole process is decentralised. Local *sangats* (communities) will often make moral decisions through the institution of the *panj piare* (lit. the beloved five) who will always be Khalsa Sikhs and are vested with a certain degree of authority. When major disputes arise, however, decisions that affect the community as a whole will usually be deferred to the institution of the Akal Takht at Amritsar which is also the seat of temporal authority for Sikhs.

12. *Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?*
By no means.

13. *What role should religion play in secular society?*
The overt distinction between religion and secularism is not recognised. In practise Sikhs will normally try to accommodate themselves within the law of the country in which they reside.

**Use of Force**

14. *Is killing ever justified?*
Only if one's own life or that of others is threatened. In Sikhism there is no metaphysical contradiction between violence and peace. They are relative terms.

15. *Is war ever justified?*
Only against cruelty, aggression and in the defence of innocent people.

16. *Is violence against innocent people justifiable?*
No.

17. *Can someone be a conscientious objector?*
Yes.

18. *Is force justifiable against children?*
It depends on the circumstances.

19. *Is force justifiable against a spouse?*
Only in self-defence.

20. *Is suicide ever justifiable?*
Suicide is regarded as an ultimately self-centred decision and, insofar, stands as an affront to *hukam*.

21. *To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?*
The incidence of martyrdom in Sikh tradition is usually linked to the defence of Sikh values and to the basic rights of others (non-Sikhs). The best examples are the martyrdoms of Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur who both suffered torture and gave their lives to protect someone else's freedom and beliefs, which they did not necessarily share or agree with.
22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
No. All human life is valued equally in Sikhism.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offences?
There is no clear consensus on this issue. However there are occasions in Sikh history where capital punishment was meted out under extreme circumstances to individuals who had terrorised entire communities.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
There is no strict theological position pro- or anti-abortion. Nevertheless abortion can be sanctioned under extreme circumstances, e.g. when the mother's life may be threatened.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
Yes.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
In Sikhism the human body is to be regarded as a means for becoming divine (i.e. moving towards gurmukh stage). While there are no specific rules in the Adi Granth regarding bodily modification, nevertheless Sikhs are encouraged to respect their bodies. To alter an otherwise normal and healthy body for purely selfish motives is strongly discouraged. In addition the Sikh code of conduct prohibits the cutting of one's hair.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
No. Natural laws must be respected.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
Yes.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
It depends on the circumstances.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
Yes.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
So far there is no clear consensus on this issue. It depends on what exactly genetic engineering is being used for.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
Not in its overtly historicist or scientistic form. It depends entirely how evolution is defined.
34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?  
Intrinsically so.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?  
It would be considered immoral to cause unnecessary harm or cruelty towards animals.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?  
There is no consensus on this matter.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?  
No.

38. Is sex only for procreation?  
No.

39. Is masturbation allowed?  
There is neither consensus nor undue concern with this matter.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?  
No.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?  
For Sikhs initiated into the order of the Khalsa

42. Is transvestism immoral?  
There is consensus on this matter.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?  
There is no clear consensus on this matter.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?  
Yes, unless there is an overt threat to the community or to the lives of individuals.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?  
There is no consensus on this matter.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?  
Sikhs are generally monogamous. Depending on the circumstances, though, men have taken second wives. But this will often be in cases where a woman has lost her husband and needed protection.

47. Is divorce acceptable?  
Only if the suffering caused to one or both parties in the marriage outweighs all else.
48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?  
No.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?  
Yes.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?  
No.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?  
Yes, as long as other religions are catered for in some way.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?  
According to Sikhism all religions must be given equal treatment.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?  
Sikhs are forbidden to eat beef and any animal which has endured torture. Muslim halal meat is forbidden to Sikhs.

54. Is gambling allowed?  
No.

55. Is smoking allowed?  
No.
TAOISM

Those who follow the natural way are different from others in three respects. They have great mercy and economy, and the courage not to compete. From mercy there comes courage; from economy, generosity; and from humility, willingness to lead from behind.

Lao-Tzu

TAOISM IS ONE OF CHINA'S TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS. It reveres Lao Tzu as its founder and its primary scripture is Lao Tzu’s Book of Tao and its Virtue.

Taoism has historically been divided into its philosophical and religious forms. Both emphasize spontaneity, tranquility and seeking harmony with the natural world. Since its formation in the middle of the Eastern Han dynasty (25 - 220 CE), Taoist religion has undergone phases of formation, reform, flourishing and development, division into sects.

The Wudang tradition of religious Taosim began around 1000 CE. It is characterized by its emphasis on cultivation and the refinement of one’s spiritual nature, inner alchemy, as well as its practice of the Inner School of Boxing.

Estimates are that there are 30 million Taoists, many of whom blend their religion with Buddhism and Confucianism. Whereas Confucianism regulates social relations, Taoism regulates one’s private life.

