

How to Exercise Your Religious Exemption to Vaccination

By Dr. Mercola

DM: Dr. Joseph Mercola

BF: Barbara Loe Fisher

DM: The unfortunate reality, at least in my experience, is that there is a relatively small percentage of the community who will take an activist role, who have the time and energy to undergo those processes and commit to those projects. So for those who are not as active as I am... I definitely would encourage people to participate, but, of course, many people won't. Are there any specific recommendations you have for the religious exemptions present in 48 of the 50 states and, for many (if not most), because that's 30 more states where the conscientious objection is available and really is their only practical alternative to opting out of the vaccine system, so are there any templates, processes, or strategies that you found to be useful in your 30 years of working with this?

BF: I'm glad you asked me that question, because I feel very strongly about the religious exemption of vaccination in this country. The constitution protects our right to worship freely. It protects our right to hold religious or spiritual beliefs, our own religious or spiritual beliefs. You do not have to belong to a church or an organized religion that officially opposes vaccination to take a religious exemption to vaccination. States that have legal language that restricts your ability to take a religious exemption to vaccination based on the fact that, for example, you don't belong to a church, whenever that has been challenged in the high state court level, it has always been found to be unconstitutional.

You have the right to have personal spiritual beliefs. They have to be sincerely held. They have to be truly held. But you have the right to defend your religious or spiritual belief about vaccination. That doesn't mean... You don't talk about science; you talk about your spiritual belief. And to me this is one of the most important freedoms that we have in America. That is to be able to hold personal spiritual beliefs, or conscientious beliefs, to obey our conscience. It's what help keeps the practice of medicine with regard to vaccination honest and ethical.

So we must defend the religious exemption to vaccination at all costs. It's all the stance between us and a militant, oppressive forcing of vaccination by those who have literally, at this point in time, no accountability or liability for what happens after those vaccines are given.

DM: Well, thank you for sharing your views on that. I thoroughly agree with that, and if someone listens to this and sort of rewinds this section of the video and listens to it a few times, he will have all the basic details on how to construct that request for religious exemptions. And I think the key is, as you have mentioned, it needs to be sincere, personal, and not some type of formula. But be that as it may, many people aren't gifted in writing skills. I mean that's just the

fact of the matter. So are there any examples that others have used successfully to obtain this, or you're reluctant to share it because it takes away from the personal aspect of it?

BF: I think truly to protect the religious exemption, a person does have to have a sincere religious or spiritual belief, and they need to know how to articulate it themselves and defend it in a court of law. Because what's happening is those who file religious exemptions to vaccination in some states like New York are being hauled in the rooms by state government officials, school officials, lawyers for the state and being grilled about the sincerity of their religious beliefs with regard to vaccination. If they haven't dug down deep and examined why they believe this on spiritual or religious beliefs, they can't defend it.

So I never advised any sort of a form. I advise people to look inside of themselves, and if they have that sincere belief, then they need to write it down, they need to talk about it and they need to know that at some point they may have to stand up in a court of law and defend it. Now, I don't agree with state officials grilling people in America about their religious beliefs. I don't think... I think it's wrong to do that. We should have laws in the books where people sign an affidavit, "This is my sincere religious belief," and that should be the end of it, because it's not the place of a government official to grill people in America about the sincerity religious beliefs. Nevertheless, that's the situation right now. So you better be prepared to do defend it.

DM: Well, bringing the person's parent into the court or any legal scenario is certainly one option. It's done not that frequently, but what is done more frequently and is very common and this should be anticipated is that usually a lower level health official representative, like the local school nurse most typically or even the principal or some type of administrator within the school, the grade school typically, will have the parent come in to defend that. And that could be anticipated.

So undergoing this exercise is I think a useful strategy to developing that, knowing that it could elevate to legal, which typically doesn't. Because if you're able to convincingly demonstrate to that person who is authentically and sincerely seeking to provide benefit to their entire domain of individuals that they're responsible for in their school, the last thing they want is an epidemic of disease. They believe, truly believe, sincerely believe, I mean that they'd bet their life on it, that their intention of administering these vaccines is going to help them.

So it's an admirable goal. Unfortunately, it's short-sided and ill-informed, at least in my perspective, and I believe yours. So doing that necessary evaluation and taking the time – you know, investing hours, maybe days, weeks, to come up with the strategy that you can successfully defend to others – could certainly be a worthy investment. Because it's about risk and balances, and we all have limited time. So where do you put your time, and hopefully get the best benefit that is of value of the investment of their time. But this, you know, if it's done properly, could literally be the difference between a massive difference in the health of your child or not having health in your child.

