

## Lesson 9: The Mission

### PURPOSE

To help students to pursue a mission of excellence, respecting human dignity.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand their lives as a long-term mission to strive for excellence and respect human dignity.
2. Recognize concrete examples of mission driven individuals.

### VOCABULARY

- Mission: one's purpose or higher goal

### MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Viktor Frankl: On the Importance of Having a Purpose
- Where Will Taking a Stand Take You?

### PROCEDURE

**Step 1:** Review the previous lesson. Recall that heroic actions, exemplified by those working to end femicide in their country, are an outgrowth of practicing habits of excellence.

**Step 2:** Recall that in Grades 9 and 10, the class learned that one of the most important “ingredients” of heroic habits involves having a mission, or a reason “why” one does everything they do. In this lesson, the class will explore further what this means and how one can pursue a life of mission or purpose.

Recall the definition of a mission and write it on the board:

Mission: one's purpose or higher goal

**Step 3:** Read together as a class the text by Viktor Frankl “On the Importance of Having a Purpose” to focus once more on the core idea of this lesson.

Ask the students to share an idea that stood out for them in the text.

Highlight the following quote:

**//** *What was really needed was a fundamental change in our attitude toward life. We had to learn ourselves and, furthermore, we had to teach the despairing men that it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life – daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual.”<sup>87</sup>*

Keep in mind that change doesn’t happen overnight. Many heroes who fight against injustice give their whole lives to a cause, only to feel at the end of their life that they would have liked to do more. While there are books on store shelves that may promise a quick-fix, a life “hack” or a new and improved method, living a life of personal mission is a lifelong undertaking.

**Step 4:** Ask students to identify a mission-driven individual they know. This person is someone who is strongly driven by a value or core belief. It could be a family member, teacher, coach, etc.. Ask students to identify how this person’s mission or purpose is reflected in that individual’s life. What has it motivated them to achieve?

Remind students that choosing to live according to their mission and purpose is not always easy; it requires practicing habits of excellence today and in the future.

Have students read the story [Where Will Taking a Stand, Take You?](#). After reading the story, introduce the idea of a manifesto.

---

<sup>87</sup> Viktor E. Frankl: Man’s Search for Meaning, 1946.

**Step 5:** The word ‘Manifesto’ comes from the latin word, manifestare, ‘make public’. There are a number of examples of manifestos throughout history. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)* is a kind of manifesto by the international community, vowing to never again allow atrocities like those of the holocaust to happen again. The UDHR addressed, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected, as it aspirationally proclaims:

**//** *Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world, whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, [...] whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms [...].*<sup>88</sup>

There are numerous artistic movements, organizations and political parties with manifestos. There is the political manifesto, *The Communist Manifesto*, by Karl Marx:

**//** *The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.*<sup>89</sup>

The book, *The Gulag Archipelago*, can be read as Soviet Dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s literary manifesto in response:

**//** *If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being [...].*<sup>90</sup>

88 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); Preamble.

89 Karl Marx, Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848).

90 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: The Gulag Archipelago (1973).

Can you guess the politics of the playwright who famously wrote, “Art is not a mirror to reflect reality, but a hammer with which to shape it”? The quote is by the playwright Bertolt Brecht, who moved to Soviet-occupied East Germany after WWII as he was a strong proponent of the communist regime.

Brecht wrote a poem, *The Manifesto*, in homage. By comparison, the painter Vasily Kandinsky fled Soviet Russia, as spirituality was unwelcome in an aggressively materialist communist society. Kandinsky moved to Germany and worked there until the Nazis closed down the school where he was teaching, in 1933. Kandinsky wrote a manifesto entitled, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*:

**//** *It has been said that art is the child of its age [...]. This art, which has no power for the future, which is only a child of the age and cannot become a mother of the future, is a barren art. She is transitory and to all intent dies the moment the atmosphere alters which nourished her. The other art, that which is capable of educating further, springs equally from contemporary feeling, but is at the same time not only echo and mirror of it, but also has a deep and powerful prophetic strength.*<sup>91</sup>

**Step 6:** Manifestos are often ideological declarations or political propoganda written to sway the reader to adopt a set of (sometimes incorrect) beliefs. However, from the basement of the UN to the spiritual in art, there’s no reason that manifestos can’t be a reaction of conscience, a call to action or a pause for contemplation.

Divide students into small groups and have them write a new manifesto of their own. The topic can be on any issue or theme covered in the curriculum. The tone can be poetic, factual and succinct, forceful, dramatic, etc.. The manifesto should include a compelling introduction (answering the “why”), at least three main statements or calls to action (the “what” you want to say to the audience) and a conclusion (“who”, “when”, “where?”). Encourage hyperbole, flair and exaggeration for the sake of the exercise. Manifestos should compel the listener and convince the audience of your points.

After each group finishes writing their manifesto, have students read their manifestos aloud to the class. Ask students which manifesto they thought was the most powerful, compelling or convincing. Why?

<sup>91</sup> Kandinsky, Wassily, 1866–1944. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. London: Tate, 2006.