Most Taoists are found in Taiwan and other Southeast Asian countries with Chinese minorities.

Yun Xiang Tseng
Priest, Wudang Temple
Hubei Province
China
Founder, Association for Chinese American Enrichment
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
   Be virtuous.

2. Why be good?
   Everyone is good when born. Be good means be on the same course of Tao (the way).

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
   Yes.
4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
Yes.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
Yes.

6. What is the source of ethics?
From Pre-heaven. We are born good.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
Yes.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
Use morality as a rule.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
It’s just natural.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
Yes.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
Self-conscience.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
Yes.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
Promote awareness of morality.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
Yes, some killings are.

15. Is war ever justified?
No.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
No.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
Yes.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
No.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
No.
20. Is suicide ever justifiable?  
Yes, sometimes.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?  
For the good of many other people.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?  
No.

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?  
Yes, for killing innocent people.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?  
Yes, if the mother choose so.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?  
Yes, for the justice.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?  
Yes.

27. Are transfusions allowed?  
Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?  
No.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?  
Yes.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?  
No.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?  
Yes.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?  
No.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?  
Yes.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?  
Yes. A great deal.
35. Do animals have any moral standing?
Yes.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
No.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
No.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
No.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
No.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
No.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
Yes.

42. Is transvestism immoral?
Yes.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
Yes.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?
Yes.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?
No.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?
Yes.

47. Is divorce acceptable?
Yes.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?
Yes.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?
Yes.
50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?  
No.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?  
Yes.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?  
No.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?  
No.

54. Is gambling allowed?  
No.

55. Is smoking allowed?  
No.
VODOUN

VODOUN IS ONE OF THE SEVERAL FORMS OF WEST AFRICAN RELIGION that is practiced in the Caribbean and the United States as well. Vodoun Santeria and Shango share many characteristics in common and distinguish themselves from other indigenous African religion in that they are not tribally based. The emphasis in Vodoun is upon cosmological knowledge, veneration of ancestors, and the mastery of natural forces.

About 15 million people practice these religions in Africa. Vodoun is found primarily in Haiti, Cuba and Benin. Several million in the Western world are adherents of Vodoun. Many of these practitioners also consider themselves Catholics.

Vivian Dansi Hounon
Mamaissii, Dahomean Vodoun Shrine
Martinez, Georgia
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
   In Dahomean Vodoun a "good person" is someone who is in balance with their proscribed destiny, and who adheres to the "law of God" as taught to them by the Ancestors, their tutelary divinity, and community elders.

2. Why be good?
   One is rewarded by the Ancestors and God with blessings of both material and spiritual wealth.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
   Yes.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
   Yes. Dahomean Vodoun is not predicated on a set of proscribed "beliefs" but rather on the nature and needs of one own spirit-destiny.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
   Yes. Within the theological context of the Vodoun tradition "morality" is relative in how it maintains spiritual and social harmony for the benefit of both the individual and the group. Vodoun is not looked upon as a "religion" but rather a way of life that happens to manifest many of the precepts that the West would define as "religious."

6. What is the source of ethics?
   The Ancestors, tutelary divinities, and God.
7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
Yes.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
If a certain action disturbs the equilibrium of the person or community, it is "wrong." If a certain action restores harmony and balance to the community, then it is "right"

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
"Good and bad" are relative. Oftentimes, "bad" things happen to people to make them "good," or "better" human beings.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
No. Though there are degrees of "offenses." Somewhat similar to the Catholic "venial vs. mortal sins."

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
The Ancestors, tutelary divinities, and the Elders.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
Some. The "Ten Commandments" that are delineated in Christianity are also the same in Vodoun. These dictates predate Christianity.

13. What role should religion play in secular society?
In Vodoun, they are not separate. This is a Western phenomenon.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
Yes. Oftentimes as punishment by the Ancestors for a very serious offense.

15. Is war ever justified?
Yes, especially to defend oneself or community.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
No.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
This concept is foreign Vodoun.

18. Is force justifiable against children?
Chastisement/punishment for a valid offense, yes.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
In patriarchal culture where women’s rights are restricted. It is considered "justifiable" against women. However, this is not the case in Vodoun. Spouse abuse is not acceptable.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
Suicide is a great taboo in Vodoun.
21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?  
This concept is also foreign in Vodoun.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?  
Do not understand the question. Is the "other" person "innocent" as well?

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?  
In traditional African culture, it is deemed acceptable, especially for crimes against the King such as blasphemy, or social crimes such as adultery. Today, capital punishment is considered acceptable if it is done fairly and fits the crime, such as murder.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?  
If it is determined that the child might cause the death of the mother, or the child may cause suffering or ill will to a family, it is commonly done. It is considered a woman’s decision nonetheless.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?  
No. The body, even in death, is considered sacred, and its integrity important.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?  
Not really.