BF: The other thing that some parents do is they actually sit down with a spiritual adviser or a minister, a priest, somebody who they can have a dialogue with and explain their sincere religious and spiritual belief on the matter. And sometimes what they do is they get letters from that spiritual advisor that attests to the sincerity of their spiritual religious belief. I think this is something that is a useful exercise because I do think that men and women of the different churches, whether you are talking Protestant or Catholic or Synagogues, whatever you are talking about in terms of organized religions, need to be educated about how the spiritual and religious beliefs of people are being violated and how they're being forced to violate their conscience.

Conscience is something that is inside all of us or should be inside all of us. If we can't exercise our sincerely held consciences or spiritual beliefs in America, we're not free. We're certainly not free. And so I think that the more dialogue we can have with people in our communities about this, the ethics of this, and it's very important because it's an educational process. So the people who can get that letter attesting to their sincere religious beliefs on it are also on a better position when they face state health issues.

DM: That's an incredible strategy, and I will strongly endorse it because it's useful for two perspectives. First, to educate the broader community, and then secondarily to have that letter testifying to the sincerity of the belief, not necessarily endorsing the church's position but the sincerity of their spiritual conviction on this issue, is going to go a lot further along the first level of resistance, which is usually the local school authority. And with that letter, maybe even from someone in their community that they know and believe, that would probably more than enough in the vast majority of cases to end the issue right there and not progress any further.

BF: Well, one would hope.

DM: ...or escalate further.

BF: Yes. One would hope.

DM: In my experience, many people are going to be reluctant to apply for this religious exemption because they're a member of a particular denomination, and they believe that the position of their church doesn't oppose it, so that by being a member of that church, that (by definition) excludes them from claiming this medical exemption. But perhaps one of the largest denominations in the United States is the Catholic Church. I'm not picking on them but just using them as an example of how someone can be a Catholic and still yet officially apply Catholic doctrine to this religious exemption. Actually, there's a section in Catholic doctrine that applies this. I'm wondering if you could share that with us.

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BF: Yes. About fifteen years ago, I started to look at the different religions. I found in Catholic canon a very strong statement about the duty, really, to obey your conscience, and it's really quite an extraordinary statement by the church. Conscience is a moral, is a judgment of reason, whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right. It is by the judgment of his conscience that man perceives and recognizes the prescription of the divine law. And in even stronger terms, the Catholic Church warns, "A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience. If he were to deliberately act against it, he would condemn himself."

And I really think this gives a tremendous amount of emphasis on the importance of all of us to be able to obey the certain judgment of our conscience. Certainly, what is more important than obeying your conscience when it comes to protecting your life or the life of your children, when it comes to using pharmaceutical products that carry risk of injury or death? This is really a matter of life and death for some people who are susceptible to vaccine reactions. So in this country, this free country of ours, we should have the right to obey the certain judgment of our conscience and not be penalized for it or threatened, harassed, or persecuted, because we're exercising our right to obey our conscience or our sincerely held spiritual beliefs.

DM: Yes. I think we have some other examples, too. I mean certainly there's this one where the government held authorities are involved. But there are other government examples such as the military, where many soldiers are given orders from their superiors to follow. Clearly, in retrospect, it's shown to be reprehensible violations of...

BF: Human rights.

DM: ...human rights and ethical codes, and they're clear examples of this. So even though they technically had the right and the government was telling them to do something, they still have this internal conscience that they need to honor and abide by.

BF: That's right and really it does, when you enter the military, you basically and unfortunately give up a lot of the civil rights that you have when you're a civilian. And I was very unhappy many years ago to find out that the Supreme Court basically endorsed the right of the military to force soldiers to use prescription drugs and vaccines, etc. even though they carried risks to, I guess, protect their ability to fight in the field.

But what they didn't really look at was individual susceptibility – those people who cannot tolerate the use of certain drugs and vaccines. This came up with anthrax vaccine, because there were a lot of soldiers in the Gulf War who were hurt by anthrax vaccine. In fact, there was an injunction at one point about five years ago that a federal court judge in D.C. issued, because the government had not actually licensed the anthrax vaccine for inhalation anthrax or weaponized anthrax, which is the only way the soldiers would likely be exposed. And so it was still an experimental vaccine under that category, and the federal injunction actually stopped for a while

the forcing of soldiers to get anthrax vaccine without their voluntary informed consent. In my view, you should never force anyone to get anything that could injure or kill them without their voluntary form and consent, because it really is a human rights violation.

DM: And the key here is informed. But what I was sort of going for are some of the atrocities that occurred in Vietnam War. Maybe in common with that, where people had honored their own conscience speaking to them, these atrocities would have been avoided.