**Step 7:** Summarize. Recall the definition of a mission and the importance of discovering and pursuing their personal mission in their lives. Encourage students to consider writing their own personal manifesto at home, to help them clarify the ideas they feel most passionate about or what values they stand for.

Explain that one of the ways they can work to develop a sense of mission is to form a World Youth Alliance (WYA) Chapter in their school or town. Interested students can visit [www.wya.net](http://www.wya.net) to learn more.

#### **FOLLOW-UP & HOMEWORK**

Ask the students to fill in [Interim Quiz 2](#) at home and bring it to the next class. Let them know that solving the Interim Quiz will help them in the Final Quiz which will happen during the last class.

**Viktor Frankl: On the Importance of Having a Purpose<sup>92</sup>**

As we said before, any attempt to restore a man's inner strength in the camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal. Nietzsche's words, "He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how", could be the guiding motto for psychotherapeutic and psycho hygienic efforts regarding prisoners. Whenever there was an opportunity for it, one had to give them a why – an aim – for their lives, in order to strengthen them to bear the terrible how of their existence. Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. He was soon lost. The typical reply with which such a man rejected all encouraging arguments was, "I have nothing to expect from life any more." What sort of answer can one give to that?

What was really needed was a fundamental change in our attitude toward life. We had to learn ourselves and, furthermore, we had to teach the despairing men that it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life—daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual.

These tasks, and therefore the meaning of life, differ from man to man, and from moment to moment. Thus it is impossible to define the meaning of life in a general way. Questions about the meaning of life can never be answered by sweeping statements. "Life" does not mean something vague, but something very real and concrete, just as life's tasks are also very real and concrete. They form man's destiny, which is different and unique for each individual. No man and no destiny can be compared with any other man or any other destiny. No situation repeats itself, and each situation calls for a different response. Sometimes the situation in which a man finds himself may require him to shape his own fate by action. At other times it is more advantageous for him to make use of an opportunity for contemplation and to realize assets in this way. Sometimes man may be required simply to accept fate, to bear his cross. Every situation is distinguished by its uniqueness, and there is always only one right answer to the problem posed by the situation at hand.

---

92 Viktor E. Frankl: Man's Search for Meaning, 1946.

## Where Will Taking A Stand Take You?

I had been up most of the night, almost every night, for nearly six weeks now. I was twenty-one, living in New York City studying piano performance. But it was my unpaid “part-time job” that was consuming my waking (and sleeping) hours.

The United Nations evokes prestigious images of flags, important people sitting in chairs with name plaques, sitting in the General Assembly room, as they lean into their mic to address their esteemed colleagues. But it’s in the basement of the UN, in cave-like rooms with orange and green polyester fabric sound-proofing the walls, and fluorescent lights buzzing overhead, that the real negotiations take place. Negotiators test and tease language proposals and attempt to sway allegiance and votes with funding. The most important debates often take place at odd hours, when the dissenting country representatives with few staff are in need of sleep, and advocate votes are ensured.

It was a Thursday, the day my life changed. I was at the Conference on Population and Development, when thirty-two young people took the floor and claimed to represent all three billion of the world’s youth. They demanded sexual rights for children, abortion as a human right and the deletion of parental rights. In claiming to represent the world’s youth, they held sway over delegates as lobbying groups began to coercively impose this agenda on weaker, poorer, countries.

I wanted to stand up and shout. It was unjust. What about those who still don’t have clean water? Sanitation? Education? Infrastructure? Housing? Basic healthcare? What about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Article 26, 3: “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.”

The room was full of influential people: delegates and state representatives, organizations ... Why didn’t they speak up! Who was I? What could I do? In a reaction of conscience, I had to do something. I thought to myself, *these young people don’t represent me and they don’t represent millions of other young people around the world.* I exited the UN basement only to emerge into the darkness of the night, and a long subway commute ahead of me.

Waiting on the subway platform, I looked around to see a homeless man crouched under a bench with his sleeping bag, a musician creatively playing the drums on overturned plastic buckets, and a parent holding a sleeping child in their arms. *We are more than our sexual faculties. Why aren’t we talking about the development of the whole person: the moral, emotional, intellectual, and physical dimensions?* I began writing. A manifesto. A counterstatement.

Hurriedly bursting into the apartment, my roommates enquired if everything was OK? I told them about the thirty-two young people, their demands and ... I could hardly get any other words out of my mouth before they interjected in shock at what was going on. The coercion! It was unjust! The bigger countries were taking advantage of the smaller countries and pushing their own agendas. We spent the rest of the night writing, editing and taking turns sleeping. As the nearest Kinkos (now FedEx) opened, we hurriedly handed over our floppy disk to the store manager, asking for copies of our manifesto on their brightest, pinkest, paper. "We only do flyers and brochures, lady.", he clarified.

In the UN halls, we placed the pink flyers in stacks on the table reserved for "delegates only".

Part of the flyer read:

The eight "proposals" of the UNFPA Youth do not address the real needs of the vast majority of youth around the world. Rather, they are aimed only at sex, money and power, and make bold demands for governments to adopt the same agenda. We reject *their* vision of our future.