27. Are transfusions allowed?  
Yes, but not encouraged.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?  
If the Ancestors say the person will ultimately live, yes.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?  
Yes, after consulting the Ancestors and divinities first.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?  
The same as #29.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?  
Yes, Same as above. Ancestors are consulted in all cases involving the affairs of the family, especially in the taking or sustaining of life.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?  
It is not considered good at all, especially “human cloning” and “anonymous sperm banks.” This is completely antithetical to the entire concept of Ancestral veneration and lineage continuity. Who are the ancestors of a child being born in such a manner? How do they resolve their spiritual disconnection not knowing from whom they descend? It is a most cruel form of “child abuse” from our position.
33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
Somewhat, but not the origins of the human race. We do not accept that we descended from apes.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Yes. Vodoun is an Earth/Nature based Ancestral tradition.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
Yes, absolutely. Animals are considered sacred especially when they are offered as food to our Ancestors and divinities. Unfortunately, the Christian evangelicals and Hollywood has presented their version of this most important and sacred rite which in truth and practice is no different from the Judeo-Christian rites regarding animal sacrifice.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
No. Dahomean Vodoun is a tradition that focuses on the "here and now." The future, it is believed, is never promised and belongs to God.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
For young girls, premarital sex is considered appropriate and may even be encouraged before marriage.

38. Is sex only for procreation?
No.

39. Is masturbation allowed?
Yes, unless it is taboo for the individual

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?
No. However, it depends on taboos specific for each individual.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?
Depends on taboos specific for each individual.

42. Is transvestism immoral?
In the Western definition (psycho-social basis) it is not considered “normal” or appropriate behavior in Dahomean Vodoun. Unfortunately, euro-anthropologists have mistakenly labeled men and women who dress in the attire of their tutelary spirit during ritual ceremony as being “transvestites” and even “homosexual.” This is not the case at all.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?
Yes, it is considered immoral in Dahomean Vodoun.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?
Yes, absolutely.
45. *Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?*
I cannot speak for the state on this issue. However, it is not acceptable in the Dahomean Vodoun.

46. *Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?*
No, at least for the men.

47. *Is divorce acceptable?*
Yes, but it is not encouraged.

48. *Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?*
No.

49. *Are men and women separate but equal?*
No. With the influence of both Islam and Christianity, patriarchy has replaced many of the matriarchal traditions that originally defined West African culture.

50. *Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?*
Under appropriate circumstances, yes.

51. *Should prayers be allowed in public schools?*
If the Vodunsi can pray to their gods, and the Muslim to theirs, and the Hindu to theirs, etc., it should be allowed. No one religion should dominate, which is what the issue of prayers in public schools is about. All are forced to pay their taxes only for the Christian based religions to pray. This is wrong.

52. *Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?*
If there is no infringement upon the rights of another group, and all are subsidized equally, why not?

53. *Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?*
Yes, but it is again specific to the individual and ethnic group. For example, some cannot eat pork, or beef etc.,

54. *Is gambling allowed?*
Lottos and other games of chance and fortune are not necessarily harmful unless it becomes an addiction.

55. *Is smoking allowed?*
Smoking is not encouraged. However, again it is specific for the individual.
WICCAN

An ye harm none, do what ye will.
The Charge of the Goddess

PAGAN RELIGIONS TRACE THEIR ANCESTRY TO ANTIQUITY. Elements of those ancient practices have been revived in recent years, combining elements of nature worship and the use of magic.

Some neo-pagans participate in groups (covens), but it may be that a large percent practice their religion alone or with one or two other people. Since most pagan groups don't keep membership roles and the practice of many groups is secret, membership figures vary wildly from just a few thousand to about 700,000. The upper figure may be the more accurate.

Most neo-pagans are Wiccans and most Wiccans are located in the United States.

Michael Thorn
Former President of the Covenant of the Goddess,
North American Coordinator for the Pagan Federation
Mastic, New York
USA

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
A 'good' person is one who follows the Wiccan Rede. This means doing your best to do good in the world. The Rede is one of the essential ethical principles for Wiccans/witches. It encourages a person to be beneficent, saying, An ye harm none, do what ye will. We attempt to increase the energy and activity in the world that leads to personal and spiritual growth for ourselves, others and all creation.

2. Why be good?
The Three-Fold Law posits a karmic response to our acts, If we do good it comes back to us three-fold. If we seek to do harm to other by hand or deed it will also come back to us three-fold.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
Yes. Wiccans feel there are many spiritual paths that lead to the same place. I envision the Goddess and God (or God/dess) as a gem of many facets. We each focus on a facet or aspect that we feel a connection to but it is not the only one.
4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
Yes, Wicca/Witchcraft is not for everyone. There are people of goodwill on all spiritual paths.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
Wicca has few requirements of its adherents.

