



# Spirituality and Scouting: Education for a culture of peace

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**(Scout contribution)**

## Introduction

Scouting is the largest youth movement in the world. Its aim is to work towards the full development of young people. Since its beginning, its founder, Lord Baden-Powell, considered the spiritual dimension as part of a whole: Scouting. Even though he was Christian, he expressed Scouting’s spiritual principles in a sufficiently open and universal way that his method was adapted to - and adopted by - all cultures, religions and paradigms in our societies. Duty to self, duty to others and duty to God (or to a Spiritual Reality) are effectively concepts that human beings share. The spiritual and moral dimensions call upon people to develop a true brotherhood by developing their sense of humanity. Respect for others, with their differences, and the mutual enrichment gained through greater knowledge about these differences are the yeast of a culture of peace. Through its worldwide dimension and its unique educational method, Scouting makes a substantial contribution to helping a culture of peace to grow. Exchanges between young people from different cultures, origins, religions or social classes who share the same principles –including this spiritual dimension – constitute a true experience of human brotherhood. Everything that people undertake in the world in Scouting contributes to elevating human consciousness. I am convinced that Baden-Powell’s intuition, which led him to say that “spirituality is the fundamental factor underlying Scouting and Guiding”, was a major contributing factor to making the World Movement what it is today.

## Young people today and the spiritual dimension

The situation is not the same from one country to the next, nor from one part of the world to another. Young people do not have the same past, the same experiences of everyday life, nor the same upbringing. But the quest for meaning, happiness and a successful life are shared widely. Scouting addresses itself to all young people. This is why it is essential for the fundamental principles of Scouting to be universal. For several decades, the Western world

has distanced itself from - or even rejected - religions, often associated with spirituality. Materialism, with its consumer model of society, has spread across the whole planet; but it is in the West that its effects are the most keenly felt. It is not considered "cool" to believe in God or to practise a religion. Neither is it always easy to bring up the matter of spirituality during the course of activities. But experience shows that young people do not shun spirituality, but rather that they reject a certain image of religion. One can also notice the effects of hammering by the media, which do not miss out on opportunities to heap ridicule on religions. Young people everywhere are confronted with the effects of globalisation. Its effects are sometimes positive, but are most often negative. In the West, the fear of work being outsourced creates uncertainty about the future amongst young people and this has significant consequences on behaviour, such as egotistical individualism or insularity. In a culture of immediate gratification and superficiality, the young person is bombarded with new things that leave him or her with little time for essential questions. In poor or developing countries, living conditions, deprivation of freedom and the absence of democracy generate frustrations and sometimes lead to extreme forms of behaviour.

### **In what ways can spirituality offer an answer?**

Spirituality, whether in terms of a religion or not, starts from the human being's need to connect with a transcendental dimension. A dimension, that gives meaning to the history of Humanity, and to each person's existence. A human being cannot claim to develop his or her full self without developing as a spiritual being. But what does developing as a spiritual being mean? It is firstly becoming aware of this source of love and light that is in each one of us. It means reconciling body and spirit; waking up to subtle realities and becoming open to what is universal. It is about gaining higher consciousness as a human being to become someone who works towards peace. Spirituality only has meaning if it transforms us through internal experiences that are like sparks of light that reveal a different reality, a reality beyond the material world. These experiences can be everyday ones, but one needs to be attentive and grasp the opportunity. Sincerity, humility and love are indispensable qualities for harmonious spiritual development. It is then that we gain a higher consciousness; our love grows and working for the good of Humanity and the Earth becomes imperative.

