



Spiritual Dimension

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Can Scouts not believe in God? An Athiest Rover? A Muslim promise? Buddists? Two Scout associations in one country?

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- Muslim Promise?

CAN SCOUTS NOT BELIEVE IN GOD?

Q - Can Scouts not believe in God? We have Buddhist Scouts, and Buddhism doesn't foresee God's existence.

A - One of the three main principles of Scouting is "Duty to God". However, the word "God" can mean different things and nobody has the right to impose his or her concept of God on other people. For example, it is true, as you say, that Buddhists do not share the concept of a "personal" God like Christian, Muslim or Jewish people. Does this mean that Buddhist people are atheists?

The concept of atheism is very tricky. Let me give you an example - a Hindu mystic, Swami Vivekananda, said: "In the same way that certain religions in the world call a man who does not believe in a God existing outside his person an atheist, we, for our part, say that an atheist is a man who does not believe in himself. Not believing in the splendour of one's own soul - that's what we call atheism."

In the constitution of the World Organization of the Scout Movement, you can find the following definition of "Duty to God":

"Adherence to spiritual principles, loyalty to the religion that expresses them and acceptance of the duties resulting therefrom."

There are three parts in this definition: (1) adherence to spiritual principles, (2) loyalty to the religion that expresses them and (3) acceptance of the duties resulting therefrom.

I think that any believer, including Buddhists, can agree on this definition.

Download the chapter 7 of "The Green Island", a novel telling how a national programme team in a given country of Central and Eastern Europe is working to develop the youth programme for their Scout association. Chapter 7 is about spiritual development. It explains how we should understand "Duty to God" and how Scouting can contribute to spiritual development, which was also called by our Founder Baden-Powell "a natural form of religion":

"The natural form of religion is so simple that a child can understand it. It comes from within, from conscience, from observation, from love, for use in all that he does. It is not a formality or a dogmatic dressing done from outside, put on for Sunday wear. It is, therefore, a true part of his character, a development of soul, and not a veneer that may peel off."

You could also download the background paper and the report on the WONDERforum recently organised on spiritual development. There you will find a lot of information related to your question, particularly a definition of the "Scout approach" to spiritual development:

The Scout Approach

The role of the Scout leader relating to spiritual development is not to give religious instruction, nor to tack religious observances onto Scout activities. It is to use the kind of experiences offered by Scouting to help young people discover a spiritual reality and incorporate it into their own lives. In fact, Scouting proposes a 5-step approach to spiritual development.

1. Enable young people to experience spirituality through Scout activities

In many cultures, the term "God" designates, on the one hand, the Creator or source of everything and, on the other hand, absolute goodness or a principle of salvation which pervades the history of humanity. There are thus two possible ways of discovering God: by exploring the wonders of creation and nature; by experiencing life within a human community.

Traditional Scout activities do indeed permit these types of experiences:

- Hiking, exploring, camping and actions to preserve the environment all enable young people to discover and admire the wonders of nature and life itself.

- Welcoming, learning to listen, building relationships with other people, however poor or destitute, showing compassion, sharing; co-operating within a team, sharing responsibilities, serving others, etc. All these are activities which aim at discovering and developing a human community.

2. Making time for young people to discover and express the meaning of life

A Scout leader also needs to propose opportunities for evaluating and celebrating experiences, in other words, to provide activities which enable young people to analyse their own experiences in the light of the Scout Law and Promise, in order to discover their meaning and value. It is through these kinds of activities, which include moments of silence, meditation and expression, that young people can experience the need to pray and worship.

3. Help each individual to identify with his or her spiritual and religious heritage

A major concern is how to help each young person make links between the experiences gained within Scouting and the spiritual and religious heritage which has been transmitted to him or her by the family and local community. With the onset of adolescence, it is normal for a young person to challenge this heritage, question its relevance and have doubts. It is necessary to pass through this stage in order to truly adopt this heritage and develop an adult approach to spirituality, religion and faith.

4. Encourage internalisation and personal commitment

Spiritual development only has any sense if it becomes internalised and leads to personal commitment. This is why one of the essential criteria for progression is the application of acquired spiritual and religious values in daily life.

5. Develop open and respectful attitudes

One of the fundamental convictions of the Scout Movement is that spiritual development should bring people together in fellowship, instead of separating them or bringing them into conflict. Since modern societies are those which thrive on communication and exchange and comprise a multiplicity of cultures and faiths, it is essential to prepare young people for such diversity. They need to overcome prejudices and develop open-mindedness and respect for faiths which are different from their own, whilst being able to express their personal convictions without aggressiveness.

AN ATHEIST ROVER?

Q - What should I do if I discover that one of the Rovers of my Group is atheist?

A - A Rover is a young person, maybe still an adolescent, and adolescence is the age where young people feel the need to question all the ideas and principles which they agreed with when they were a child.

This is a normal trend, because they now not only have to agree to the values that adult people propose to them but also to test them and develop a deeper and more personal adherence to these values.

So many adolescents say they are atheists. Most of the time, that means that they are challenging the image of God they have developed for themselves when they were a child.

That is the necessary way to build a more mature and more personal image of God (to build a large house you have first to destroy some walls).