6. What is the source of ethics?
We feel that individuals are autonomous and have their own spiritual connection with deity (God/dess). Through our self-awareness and following the Wiccan Rede we come to find the ethical path we need to follow in the world.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
Yes. Being good is not attached to religion or the lack thereof.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
We examine acts that lead to further growth for ourselves, for those around us and the world. Actions that encourage growth and follow the Rede lead us. Actions that harm or restrict others from self-actualizing are counter to our faith.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
Life is a path of growth and change. This can certainly be confusing and painful at times. But through adversity and challenges, we become stronger spiritual people. 'Bad' things are lessons to learn. In particular, the Gardnerian tradition of Wicca has a tenet that you must suffer to learn. This is not seen as an encouragement to bring suffering but an acknowledgment that suffering is part of our existence and that we can learn from change and adversity.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
We don't have religious offenses as such though there is a difference between magick (praying) for control or harm of someone and using a gun. There are some acts that are considered offensive by some witches. There is a history of secrecy about individuals who participate in our religion due to past discrimination. Because of this it is considered a serious matter if someone outs another person as a witch without their permission. This would be a moral issue for us but not a secular one.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
There is no central authority. Individual covens (congregations) may be lead by a Priestess and/or Priest who would give guidance. Our faith emphasizes our own responsibility for our actions. If the person is in a coven, there are times that the high priestess or high priest might step in to give direction or even exclude someone who could not comply with the accepted rules of privacy and other issues.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
Perhaps not a bad idea since they are a version of the golden rule. Having said that we wouldn't think of imposing our values on other people. We feel quite strongly that people have to find their own spiritual path. If they feel compatible with our ways, they may join in, but they may find other paths more in line with their needs.
13. **What role should religion play in secular society?**
Church and State should be separate but ethical ideals of respect for others and Nature can give guidance. Once church and state become intertwined, it can become a contest of which religions will be accepted, along with its attendant rules, and which will be excluded or marginalized. In our multi-cultural society we need to celebrate our diversity.

**Use of Force**

14. **Is killing ever justified?**
There are Wiccans in all areas of life. There are military Wiccans as well as pacifists Wiccans. There is no rule though I would expect that many would say self-defense is acceptable. Though we follow the Wiccan Rede, we must each make situation ethical judgments. There are pro-life and pro-choice witches, just as there are in many faiths.

15. **Is war ever justified?**
As mentioned in #14 there are Wiccans who span the spectrum of belief and practice related to war.

16. **Is violence against innocent people justifiable?**
The two ethical principles would preclude violence against innocent people.

17. **Can someone be a conscientious objector?**
Yes, as well as a member of the military. There is a military pagan network that has been functioning for many years, as well as pacifist Wiccans.

18. **Is force justifiable against children?**
Wiccans are opposed to corporal punishment feeling that children should be raised to be responsible for their actions and treated with respect.

19. **Is force justifiable against a spouse?**
Perhaps to prevent injury to yourself or others.

20. **Is suicide ever justifiable?**
There are no set guidelines. While we learn lessons from hardship some may wish to end their lives due to serious illness or other reasons. The general belief is in karma and karmic return. If we are unable to learn a lesson in one lifetime, we may return again to work it out again.

21. **To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?**
I don't believe that it would be acceptable.

22. **Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?**
It would be a personal decision based on the circumstances.

23. **Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?**
This would be a personal judgment based on circumstances. Some Wiccans would be against, some for and other undecided.
Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
Each person would need to follow his or her own conscience. There is a strong belief in personal autonomy and most Wiccans would feel that a woman should make decisions about her own body.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
We believe in the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. We are spiritual beings and our bodies are temporary. There is no rule but I think that many Wiccans would not care if they had an autopsy.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
No.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
Yes. No restrictions.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
This would be personal choice. We see the transition at the end of life as part of the cycle of life. In a manner of speaking, it is a birth into another existence.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
This would be personal choice. Since death is not seen as an end, many Wiccans would understand someone who was suffering and wished to make the transition to death.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
There is no restriction and it would be personal choice.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
This would be a personal choice.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
Some might object to our manipulating Nature to meet our own needs rather than try to live with Nature in harmony. Others are scientists working in the field. This is another issue of personal choice.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
Yes. We evolve spiritually and there is no reason to think that the world around us has not evolved over time.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Yes. We feel that all life is interconnected. We are connected to other people, trees, animals, rocks, the Earth, etc. Our wholistic outlook means that we are all connected.
35. **Do animals have any moral standing?**
   There are Witches who are ardent animal rights activists and those who are less concerned about the issue. Since we have a wholistic perspective we consider ourselves connected to all life. In that context it is not appropriate to consider animals (and all living and inanimate things) as deserving of respect.

