Hi. Welcome back. This is a tutorial on the nature of religious narrative stories. We've all heard lots of good stories in our lives. Religions are full of all sorts of narrative, myths and histories that contain beliefs that guide people's actions along a religious pathway. These narratives provide information about religious culture and tradition that is available to believers and non-believers.

Of course, there are many narratives that are not religious. Instead they contain stories, perhaps actual histories, of the lives of cultures and societies. These secular narratives are not intended to portray a religious tradition in any direct way, as the religious narratives generally do. Certainly religious themes might be present within the secular narrative, but this is not the purpose or the approach of secular narratives.

You might think of the traditional historical narrative that recounts the events of different cultures struggles for and fights for independence, for example, the American Revolutionary War. And there are specific secular themes that would apply to other cultures, as well.

Well, the same is true of religious narratives. In spite of the unique elements that are specific to each particular religion, there are universal themes that don't necessarily know any boundaries. There's no distinction. These themes apply to many different traditions and cultures. And the religious things we're talking about have to do with where we come from, what role God plays in the unfolding of the universe and human civilizations, and perhaps the most universal theme of all, the belief that there is some very special relationship between humanity and the sacred realm of the divine and transcendent.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, there is the fairly well-known creation story in the book of Genesis, the book where Adam and Eve appear in the Garden of Eden. According to this story, God created the heavens and earth and man in perfect paradise. Well, sin emerges, and God extends his further judgment and punishment. The Christian story unfolds, and many stories later, Jesus of Nazareth appears, come to reconcile man with God and offer himself for the sins of humanity.

And in Judaism, the book of Genesis ends with the people of Israel who had descended into slavery in Egypt, and there they await the arrival of Moses, who would lead them back to their promised land, Canaan, their land of origin. The second book of the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Old Testament, is the book of Exodus. And this book narrates the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of captivity and through the desert back to Canaan. The Ten Commandments are received by Moses, and the foundation of Jewish law is further established. The subsequent stories portray the establishment of civilization and the mandates of God.

In certain branches of Hinduism, there is the creation story that links divine Vishnu, the incomprehensible
transcendent being, with creation. His sport and folly and love entailed manifesting itself in the form of various avatars, Lord Krishna, for example, and dispersing himself throughout the universe. He is all pervasive, all encompassing. Creation represents his divine will and expansion, the divine expansion of his well.

So now we can review and summarize. We started out by distinguishing between a secular narrative and a religious narrative, and it has to do with the approach and the intention of the story. Religious narratives contain themes that are related to the creation of the world, creation of human beings, and the establishment of civilization, and the role that God might play in that.

And secular narratives have more to do with things that are non-religious and related to, for example, politics. We used the example of the American Revolutionary War. We gave the example of, in Hinduism, the example of the creation of the universe and the creation of the divine expansion of will, of Vishnu, into different aspects of the universe and the creation.

We identified that many of the themes in religious stories and religious narratives are universal across all of the traditions, in terms of this belief that there is some special relationship between the created world and the uncreated creator or the divine, or the transcendent. There are many names for it, but if there is one theme that is universal across all traditions, it's that. And the purpose of religious narrative is to express that and maintain that kind of connection with the transcendent through storytelling.

And we suggested that perhaps one of the most well-known creation stories in the West in the Judeo-Christian tradition is the story of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis, the creation of the world, the creation of man and woman, and the subsequent interruption or emergence of sin, and the casting out of the Garden of Eden. And then also, in Judaism, we mentioned Moses leading the Israelites back home, out from captivity in Egypt.

All of these stories maintain a link with the past, maintain a link with tradition and sacred principles. We mentioned the divine commandments that are part of the narrative, as well, that have become a part of civilization, a part of secular law in many cases. So there is this inter-weaving of the secular and religious. However, the intention of a narrative really depends on the themes that the story is intending to portray.