BF: I mean, I'm old enough to remember The My Lai massacre, where a soldier or a captain ordered his soldiers to massacre civilians without any provocation. I mean, it was a massacre, The My Lai massacre. And you know, if each one of those individuals who were asked to obey that order had followed their conscience and had refused to obey that order, that massacre would not have taken place. The same can be true if you look in the history of great atrocities that have been committed by people who followed orders instead of obeying their conscience.

It's why individual accountability is so important, and why I think the defense of the individual's right to obey their conscience is. Even if obeying their conscience conflicts with a law, like a vaccine law that is really violating informed consent rights and the human right to protect your life or your child's life from using a pharmaceutical product that can injure or kill you. I don't know if it gets really more profound than that. We should have the right to decide what we're willing to risk our lives or our children's lives for. Certainly, conscience plays a very important role in making these kinds of decisions.

DM: Yes, especially if one has performed the due diligence, done the research, investigated whatever resources you felt were appropriate and major decision, your choice, then it should be your right and privilege, your freedom, to exercise that choice and not to be barricaded by these obstructions to justice. It really is a challenge, but fortunately there are still these religious exemptions, which you've provided really in great detail of practical strategy that they can be implemented, and likely, successfully implemented, which is the key.

It's easy to sign the paper saying something, but, you know, the issue really is to defend it successfully. And I think you provided one of the most powerful strategies I've ever heard: how to implement that.

BF: And that is to consult your priest, your minister, your rabbi, your spiritual advisor, or anyone who you can have a conversation with and explain to them why you have to obey your conscience, why you must obey the sincere religious beliefs or sincere religious beliefs that you have. Again, you don't have to belong to any religion that has an official recommendation against vaccination. You can be Catholic or Protestant, Jewish, or whatever, or don't belong to any church, and be able to do this or should be able to this in America.

I really believe that if we all stand up and are not afraid to stand up for our right to have a religious exemption and a conscientious belief exemption, in addition to a medical exemption in America, we will be able to protect vaccine choices in this country.

DM: I mean, we outnumber them enormously. They're just relying on the intimidation of power that they have in the media and limiting potential perceived restriction to access to public education and other areas. But you know if we stand up as a group, we can certainly defeat this.

BF: We can.

DM: Our long-term goal is to solve this at a foundational level, and the religious exemption is certainly a Band-Aid, and it's a useful Band-Aid. I always like to have strategies that people can use now and, you know, without a lot of extra effort. Well, there's certainly a lot of effort here, and it's a useful one. Actually, maybe one of the best results of this conversation – and it's actually the best recommendation I've ever encountered – is how do I go about this process. So I would encourage anyone who's seeking to exercise their religious exemption to replay this video and listen to it several times.

BF: Well, I mean, I'll give you my own example. I have two children of who have had reactions vaccines – one child is vaccine-injured. And, you know, when I have to face doctors or health officials about vaccinating other children in my family, if I have a very deeply held spiritual and conscientious belief about this, because I know that if I would allow my children to get more vaccines, they could die or be further injured. This is a violation. This is a human rights violation for me and for anyone else who's in my position, especially when we know this individual's susceptibility to vaccine reactions.

So when you talk about religious, spiritual beliefs or conscientious beliefs in this context, it's literally a life and death matter for some families. And in America, we should not be throwing people under the bus because they have individual, biological or genetic, or other reasons for being highly susceptible to vaccine reactions. This is immoral; it's an immoral policy.

DM: And it's relatively easy for you to have this deep conviction because of your personal experience with your son.

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Others are going more for an intellectual, academic perspective and it's going to be a little more challenging to be as deeply convicted. But what I would recommend – thank God for the Internet – whatever vaccine you're considering, you can easily go to YouTube and type in the vaccine and type in “adverse reactions” or “side effects,” and you'll probably have dozens, hundreds, thousands of videos of personal testimonies from parents or patients themselves who have undergone the adverse reactions. You can sort of play forward and substitute that individual with your own child.

It's certainly not the same experience that you went through, but it's a substitute. They can have a little more incentive and motivation to achieve this level of conviction.

BF: I think most of us don't think it's going to happen to us. We always think it's going to happen to somebody else. Until it happens to you, until the risks are a hundred percent for you or your child, it's hard to imagine. That's why I think it is right to have people come forward who have suffered vaccine reactions. I call it witnessing. They're basically witnessing their own experience, and this is useful information so that people can start to put themselves in the place of those who have suffered. Then maybe we won't have such demonization and persecution of families with vaccine in their children, because people will put themselves in their place.

What a great conversation.

DM: Yes, indeed, and they always are. Thank you for sharing that and providing a really incredible and valuable resource that people can use immediately to apply their efforts and decisions with respect to implementing their own freedom of personal choice in these areas. So, thank you for helping articulate that and providing it as a resource and all that you do.

BF: Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Mercola.

DM: All right.