36. **Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?**
   We see life as a cycle or birth, death and rebirth. At some point the entire universe will end and perhaps begin again.

**Behavior**

37. **Is sex outside marriage permissible?**
   There is a famous poem known as 'The Charge of the Goddess'. One part states that 'all acts of love and pleasure are my (the Goddess') rituals'. We believe that sexuality and its expression is a pleasurable as well as a sacred act. We are taught to be responsible and treat others with respect.

38. **Is sex only for procreation?**
   No.

39. **Is masturbation allowed?**
   Yes. In fact, in some ancient myths, it helped create the universe.

40. **Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?**
   No.

41. **Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?**
   Some traditions (denominations) of Wiccan encourage or proscribe nudity ('skyclad') during worship but it has become a minority practice. There are no other special guidelines.

42. **Is transvestism immoral?**
   There is a history of native people around the world playing with gender roles and this may be seen as an expression of the Goddess and God (male/female) in each of us. It is a common historical practice in Paganism and is acceptable.

43. **Is homosexuality immoral?**
   There are some traditions that did not have a historically positive view of lesbians and gay men. These were attitudes left over from the 1950's and before. Most individuals feel sexual expression that does not harm others is celebration and can be a sacred act. This applies for heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual persons. There are some Wiccan traditions solely for gay men or lesbians. In some native cultures, gay people are seen as especially magickal, with the ability to move between realities as shamans.

44. **Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?**
   If people can't get along with each other some restrictions would be acceptable for individual and other safety.
45. *Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?*
Yes. A hanfasting (our term for wedding) for a gay or lesbian couple is an accepted ritual.

46. *Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?*
There is a thread of 'polyamory' in the community. This is a minority but it is seen as an acceptable lifestyle. Wiccans have performed marriages between several people.

47. *Is divorce acceptable?*
Yes.

48. *Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?*
Not moral. Each person needs to explore self-actualization.

49. *Are men and women separate but equal?*
Certainly equal but also cause for celebration of differences.

50. *Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?*
There are no particular restrictions though serious drug addiction would be considered a problem. While some may use chemical means to achieve altered states (as indigenous people have for ages), others feel that we should become skilled in techniques to achieve these without drugs.

51. *Should prayers be allowed in public schools?*
There is no one opinion but if any prayer were allowed then all types of prayer would need to be allowed not just what is considered appropriate by the major religions.

52. *Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?*
Church and State should remain separate.

53. *Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?*
Some Wiccans are vegans, some carnivores. It is a person choice.

54. *Is gambling allowed?*
No restrictions.

55. *Is smoking allowed?*
There are no restrictions.
ZOROASTRIAN

Make your own self pure, O righteous man. Any one in the world here below can win purity for himself, namely, when he cleanses himself with good thoughts, words, and deeds.

Vendidad, 10, 19

Most historians and practicing Zoroastrians believe that Zarathustra, a prophet, lived between 1500-1000 BCE in Persia (Iran and Iraq), although conservative Zoroastrians place the date of 6,000 BCE.

There are 150,000 practicing Zoroastrians today, most of whom can trace their roots in India as far back the 8th century.

Khurshed Pastakia
Governor, Board of Traditional Zarathustris
Mumbai
India

General

1. What does it mean to be a good person?
A good person is one who lives a life following the principles of "Humata Hukhata Havrashta" which translates to mean Good Thoughts - Good Words - Good Deeds.
In Zarathustra's teachings greatest importance is put upon "Asha" which is a very wide term that one can loosely translate as Righteousness: doing the right thing simply because it is the right thing to do.

2. Why be good?
The fundamental precept of the Zarathusti Din (religion) is that we live in a world of duality where Evil is an equal and opposite competitor to Good. The message of Zarathustra tells man to use his "Vohu Manah" (intellect + wisdom + intuition) to discern between good and evil and then to consciously "choose" the good. Zarathustis are enjoined to be God's warriors ("rathestars") in the fight of good against evil.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?
Of course. No religion has a monopoly over goodness. Zarathusti Din honours and respects all other major religions. Moreover, belonging or not belonging to a religion does not make a man good or bad. It is how he conducts himself and his affairs that matters.
4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in your religion i.e. can an apostate be a good person?
   Of course. He may not be a Zarathusti but he could be a good person.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?
   Morality is one part of religion. Perhaps the starting point. Religion guides the good man towards his higher spiritual goals. It is a path that leads the good man to God.

6. What is the source of ethics?
   The Holy Gathas are the main repository of the Zarathusti code of morals. There are other, more mundane, laws in the Holy Vendidad, some of which may involve morals.

