

Background reading related to the Promise and Law

Spirituality / Faith / Promise and Law

What is Spirituality?

For centuries, people have grappled with their understanding of the spiritual dimension of life. For some, it is expressed as a relationship with God, for others the search for a Supreme Being or Force that is beyond men and women. It could also be understood as the relationship with others and the world around.

It is easy to define the material world: what we can touch, see, hear, smell and taste. These are the material aspects of life; concrete, measurable, solid and easily described.

Defining spirituality and things spiritual is much more complex. The root of the word itself is interesting. The English word and equivalents in other romance languages are derived from the Latin “spiritus”, a word meaning breath or wind. Similarly, the Greek word “pneuma”, means breath, wind and spirit. The arabic “ruh” means spirit, and the Hebrew “ruach” adds to the ideas of creation. Many other languages embrace breath, wind, spirit, soul: words that express creative activity.

Wind is invisible. We know it only by its effects. It can be incredible, frighteningly powerful.

Breath is invisible. When we drew our first breath, independent of our mother’s body, a new life was born. When we draw our last breath, a mirror held to our mouth shows no mist. We are dead, at least to this life.

Spirit, our sense of self, is invisible. Our body is very obvious: skin, muscle, organs, bones, liquid and other tangible components. But spirit or soul is the very essence of our persona, who we are. It is what defines us as unique individuals. It is our inner self, our real self.

Our spiritual growth is stunted if cultivated in isolation. We are all connected and mutually responsible for each other’s well being. Each person in the world has value and purpose. The truly spiritual person does not withdraw from the world but plunges into it and brings hope, joy and reconciliation to all she encounters.

As people grow up, they make their own decisions about their spiritual values. These may be affected by peer pressure, either positively or negatively. Within Guiding there are many opportunities for girls and young women to develop or to deepen their spiritual awareness and to express their spiritual beliefs through action. For example, the way we act, the way we speak and the way we deal with people should all be consistent with our spiritual beliefs and values. Our body language reflects our inner attitudes.

Our search for meaning in life with all its ups and downs and contradictions is a spiritual journey towards a goal. Our vision of the goal will differ and, if it grows faint, we have many ways of rekindling it. Music, literature, painting, quiet reflection, conversation with a friend, doing an act of kindness, religious observance and care for others and ourselves can all give us a new perspective.

Many people chose to make that spiritual journey within a context of a faith community. They find strength, guidance and companionship within one of the major religions of the world such as Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, or Buddhism. For them, religion and spirituality are intertwined.

Their spirituality is supported by communal worship and celebration and by the moral and ethical framework promoted by their particular faith community. Their concept or understanding of God or gods is expressed through languages and images familiar to each religion.

For others, their spiritual journey does not include involvement in formal religious practices. The natural environment can provide them with an understanding of the link between spirit/soul and life and the purpose of life. Yet they would still emphasize and celebrate the importance of the spiritual aspects of life.

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Stage 2: Leadership Development Program Appendix 1: Spirituality/Faith/Promise and Law

What is Faith?

“You can be strong in your faith, but understand there are people of other faiths. Help others be strong in their faith”

Sri Ramakrishna, Hindu sage

Note: When discussing faith issues at any time, especially in a group of people representing more than one faith tradition, encourage people to clarify their own background.

At the WAGGGS 21st World Conference in 1972, it was determined that the Promise of each Association must express a spiritual dimension as detailed below:

‘ The essence of Duty to God is the acknowledgement of the necessity for a search for a faith in God, in a Supreme Being, and the acknowledgement of a Force higher than man, of the highest Spiritual Principles.’

The philosophy of the Girl Guides of Canada-Guides du Canada is expressed in the Promise and law, which include the following Fundamental Principles:

- ◆ A search for a higher spiritual being.
- ◆ Commitment to country or community
- ◆ The principle of service.

In the Canadian Promise, we express this spiritual dimension as follows:

‘I promise to do my best,
To be true to myself, my God/faitth and Canada.’

Each individual who makes the Promise has the responsibility to explore and develop her own spirituality.

What is Faith?

Life has been described as being a spiritual journey. Some people make that Journey within the context of various faith communities, such as Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism. Others profess a belief in a Divine Being yet do not identify themselves with a formal faith system.

Many people want to have faith in something or someone who typifies meaning in life and who brings them hope and peace. The materialism of today’s world leaves them feeling empty and barren. They are yearning for a spiritual sense of belonging, for faith in something beyond themselves.

Faith in a higher force, no matter how it is defined, has given people of all cultures strength to endure incredible hardships and hope against seemingly impossible odds. The stories of people of faith are inspirational. Many have changed the course of history and enriched the lives of millions. They are ordinary people doing extraordinary deeds.