### **The Scout Method's contribution**

The spiritual dimension has been part of Scouting since the Movement began. This is what enables Scouting to affirm that it aims at the full development of the young person. Scouting is an active method in which the young person is the central player. It is through action and experience that the young person progresses in his/her personal development. The Scout Method is well suited to taking the spiritual dimension into account. In effect, transmitting spirituality is not about teaching religious dogma. It is about making a young person aware of this vertical dimension; making him or her aware of this reality through activities, challenges, joys and life in the small group or patrol. The leader can take advantage of any promising opportunity to make a connection with this dimension. As one can see, there is no need to systematically schedule time for spirituality, but devoting specific time to the spiritual dimension is beneficial. Nature offers a privileged space in which to introduce this spiritual dimension. B-P insisted a lot on the educational role of nature. He said: "For those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, the forest is at once a laboratory, a club and a temple". Nature enables each person to reveal and see his/her true nature. One cannot lie with nature. Whether in the mountains, in the forest, at sea or in the desert, a person must become aware of his/her condition, weaknesses and strengths. When young people who have never left their inner cities or neighbourhoods find themselves in the forest or up in the mountains, their reactions can often be surprising and they learn a lot about themselves in a short space

of time. They become more open and are more apt to listen to ideas to which they would have paid no attention in their inner cities. The mountains and the desert, for example, have been where prophets and wise men of the various religions or of spirituality have had life-changing experiences.

### **Towards a culture of peace**

The Scout Movement makes an active contribution to building a world in which peace is a reality. The action undertaken in this direction is vast, both in terms of initiatives undertaken by the World Scout Bureau and by National Scout Organizations. The “Scouting and Peace” publication, which was one of WOSM contributions to the International Year for the Culture of Peace, presents a wide spectrum of work in this area.

According to the definition of the United Nations, a culture of peace is a whole; made up of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by combating their roots through dialogue and negotiation between individuals, groups and nations (UN resolutions A/RES/52/13: Culture of peace and A/53/243: Declaration and Programme of Action for a Culture of Peace).

The UN action plan involves eight steps, including:

- “Actions to foster a culture of peace through education”, into which Scouting fits perfectly as a non-formal educational movement.
- In Resolution 5 adopted by the 30th World Scout Conference in 1985, the Conference recognised that, since its creation, Scouting had always been a force for peace in the world and that, through its universal nature; it had unique possibilities to translate education for peace into concrete activities.
- “Actions to advance understanding, tolerance and solidarity”, which Scouting includes in duty to others.

By its very nature, Scouting is a movement that develops universal brotherhood while preserving cultural and spiritual identities. The adherence of millions of Scouts to the same universal principles of the Scout Method creates a real bond of brotherhood. This brotherhood is not just aimed at Scouts; it encompasses the whole of humanity.

Experiences that bring together people from different spiritual traditions within the framework of Scout activities also contribute to mutual understanding and respect for each other's differences. For example, each year since 1996 the “Scouts Musulmans de France” have organised Abraham's Tent, which is an opportunity for young Scouts and non-Scouts to meet around a theme (solidarity, peace, etc.) and each speaker (Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and free-thinker) presents his/her point of view. Workshops then enable young people to react to the presentations. After that, Scout activities are proposed in line with the theme.

## **Conclusion**

In many spiritual traditions, life is something sacred that must be preserved in all circumstances. Yet, people do not hesitate to kill each other for various reasons. Spiritual development makes us become aware that life is a divine gift, a miracle to which we are witnesses. The origin of this life is twofold: spiritual and biological. "We are all from Adam and are Adam and the Earth". Education needs to take both aspects into account. Just as our bodies need food to grow, human beings need spiritual food. This spiritual food progressively leads us to respect and understand others; to act in solidarity; to realise that even if differences can be a challenge, diversity is a richness; to take care of the weakest, and, finally, to contribute to peace and the well-being of Humanity. It also leads us to become aware that that the nature that surrounds us is part of this miracle that makes the Earth an oasis in a galactic desert. Natural resources are not endless and tomorrow's world will need to take this into account. But it is the decisions taken today that affect the future. Will we see wars fighting over natural resources? Or will human consciousness be sufficiently high to change our vision of the world; our lifestyles, societies and relations between rich and poor countries so as to face this inescapable fact together - we only have one Earth.

Education is certainly the best means to transmit the need to work together towards a common future, peace and justice to young people. A young person who feels at ease in his/her body, head and heart will take action in this direction. Scouting has undertaken an original approach and has given itself the means to contribute towards this kind of education. It has done so for a century and will continue to do so.