   The Holy Gathas and Vendidad are original Avesta texts that have survived the repeated terrorizing and plunder of our religion and culture, first by Alexander the Great (whom we call "Alexander the Accursed") and then by the Muslim fanatics who succeeded in Islamization of Zarathusti Iran about 1350 years ago. The Parsis escaped from the Arab onslaught to save their race and religion and took shelter on the shores of western India.

   These texts are written in a 6000 year-old language called Avesta, now dead. Various scholars have tried to interpret the Gathas, Vendidad, etc., using rules of grammar and philology. However, grammar and philology are imperfect tools when trying to reconstruct what was written millennia ago because in any language, meanings of words change every so often. Moreover, much of religious texts are invariably written in code and metaphor — that cannot be understood by mere literal translation. Western scholars also have the handicap of looking at Zarathusti texts through lenses tinted by their own prior theological / religious background of Judaism, Christianity, etc.

   Some of the Indian scholars interpret Avesta with a background of Sanskrit and invariably end up giving interpretations based on Vedic concepts. Due to all this there is a multitude of translations and interpretations, most of which is okay but some of it is certainly chaotic.

   Customs and traditions lay down do's and don'ts but, for the most part, these do not involve moral or ethical matters. We have many books written by enlightened Zarathusti priests where valuable commentaries are given. However, we do not have any Papal figure who can give a ruling on right and wrong with authority. Each individual must decide ethical issues for himself, based upon the guidance given in the Holy Gathas.

   The Gathas, basically, lay down that we live in a world of duality where good and evil, light and darkness, happiness and misery, wisdom and ignorance, etc. always co-exist. To live in such a world, we necessarily have to make choices between these opposites. We have to make the best choice under the given circumstances, but such a choice has to be made using the faculty of Vohu Manah (intellect + wisdom + intuition / conscience) to do what needs to be done as per the Law of Asha (Righteousness for its own sake, not with an eye on getting any reward or escaping punishment).

   It further says that while people may make their own decisions, the righteous will be rewarded and those who err in making the proper decision shall be punished. The freedom of choice is thus quite onerous. The religion is very clear about judgment: no one can escape punishment and suffering for the wrong that he does by any means. There are no concepts such as mercy, or forgiveness, or confession, or a saviour taking over the burden of humanity's sins. Each
one of us is fully responsible and accountable for whatever he/she thinks, speaks or does. Evil
thoughts are as reprehensible as evil actions.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?
   Yes, a man could be an atheist and still be a good person. But, without the support of the
institution of religion, it would be far more difficult for him to be one. Religion provides man
with a code of values that help him in deciding what is right from wrong. Without such a code of
values, one might have to flounder in uncertainty and the chances of one's negative emotions
getting the better of him are far greater.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
   Religion provides man with a code of conduct that tells him what values are worthy and
what are not. Moreover, one's parents (family), friends/associates and teachers in his formative
years influence a man's decision-making faculty to a tremendous extent. A child learns his ethics
from the examples of how adults behave around him. These impressions of childhood generally
are the biggest determinants of how that child will decide between right and wrong when he
grows into an adult. Again, the faith that a child imbibes in religious tenets and beliefs at a young
age will remain the strongest faith throughout his life.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?
   Souls take birth in our world in order to improve their spiritual grades, as it were. The
world is a school for our souls. It provides various experiences through which man wades along
during his life. These experiences put man in different circumstances where he is confronted with
having to make right or wrong choices.

   It is not only in adversity that a man's ethics are tested. Often when things are most
pleasant, man commits the error of allowing his baser instincts to surface. It is more difficult to be
a king and keep one's virtue than to be a beggar and do so.

   Good or bad is relative. It depends on where you are standing and looking at it from.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offence and a moral/secular offence?
    As the Zarathusti religion is very specific and strong on morals, a moral offence would
almost always be a religious offence as well. But there could be other injunctions within religion
that are unconnected with morals. For example, the Zarathusti religion lays great emphasis on
cleanliness and purity. If one does not observe cleanliness and purity he might be committing a
religious offence but that might not be strictly speaking a moral offence. It also depends upon
one's definition of "moral", I suppose.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?
    The Zarathusti Din is a very individual religion where man is in direct communion with
the Almighty, through His manifestations and angels. Man is responsible and answerable directly
to God.

    The Parsi/Irani community has its own traditional rules of behaviour, however.

12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?
    If they did, the world would certainly be a better place to live in.
13. What role should religion play in secular society?
A secular society than shuns religion soon becomes a decadent society, a society that has
depraved values, a purely materialistic society where man aspires only to worldly gains by means
fair or foul. Religion should therefore play a very vital role in every society.

Use of Force

14. Is killing ever justified?
I doubt if one can generalise such a thing. It depends upon circumstances. For example, if
someone is surely going to kill me or my loved one and the only way I can save myself is by
killing him, the killing would be justified — provided I had no way of preventing his death. For
another example, if the Holy Fire of the Zarathustis at Udwada, which is revered as our Emperor,
is under physical attack by vandals, I do not think it would be wrong to defend it and, if in the
process a life is lost, so be it.

