Introduction

Growing numbers of faith leaders and educators are discovering that spiritual, ethical and environmental education can no longer be conducted from the perspective of only one religion or culture. We need to refer to the wisdom and teachings of many faith and philosophical traditions to resolve the great social and ecological issues of our time.

The Green Rule quotes representing each religion, selected from the world’s great sacred texts, are just a tiny sampling of religious writings and aural traditions that exclaim the beauty and holiness of the natural world. They were chosen to demonstrate that at the heart of each major religion and spiritual philosophy is a call for humanity to care for the Earth as well as praise for the natural world as an essential medium through which we may better come to know the divine.
The Green Rule was derived from the classic Golden Rule that is found in the major faith traditions. In Christianity, for example, the Golden Rule is “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” In Hinduism, it is expressed; “Do not do to others what would cause pain to you.” In Islam, “Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.” And so it goes through the many cultures, religions and philosophies, this similar expression of mutual concern and compassion for others. The Green Rule extends that call to care for one’s neighbour to include all of creation: humanity, animals, birds, insects, plants…

The Green Rule poster invites participants to reflect on the sacredness of Earth and our Oneness with it. You can work with texts from more than a dozen faith traditions or select one or a few that resonate with your group. You can also approach the image and texts from a variety of ways.

Some suggestions for general or specific group discussion are as follows:

**Eco-Theology**

**Discussion**

The Bhagavad Gita, Dhammapada, Tao te Ching, Bible, Qur’an, Guru Granth and other sacred texts comprise the distilled wisdom of humanity. In working with The Green Rule, we are opening those texts up to find wisdom that can help us heal ourselves and the planet at this time of unprecedented global crisis. In your group, discuss the texts and central message of The Green Rule. Who is our neighbour? Is a tree our neighbour? A bird? What does your faith tradition say about caring for creation? What contribution might your religion and other religions offer towards renewing humanity’s sacred balance with the Earth and all its beings?

**Action**

Start a study group and read your sacred texts from an eco-theological perspective. Consider extending your reflection to faith traditions outside your own, read their texts. What do they have in common with or can add to your faith’s concept of stewardship? Arrange a worship service dedicated to eco-spirituality, include prayers and/or music from other traditions.
**Eco-Justice**

**Discussion**

In Asia, Buddhists wrap trees in saffron robes to protect them from deforestation. ‘Redwood Rabbis’ protect ancient cedar groves in California. Christian groups in the USA have initiated a protection program for mountains threatened by strip mining. Hindus clean up endangered rivers and designate them as sacred.

**Action**

Choose a current ecological issue (deforestation, climate change, pollution, water shortage…) and initiate a response in your community i.e. a) advocate for energy conservation around your place of worship/get an energy audit b) hold a public awareness-raising event to promote bicycle lanes and the installation of bike racks in your community c) start a campaign to reduce water consumption around your place of worship, and consider rain barrels and Xeriscaping, landscape design that minimizes water usage d) use FSC certified lumber and other sustainably produced resources when building or retrofitting.

**Social Justice**

**Discussion**

Chemicals and pollution don’t just harm trees and rivers, they can make people sick, and the poor are often the first to suffer. Several places of worship have created pesticide-free community gardens on their grounds and offer the fresh produce from food garden to those in need. Others have switched to more natural cleaning products in consideration of janitorial staff health. To what current socio-political issue in your city or country might The Green Rule offer an opportunity for dialogue and action?

**Action**

Choose a current social issue (poverty, racism, housing) and initiate a response i.e. a) start an organic community food garden b) advocate for natural cleaning products and Fair Trade coffee and tea at your place of worship and promote buying them for home use.
Eco-Spirituality

Discussion

Each leaf on The Green Rule tree is different and has spiritual and/or healing significance to the faith it represents. For example, Buddha found enlightenment while meditating under the bodhi tree, 2500 years ago. The bodhi has since become a symbol of Buddha’s presence and a focus for worship. Israelites used olive oil to anoint people and sacred objects and the leaf signifies peace. The fig leaf of Christianity was one of the few plentiful fruit trees in the ancient Middle East and is rich in vital nutrients. To Jains, the neem tree is known as the Village Pharmacy for all the ills it treats. Its juice repels insects without harming them, signifying the Jain vow of nonviolence to all creatures. The ginkgo tree, representing Taoism, is 300 million years old, the oldest known tree species. Sacred in China and Japan, it symbolizes immortality and is used in Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Action

Consider learning a spiritual practice from another tradition such as Hindu yoga, Buddhist meditation, Taoist Qi Gong, Christian contemplative prayer, Japanese reiki, visit a Native sweat lodge…

Start an organic local food initiative at your church, gurdwara, mosque, synagogue, temple or retreat centre. Locate stores that sell local and organic produce and post this information. Consider holding a workshop or event on the healing qualities of organic food, plants, nature in general.