Your role as Scout leader is not to reject a Rover because he says he is an atheist but to help him to clarify his ideas concerning God and spiritual development, and to ask him, at least, to start a process of research, reflection and experimentation.

TWO ASSOCIATIONS IN ONE COUNTRY?

Q - I'm a Rover and I have had a question for a long time.

In our country there are two Scout associations recognized by the WOSM: the first is the closest to the Baden-Powell Method, while the second is confessional (it's a Catholic association).

1. Is it considered normal that in one country there are two Scout associations (even if united in a federation)?

2. Reading B.-P.'s books I felt the importance of the spiritual dimension in Scouting, but on the other hand Scouting should be open for everybody, without any discrimination (race, religion, etc).

I found this also in the WOSM's rules for an association to be accepted. What's your opinion about this?

A - According to the Constitution of the World Organization of the Scout Movement (Chapter III, Article V, paragraph 2): "only one National Scout Organization from any one country can be recognized for membership in the World Organization..."

The aim of this article is to preserve the unity of the Scout Movement and also to ensure that the nature of the Scout Movement is respected according to the Chapter I, Article I of the World Constitution: "The Scout Movement is a voluntary non-political educational movement for young people open to all without distinction of origin, race or creed in accordance with the purpose, principles and method conceived by the Founder."

However, in some countries, particularly in Europe, when the Scout Movement was founded, it was quite impossible to create a single national Scout association. Society was divided according to various ideologies and people were unable to accept a single association (this was particularly the case in France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, etc.).

This is why the second part of Article V, paragraph 2 states: "A National Scout Organization may consist of more than one Scout Association participating in a Federation based on the common Scout purpose..."

Some years ago, the World Scout Committee considered the issue of federations and adopted a statement indicating clearly that a federation is only acceptable for very special and strong reasons.

It is generally agreed that federations are just umbrella organisations unable to develop a clear strategy for the development of Scouting in a given country. In the case of new associations to be created or recreated in the former communist countries, WOSM's policy was consistently to persuade the Scout leaders to agree on a single National Scout Organization. This aim was achieved in most cases.

One of the reasons why people want to have a federation of several associations rather than a single "open" national association is the concern about spiritual and religious education. They think that it is easier to achieve spiritual development within an association based on a single denomination: for example, the Catholic Scouts would need to stay together in order to educate young people in the Catholic faith. It is true that the spiritual dimension is sometimes weaker in "open" Scout associations. An effort is necessary to develop this dimension of the Scout programme.

This is one of the main objectives of the World Programme Committee. To obtain more information on this issue, you could download the report on the WONDERforum on Spiritual Development. You could also download chapter VII of the Green Island, a novel explaining how to develop a Scout Programme.

MUSLIM PROMISE?

Q - I'm a Rover leader in Italy. I have a muslim Rover in my unit: what is the Muslim promise?

A - There is no Muslim promise. There is neither a Catholic promise or a Buddhist promise. But there is a Scout promise as there is a Scout Law. The Scout Law and the Scout promise do not refer to a particular religion but to the purpose and principles of Scouting.

According to the Constitution of the World Organization of the Scout Movement (to which the Italian Scout Organisation belongs), the purpose of the Scout Movement is defined as follows:

"The purpose of the Scout Movement is to contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potentials as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of their local, national and international communities". (Article I, paragraph 2)

As you know already, I suppose, one of the main characteristics of Scouting, as it is explained in this paragraph, is that it is

working for a "holistic" development of the human being: not only intellectual development or physical development but also social, spiritual and, I would add emotional development.

In Italy, which is a country of Catholic tradition, almost all people are Catholic and most of the scouts are also Catholic. But in the world it is not the case everywhere. The largest Scout association in the World is Gerakan Pramuka, the Guide and Scout Association of Indonesia, with 10 million Scouts. Most of them are Muslim.

Scouting is a global crossroad of cultures and religions. Now, to come back to the Promise. Its content is defined by the Constitution of the World Organization of the Scout Movement. Article II, paragraph 2 states:

"All members of the Scout Movement are required to adhere to a Scout Promise and Law reflecting, in language appropriate to the culture and civilization of each National Scout Organization and approved by the World Organization, the principles of Duty to God, Duty to others and Duty to self, and inspired by the Promise and law conceived by the Founder of the Scout Movement..."

Duty to God is defined by the Constitution as follows: "Adherence to spiritual principles, loyalty to the religion that expressed them an acceptance of the duties resulting therefrom".

Therefore, as your Scout is a Muslim, he can as well as a Catholic Scout promise to "serve God".

Don't forget that even if you are Catholic, your duty as Scout leader is to help this Scout to grow in his faith. This means to develop a better knowledge and awareness about Islam and develop a personal choice for his life.

Have a look at the publication The Spiritual Dimension of Scouting. Its in the Leaders Library.

Also, The Green Island is a book telling the story of a team of friends having to develop a new programme for their association. A chapter concerns the spiritual development.

National Scout associations' web pages on spiritual dimension: http://usscouts.org/scoutduty/sd2gc_ol.html
http://scoutdocs.ca/Documents/Duty_to_God <http://www.vicscouts.org.au/info/infobook/spiritual.htm>
http://www.umcscouting.org/reverant/to_do_my_duty_to_god.htm