15. Is war ever justified?
Yes, if a country is physically attacked by a neighbour, it becomes the duty of that
country to go to war in order to save the lives of its people.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?
No.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?
As mentioned above, each of us is free to take one's own decisions regarding morals. So,
for common rules, there will be many objectors. It would be fine if all of these were, as you say,
"conscience" objectors. But many of them are probably influenced by their own selfish
materialism and politics, rather than by their good conscience!

18. Is force justifiable against children?
Sensible and occasional use of force to inculcate discipline in children is not improper.
Like, a good spanking on the backside might be necessary for a child when he does a wrong. It
should, however be used most sparingly and within limits of reason.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?
No, physical force isn't allowed. However, force can be of different types — oftentimes
emotional. I am not commenting on use of those types of forces but they are used often,
nonetheless.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?
Suicide, when man cannot cope with his circumstances, is escapism that has no
justification in the Zarathusti Din. On the question of euthanasia, the views in the community are
divided.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?
Generally martyrdom is not glorified in the Zarathusti way of life. Life is considered far
more important than death.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?
No. But I cannot think of an example where that would be necessary.
23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?
Yes, but only for the most heinous criminal offenses against mankind/society.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?
As the religion is silent on this, one has to use his good mind and righteousness to decide the question, remembering that what it implies is terminating a life.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?
This is governed by the law of the land and we have no say in the matter. Generally, the religion says that a dead body must be disposed of as expeditiously as possible. A section of the community, that goes more by esotericism, is not in favour of autopsy.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?
No.

27. Are transfusions allowed?
Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?
See answer to Q 20 above re: euthanasia.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?
See answer to Q 20 above re: euthanasia.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?
See answer to Q 20 above re: euthanasia.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?
As the religion is silent on this, one has to use his good mind and righteousness to decide the question, remembering that what it implies is terminating a life. But it is certainly more justified to save one life than none.

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?
This issue has not yet been addressed by the community though there is a general feeling of apprehension about what genetic engineering really might imply. We have nothing against the science per se. It is how some people will use that science is what matters.

One can cure AIDS using genetics and that would be definitely a good use. But one can create a Frankenstein using genetics too and that would be a bad use. It is just like atomic fission: you can use it to create useful electricity or you can make a bomb to destroy humanity.

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?
Whose theory of evolution? If you mean Darwin's, No.
34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?
Zoroastrianism placed absolute importance on the environment more than 4000 years before Christ. We were arguably the first environmentalists on earth. We are basically nature worshippers because we see nature as the manifestation of God on earth. Therefore, the earth, water, fire, air, etc., are to us divinities that must be protected by all means available. Ours is the most environment friendly religion on earth.

35. Do animals have any moral standing?
The Zarathusti Din respects all forms of nature, including animals. While some animals like the dog, cattle, horses, etc. have a pride of place, some others like vermin, snakes, cats, etc., are abhorred, as being instruments of the Evil One.

The Vendidad has a whole section dedicated to the dog. Cattle and horses are glorified even in the Gathas themselves as well as in our great mythological epic, the Shanameh of Firdausi Tusi. We do not regard animals, birds, fish, etc., as inanimate or soul-less creatures.

In our religion, even the earth is said to have a soul of its own — a very powerful and elevated one at that! The Gathas tell us that the Soul of the Earth (gueush urvan) cried out in anguish that it was burdened by an excess of evil, black magic and sorcery and prayed to Ahura Mazda to send a mighty saviour. Heeding her pleas, Ahura Mazda and His council of ministers (who are all actually His own various aspects) chose Zarathustra to proceed to the earth as Ahura Mazda's messenger and to root out the prevailing evil.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?
The religion predicts the coming of three messengers from Ahura Mazda (the Supreme Lord) following Zarathustra. The last of these, Saoshyo, will oversee the permanent destruction of evil. There is no authentic time frame for his coming but, before he comes, the two earlier messengers would have cleaned up the earth of a lot of its existing evil.

There will then be a bitter war between Adi Dazaka (Zohak) [an evil mythological personage who was defeated by Kersasp Pahelvan millennia ago and remains alive and enchained in a mountain cave], who will break free of his chains, and Kersasp Pahelvan, who will be resurrected to encounter him. Zohak will be finally killed in the ensuing battle by Kersasp Pahelvan. In this mythology, Zohak probably represents the accumulated sins of mankind from all the past and Kersasp Pahelvan, the forces of righteousness.

Then will come Judgment Day when each past and present soul will be individually and impartially judged by Ahura Mazda and given the reward/punishment that is deserves. The evil souls, after undergoing their punishment, will then turn to righteousness.