Language about God

When discussing faith, Christians, Jews and Muslims will use the word God to define the higher force they believe in. Hindus however don’t have a word for God. For Hindus, God is symbolised by the monosyllable AUM. In Hinduism, God is all powerful, omnipresent and omniscient, and within Hinduism, there are Gods and Goddesses. Of the five major world religions, Buddhism does not have a doctrine of God.

If you belong to one of the major world religions, you will probably cherish a definition of a higher force from within its traditions. For example, Islam, Judaism and

Christianity all teach that there is only one God who is the creator of everything, eternal, all powerful and all knowing. For followers of these religions, God is holy and perfect, just and merciful. And because of who God is, each follower is taught how to behave within the ethical framework of their religion. But teaching is overlain with an individual understanding of God that is bound up with an individual's life experience.

Who is God?

The idea of God is the most important and yet the most questioned of religious beliefs. Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity all claim to reveal something of who God is through their holy books or scriptures, through their prophets and teachers and through the traditions and experience of their faith. For followers of these religions, God is real and active, a powerful force for good that enables women and men, girls and boys to reach their full potential as human beings. Yet the idea of God remains elusive and frequently challenged.

For some people, the word God is laden with autocratic authority. God is experienced as exclusively masculine with no feminine attributes. For some, God is judgmental and punishing, whilst for others God is loving and forgiving. Some people cannot believe in something that cannot be explained whilst others are happy to believe in the mystery of the divine.

The concept of a deity is older than recorded history. It is the strongest component of oral tradition in many cultures. Within the word "God" are many ideas that are basic to human thought.

Discussing Spirituality and Faith

Many leaders are looking for new ways of helping young people grow spiritually. In today's multicultural and ever changing society, this is no easy task. Without proper guidance some leaders may impose moral and religious attitudes on young people.

Spirituality underlies both WAGGGS' call to action and the contribution of its members through friendship to world peace and understanding. Service and friendship are important elements of a spiritual dimension to life recognised not only by all the major world religions but also by people of good intent who do not profess a faith.

Robert Baden-Powell on Guiding

Founder of Scouting and Guiding
Robert Baden-Powell
First Baron Baden-Powell of Gilwell (1857 – 1941)

“Our Movement not a mere Organisation. Let us remember then, as a first step in our Conference here, that Girl Guiding and Scouting is a movement not an organisation. There is a world of difference between the two.

“ The Bond of the Guide Law. The secret of our success and of our wonderful expansion in the comparatively short period of our existence is that we are a spontaneous and willing sisterhood and not a formal and soul-less organisation.

We find ourselves bound together by our voluntary acceptance of the Guide Law and Promise. This is the outward and visible sign under which we are rallied; the hinge on which the Movement turns.

But no Law can of itself be binding unless the spirit be also present to back it with a whole-hearted determination for its performance.

And we have that Guide spirit!

“The Spiritual Side to the Guide Law. In considering the Guide Law we all recognise its moral values and how these can, where properly directed, develop in the girls the desired healthiness of mind and body.

But this is not enough. This is only its moral and material side. There is a higher and more vital force underlying the same Law, namely its spiritual inspiration.

That spiritual force is Love. Love is the soul of our Movement and service its expression.

“The Need. It is just the application of such spirit that is so desperately needed in the world today.

Many of our respective nations have suffered, and are still suffering, from the devastating effects of the late war and are only now emerging from its welter. We are endeavouring to rebalance ourselves but are handicapped by the fact that the oncoming generation has been born and brought up in the unsettling chaos of war conditions.

Since the war, under the name of progress, various ideas and experiments have been tried, some of them revolutionary, some good, some harmful, in such matters as national government, economics, industry, education, art, literature and religion.

To make these successful, balanced character is needed in the oncoming generation which has the responsibility for carrying them out. More especially is this the case in the effort to secure peace in the world, where international agreements and regulations can have little success unless backed by the spirit of mutual trust and goodwill in place the constant suspicion and jealousy.

“Our Responsibility. An unprecedented responsibility therefore rests on those who are charged with education. They have already recognised that there are many subjects to be taught besides the three R's if the next generation is to bring back prosperity and peace.

President Hoover, the other day, pointed out that the Scouts were teaching the fourth and most important R, that of Responsibility.

There is greater need than ever, in these days of mass emotion created by partisan press, cinemas, easier communications, etc, for individual strength of character and self control.

So while we develop sisterhood and team spirit, we must not forget, at the same time we develop the individuality of each girl on a sound standard.

Extracts from The Chief Scout's address to The World Conference of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, July 16, 1930