On behalf of the youth from around the world who have been deliberately excluded from the youth forum process we would like to re-emphasize the following aspects of the Cairo document:

- We understand that youth rights are already ensured by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirmed by Principle 1 of the Cairo document, and therefore we do not need to create new rights and privileges;
- We endorse and live the principles of sexual restraint and responsibility and reject the promotion of unlimited sexual rights, which lead to illegitimacy, disease, and disillusionment;
- We implore parents to exercise their prior rights and responsibilities to direct the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions and not to relinquish these rights to governments and to UN agencies;

The development of the whole person includes the moral, spiritual, emotional, intellectual as well as the physical dimensions. Please do not reduce us to our sexual faculties. Our main concerns are issues relating to education, family, employment and development. Please don't "reserve and move on"<sup>93</sup>. Hold fast to principles for our future.

<sup>93</sup> This is when Member States voice their reservations on elements of a draft but still agree to adopt the document. The pink flyer asked representatives not to simply register or voice a reservation, but to vote down the proposal completely, and to consider the future they want for the young people in their country.



It's not an exaggeration to say that the pink photocopies caused pandemonium that day. The negotiations were halted as delegates came up to us one by one, saying: "Thank you for standing up." "Thank you for saying this." "Thank you for being here." Many of the delegates knew first-hand how our understanding of the human person lays the foundation for what policies and initiatives are adopted in practice. In their countries, foreign aid funded population control programs, while antibiotics or education needs remain unmet. International delegates asked us to maintain a permanent presence at the United Nations and to work with youth from their countries.

My roommates and I didn't continue down the path to become concert pianists; we took the road less travelled, building an organization of young people from around the world to understand and defend the dignity of the human person. We also eventually got our name on a plaque at the United Nations, that reads: "Non-Governmental Organization, World Youth Alliance."

**Interim Quiz 2****A. True/false questions**

1. T/F “Justice is blind” means that if we want to be just, we need to be blind to all differences among people.
2. T/F Invention of ultrasound decreased femicide around the world.
3. T/F He who has a ‘why’ to live can bear with almost any ‘how’.
4. T/F If it’s unjust, it wouldn’t be the law.

**B. Essay Question**

5. Name and explain three types of coercion:

**C. For each answer, make a correct question.**

*For example, if the answer is “The first letter of the alphabet”, the question is “What is the letter A?”. Or, if the answer is “A paste or gel used in conjunction with a toothbrush to help clean and maintain the aesthetics and health of teeth”, the correct question is “What is toothpaste?”*

6. The sum of goods needed both for the individual and the community to flourish.
7. A group of people unified in the pursuit of common good.
8. A habit of treating everyone as equal in humanity and giving everyone their due.
9. My purpose or a higher goal.
10. The practice of intentionally aborting a girl child or killing them after birth because of the preference for male posterity.

**D. Multiple choice questions. There can be more than one correct answer.**

11. Paul Ehrlich advocated for the following:
  - a) Adding temporary sterilants to the water supply.
  - b) Dr. Swaminathan
  - c) Riding in a taxi with his family.
  - d) Zero Population Growth
12. What should determine whether someone has a right to life:
  - a) Disability
  - b) Whether the parent wants a male or female child.
  - c) Being human
  - d) Level of cognitive and emotional development.
13. In many countries, skewed male-female ratios due to femicide has led to:
  - a) Sex trafficking
  - b) Forced marriages
  - c) Bride buying
  - d) More jobs
14. The main point of the article by the Dalai Lama was that:
  - a) All religions are basically the same.
  - b) We are all the same human beings with the same dignity.
  - c) No one is responsible for carrying the burden of another person.
  - d) There is fundamental inequality in our society.
15. What are the important principles in determining who should enter college:
  - a) Level of knowledge
  - b) That no one feels bad
  - c) Skin color
  - d) Displays habits of excellence
16. Which of the following countries are listed as having skewed birth ratios because of femicide:
  - a) Indiana
  - b) India
  - c) Armenia
  - d) Albania
17. Which of the following is an example of a just cause?
  - a) Promoting Human Dignity
  - b) Promoting Eugenics
  - c) Promoting youth for euthanasia
  - d) Promoting feminists for femicide

**Interim Quiz 2 - Answer Key for the teacher**

1. F – we should be blind to everything except to a principle important for the thing in question.
2. F - pregnant women were taking advantage of a cheap and pervasive tool—ultrasound—and aborting if the fetus turned out to be female.
3. T
4. F – some things can be legal and still unjust (e.g. slavery and racial segregation were legal).
5. Three types of coercion are: coercion through psychological pressure, economic pressure and by force. Psychological pressure is a reasonable fear that one will be subjected to violence, detention, duress or psychological oppression. Economic pressure is when someone risks losing their job or facing unreasonable fines or other financial penalties for failing to submit. Likewise, incentivizing people through payments to undergo procedures they otherwise wouldn't submit to, is a form of economic pressure or coercion. In the case of coercion by force, individuals lack the information or knowledge necessary to give informed consent and are physically forced to undergo certain procedures.
6. What is the common good?
7. What is solidarity?
8. What is justice?
9. What is a mission?
10. What is femicide?
11. a and d
12. c
13. a, b and c
14. b
15. a and d
16. b, c and d
17. a