After this, the earth will undergo massive upheavals and a final renovation to make it fit again for human survival with all its citizens totally righteous and there being no place for any evil upon earth.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible?
Strictly not.
38. *Is sex only for procreation?*
From the strict religious viewpoint, yes. A man is enjoined not to waste his semen.

39. *Is masturbation allowed?*
A man is enjoined not to waste his semen.

40. *Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?*
Yes

41. *Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?*
As the religion is silent on this, one has to use his good mind and righteousness to decide the question.

42. *Is transvestism immoral?*
Yes, by society.

43. *Is homosexuality immoral?*
Yes. The religion recognises only man-woman relationships.

44. *Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?*
The Zarathustis do not have their own law administration. People who commit moral crimes are answerable to Ahura Mazda. It is only He who judges and He who can reward/punish. So, at least on earth, moral offenders continue to have all the rights that everybody else has.

Nevertheless, if the moral crime is subject to the law of the land where it is committed, we respect the law and abide by it. That is in fact the King’s prerogative. In ancient Iran, the kings used to be also highly religious/spiritual men or had ministers who were highly religious/spiritual men. They could dispense justice even for religious misdemeanors. But today there is no one who can do that.

45. *Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?*
See answer to Q 43 above.

46. *Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?*
Yes.

47. *Is divorce acceptable?*
Yes.

48. *Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?*
While 90% of the population lives in big cities where the above is true, in the 10% or so cases where people live in Indian villages, women might still have the housekeeping role while the men are expected to be the breadwinners.

Men usually work too, so finding cases where a man is at home looking after the kids as his wife is out working are rare. In most modern homes, the husband and wife share the chores. Besides we have the advantage of getting part-time or full-time domestic help in India, which most Parsi working couples avail of.
Of course in some families, the husband and wife might mutually decide that the wife should leave her job to look after the kids, rather than leaving kids to grow up affectionless and uncared for. But that would be a matter of agreement in the best interests of a family, not because of any preconceived roles.

49. Are men and women separate but equal?
Yes. Women have absolutely equal rights and status in our society.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?
Drugs — No.
Alcohol within social limits — Yes.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?
No. It is unfair to children of other religions when one religion's prayers are made official.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?
If by religious schools it is meant schools imparting teachings of religion (like Madressas), no. If by religious schools it means schools teaching normal curriculum but which have been set up by religious missions, yes.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?
Not really. Zarathustis are allowed to eat pretty much what they want. However, in general, pork and beef are avoided.

54. Is gambling allowed?
As the religion is silent on this, one has to use his good mind and righteousness to decide the question.

55. Is smoking allowed?
No. Zarathustis consider fire as holy. It is considered a sin to put it in the mouth or blow upon it with exhaled breath.
Christianity 1.9 billion
Islam 1.1 billion
Hinduism 781 million
Buddhism 324 million
Sikhism 19 million
Judaism 14 million
Baha’ism 6.1 million
Confucianism 5.3 million
Jainism 4.9 million
Shintoism 2.8 million

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branch</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Number of Adherents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>1,030,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>940,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaishnavite</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>580,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox Christian</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>240,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaivite</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>220,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Protestant</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>200,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahayana</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>185,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Protestant</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>150,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theravada</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>124,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiite</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>120,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African indigenous sects (AICs)</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>110,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>105,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>68,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikhism</td>
<td>Sikhism</td>
<td>23,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Hindus and reform Hindus</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>22,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamaism</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>20,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Vajrayana/Tibetan, etc.)</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>20,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah's Witnesses</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>14,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latter Day Saints</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>11,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmadiyya</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>10,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veerashaivas (Lingayats)</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>10,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baha'i World Faith</td>
<td>Baha'i Faiths</td>
<td>6,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>4,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffiliated and Secular</td>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>4,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svetambara</td>
<td>Jainism</td>
<td>4,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>3,750,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seicho-No-Ie</td>
<td>New Japanese</td>
<td>3,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinto all branches</td>
<td>Shinto</td>
<td>3,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenrikyo</td>
<td>New Japanese</td>
<td>2,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL Kyodan</td>
<td>New Japanese</td>
<td>2,600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Thought (Unity, Christian Science, etc.)</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sekai Kyuseikyo</td>
<td>New Japanese</td>
<td>800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanakavasis</td>
<td>Jainism</td>
<td>750,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zenrinkai</td>
<td>New Japanese</td>
<td>600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Druze</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>450,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tensho Kotai Jingukyo</td>
<td>New Japanese</td>
<td>400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends (Quakers)</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ennokyo</td>
<td>New Japanese</td>
<td>300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digambaras</td>
<td>Jainism</td>
<td>155,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstructionist</td>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsis</td>
<td>Zoroastrianism</td>
<td>110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabars</td>
<td>Zoroastrianism</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>