Interfaith Dialogue

Discussion

A central message of The Green Rule is ‘Unity in Diversity’. Consider ways it can be used as a tool for bringing people of different faiths together for greater understanding and appreciation of one another.
Action

Invite members from different religious and cultural backgrounds to your place of worship for an event. Consider starting an interfaith community garden and plant foods from a variety of cultures and hold community feasts.

Seniors’/Mediation Group

Discussion

In Japanese cities, senior citizens are assigned a tree to care for, both as a mode of urban upkeep and respect for the aged by keeping them engaged. Trees, like many seniors, are esteemed, engaged citizens of their communities. “In soil, roots of the trees in a community may mingle and actually fuse, thereby allowing the trees to communicate, exchange materials, and help each other out,” writes David Suzuki in his book *Trees*.

Action

Have an experienced leader hold a series of meditation sessions. Mount The Green Rule poster and ask participants to choose one text and meditate on it. Consider conducting some sessions outdoors sitting under a tree with backs against the trunk, if possible. Afterwards ask for insights. Invite participants to support some kind of environmental project through their place of worship such as paper recycling and general ‘greening’ of office supplies, or to investigate ‘green’ and ethical funds for their faith community members to consider contributing to.

Holy Days

Discussion

Each faith tradition has holy days that offer inspiration to reflect on the natural world. For example, in January or February, Judaism celebrates the festival of Tu B'Shevat, “the new year of the trees,” with a Seder meal that reconnects the faithful with the fruits of the Earth. For Christmas, Christians celebrate nature with an evergreen tree.
Action

Synagogues in the Greening Sacred Spaces program have related holidays like Tu B’Shevat to the environment by starting CSAs (community shared agriculture) and CFLs are distributed during Hanukkah to encourage energy efficiency and remind of the miracle of light. Many Christians have opted for a potted tree or post The Green Rule Tree in lieu of a cut tree. For Lent, some churches are ‘giving up carbon’. Consider ways that your holy days can become not just more sustainable but raise public awareness about conservation and climate change. Visit www.faithcommongood.org to learn more about Greening Sacred Spaces.

Environmental Education

Discussion

Through the incredible process of photosynthesis trees transform sunlight into usable energy, they play an invaluable role in moving water around the globe through transpiration and make our air breathable by converting carbon dioxide to oxygen. A youth workshop could invite discussion about how nature sustains human life.

Action

Invite participants to take a walking meditation in nature with the guidance to walk very slowly, mindfully, staying in the present moment. Invite them to ‘listen with their eyes and see with their ears’. Afterwards discuss their experience and insights into the natural world.

Creative Arts and /or Youth Groups

Discussion

Invite silent reflection and journaling on one or two of the Green Rules, then ask participants to write a prayer, poem or homily based on one of The Green Rules that may be used in an worship service at their church, gurdwara, mosque, synagogue, temple.

A Youth leader could organize a gathering where The Green Rule poster is presented. After a silent reflection on The Green Rule poster, the leader asks the group for interpretations. What does The
Green Rule image say to them? Which texts speak to them? Why? What might their faith have to do with the natural world?

Action

Invite participants to draw, paint, build their own new species of tree; name it; describe it. Then ask “what is it like co-creating?”

Schools

Discussion

Teachers could display The Green Rule in the classroom and lead a discussion about biodiversity, cultural and religious/spiritual diversity.

Action:

Arrange class visits to temples, mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras and churches of various denominations in your region.

Special Events

Official ecological events such as Earth Week in April and National Biodiversity Day in May as well as changes in the season such as spring’s rebirth of nature and blossoming trees, and autumn’s harvest with its beauty of colouring leaves, provide natural opportunities to organize special Green Rule events in your faith community, neighbourhood or schools.

We hope you enjoy working with The Green Rule and we invite you to send us your ideas and Green Rule experiences. For more information about The Green Rule and the Greening Sacred Spaces program, please see the Faith & the Common Good website:  
http://www.faithcommongood.org/. Email: resources@faithcommongood.org

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