a handbook on Inter-religious equality
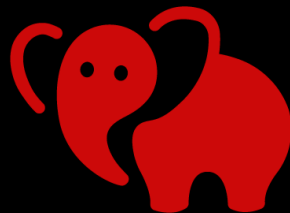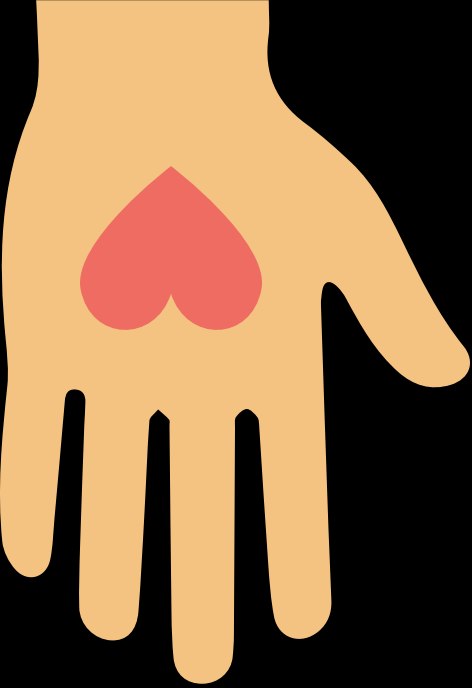
The Red Elephant Foundation

WHAT IS RELIGION?

Religion is a cultural system of behaviors and practices, world views, sacred texts, holy places, ethics, and social organisation that relates humanity to God, or the unknown form that is seen as a creator.

In simple terms, religion refers to the set of principles that governs one's personal relationship with God
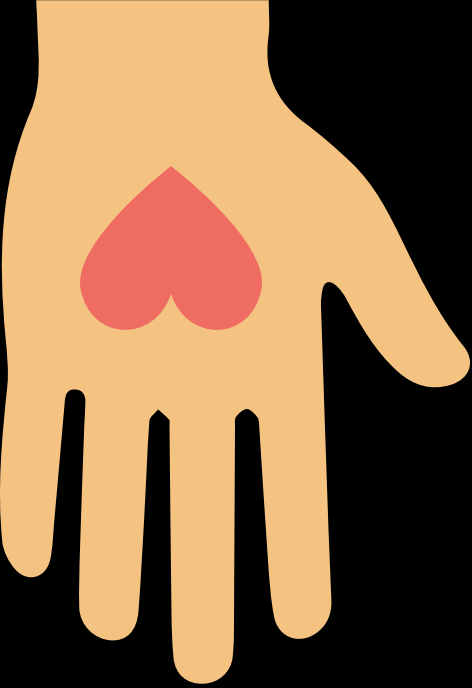
WHAT IS RELIGION?

According to the World Religions Religious Statistic estimates, there are roughly 4,200 religions in the world!

Some of the ones whose names we hear commonly include Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

As much as one may choose to embrace and practice a religion, they may also choose not to. People may choose to believe in a God, but not religion.

Some choose not to believe in God and religion altogether. They are called Atheists. Some choose to question the existence of God, and remain unsure. They are called Agnostics.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

Although many people may subscribe to a religion, religion in itself is personal. This is why you may have two people of the same religion, practicing it differently.

One may choose to identify religion as a part of their identity. Each person interprets religion depending on their own values, morals and experiences

WHAT IS RELIGION?

When one chooses to incorporate religion in their identity, they may or may not incorporate religious markers in their way of dressing.

For example, some women choose to veil, some people choose to wear crosses, some people choose to wear jewellery with pictures or designs of their idea of God.

WHY SO MANY RELIGIONS?

Since religion is a personal expression of what one's relation with God is, there are many ways to express it.

The personal nature of religion allows many interpretations - which gives rise to newer and newer religions!

However, at the base of it all, most religions have the same message.

THE SAME MESSAGE?

All religions preach the same messages of peace, love and harmony. They help one govern their behaviour and to be good people.

Take any religious text, and you will find that it contains simple truths such as:
be compassionate to all living beings, do unto others what you wish for them to do unto you, love one another, live in peace and the like.
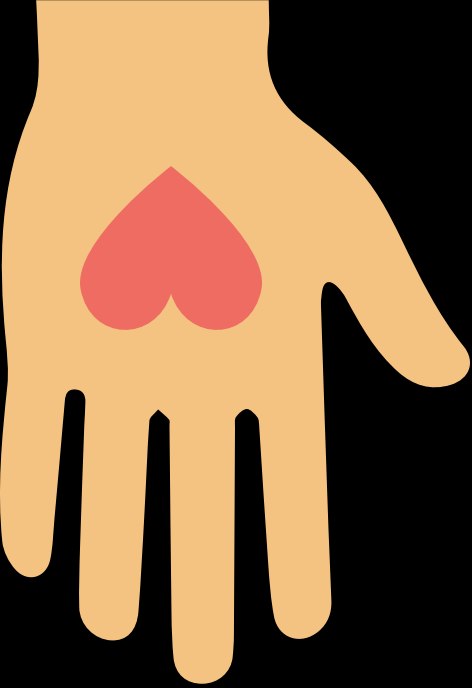
Then why the inequality?

Although all religions are equal in principle, in reality, there have been many instances where wars have been fought on religious grounds.

Sometimes, because of such things as ignorance, fear or even mistrust of other religions, people tend to fight in the name of religion, or try to establish their religion's superiority over another's.

THEN WHY THE INEQUALITY?

When fear, insecurity, ignorance or distrust come into play, people don't give each other a chance, and don't give themselves a chance to learn about the other.

And so, they spend time on how they can gain the upper hand, or assert their superiority over the other. This leads to war, conflict, hatred and violence.

RELIGION AND CULTURE

Sometimes, people tend to mix up religion and culture. But, they are very, very different. Culture refers to the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society.

Sometimes, cultural practices are carried out in the name of religion. For instance, things like honour killings, child marriage and domestic violence are carried out with religion as an excuse.

Religion and Culture

But the truth is, no religion endorses violence at its core. Culture, because it is a social behaviour, could endorse violence.

And so, your role here is very important. Question a practice if you find it to be against human or animal rights!

RELIGION FOR PEACE

And yet, religion has been a great factor in bringing about peace, too! Take for instance the work of Leymah Gbowee, who united Christian and Muslim women to end a war in Liberia!

Similarly, the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative and the European Council for Religious Leaders help bring many religious leaders together to spread messages of peace.

How can YOU use religion for peace?

The first step is to identify what you know and don't know about religion. Remember, awareness is the best place to start.

Next, spread awareness by sharing your learning with others. Interact with people without allowing religion to come in between. If you have questions, ask!

How can YOU use religion for peace?

Always remember, it is ignorance that causes fear and mistrust, and this can be dangerous if left unchecked.

So what then becomes important, is to dispel ignorance by keeping the conversation alive. Speak out if you find anyone discriminating on the basis of religion. Question things that you know are wrong.

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