



The Promise and the Law

The Original Promise and the Law

The Original Promise and the Law are at the heart of Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting. Together they are what sets the Movement apart from other youth organizations. They offer each Girl Guide/Girl Scout a philosophy of life that embraces a profession of faith in the future.

In 1908 Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of Scouting and Guiding, wrote bi-weekly articles that he called Campfire Yarns. Although meant for boys, these tales were avidly read by boys and girls throughout the United Kingdom. Eventually they were published in book-form entitled Scouting for Boys. The outdoor activities in the book were the main attractions: tracking, stalking, cooking on an open fire, camping and the premise that life was like one big game. But B-P (as the renowned general became known to Scouts and Guides), knew that practical skills, however adventurous, were not enough.

Baden-Powell's experience of training soldiers had taught him that people learn best by doing. He was also convinced of the value of small groups working and playing together. He had a firm belief in God, whom he saw reflected in the world around him. This gave him a strong sense of stewardship of the earth and all living things. Out of these convictions grew the Scout Promise and Law. The Promise and the Law for Girl Guides was slightly modified.

The Original Promise

The Original Promise in Baden-Powell's Girl Guiding reads:

On my honour I promise that I will do my best:

To do my duty to God and the King
or God and my country;
To help other people at all times;
To obey the Guide Law.

The Original Law

A Guide's honour is to be trusted.

A Guide is loyal.

A Guide's duty is to be useful and to help others.

A Guide is a friend to all, and a sister to every other Guide.

A Guide is courteous.

A Guide is a friend to animals.

A Guide obeys orders.

A Guide smiles and sings under all difficulties.

A Guide is thrifty.

A Guide is pure in thought, word and deed.

The Guide Law is about the effect of behaviour on our relationships with other people as individuals, society at large and the natural environment. As we try to practice the Law in daily life, we recognise that we can make a difference to the quality of life for ourselves and for others.

Spiritual Comfort

In *Rovering to Success*, Baden-Powell tells how the British Boy Scouts maintained several recreation huts for soldiers at the Front during World War I. The Scout Law was hung on the walls of the huts. Many soldiers who were going to the trenches feared they would never come back.

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'Many a man realised then, for the first time, that though he had been taught at school as one of a herd, preached to in church as one of a herd, drilled in the army as one of a herd, he was really a single being having his own existence, his own consciousness, and his own soul, and he might even now at any moment have these taken from him by Death. It disturbed him to feel he had no exact spiritual comfort to turn to and to take hold of. He knew little of religion or of God – yet he wanted something of the sort – he knew not what. Then he saw the Scout Law and he read it over, and again he read it over, and thought it out. Here was something that he could carry out and it looked like doing him good. So he came and asked if he could 'sign on to that'. He felt that if he carried out its instructions as far as he could, he would at least have the comfort of knowing that before he died he had tried to do his best, and no man could do more than that.'

Fundamental Principles

The Promise and the Law gives a purpose and a new meaning to life. It provides Girl Guides/ Girl Scouts with a set of values such as honesty, responsibility, integrity, loyalty, respect, tolerance, self-awareness and a moral framework.

In the years since the founding of Guiding, tens of millions of girls and women have made the Promise each in her own language. Although the words and the emphasis vary from nation to nation, the essential meaning is as Baden-Powell originally intended. Each National Girl Guide/Girl Scout Organization must adhere to the Fundamental Principles expressed within the original Promise and Law.

At the 21st World Conference in 1972, the Fundamental Principles of the Duty to God was explained as:

"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."

At the same Conference it was emphasized that:

"the Fundamental Principles of Duty to God, Duty to Country, Service to others and the principles expressed in the original LAW be maintained and safeguarded in that they are the very foundation of the Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting Movement and continue to be the living force which makes the Movement unique in the service of youth."

Duty to Country was explained as:

"The essence of Duty to Country is the acceptance of the concept of responsibility to the communities in which we live."

Service was explained as:

"The essence of Service is the acceptance of the practice of helpfulness to others."

The essence of the Law is:

- i) Duty to others and the Brotherhood of Man
- ii) Self-Discipline
- iii) Respect for all living things

The words of the Promise and Law are plain and direct. Young girls can understand them, especially if helped to reflect on them. Their depth of meaning, with their broad application to daily living, becomes more apparent as girls get older.

Many National Organizations have made changes to their Promise and Law. These are in response to a desire for more relevant language, to reflect cultural or national

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concerns and to expand Baden Powell's original ideas. For example, A Guide is a friend to animals is often changed to express stewardship for the whole natural world. All changes to the Promise and Law must be approved by WAGGGS.

When a National Organization undertakes to change its Promise and Law there is widespread discussion of the Fundamental Principles of Guiding. This brings a renewed emphasis on what makes Guiding unique and how the basic philosophy of Girl Guides/Girl Scouts unifies over ten million girls and women around the world.

Spirituality in WAGGGS has both a constitutional and personal dimension. The concept of spirituality is laid down in WAGGGS' Constitution and each individual who makes the Promise has the responsibility to explore and develop their own spirituality.

Exploring Spirituality

The following are quotations from BP that will help us in our exploration of Spirituality.

"I have been asked to describe more fully what was in my mind as regards religion when I instituted Scouting and Guiding. I was asked: where does religion come in?... Well my reply is ... "It does not come in at all. It is already there. It is the fundamental factor underlying Scouting and Guiding."

(Statement made by BP on 2nd July 1926 in an address to the Scout and Guide Conference)

"Religion can only be "caught" not "taught". It is not a dressing donned from outside, put on for Sunday wear. It is a true part of a boy's character, a development of soul

and not a veneer that may peel off. It is a matter of personality, of inner conviction, not instruction."

(Statement by BP in 1918 and repeated in 1939)

The opportunity to explore the spiritual dimension in Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting can be a unifying factor, bringing together people with different spiritual experiences to share, discover and learn, making the world a more open, tolerant place. In Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting exploring spirituality enables the individual to:

- a) reflect on the issues related to the inner self
- b) explore relationships with others
- c) explore relationship with the world around
- d) explore relationship with the Transcendent

Only by considering all the aspects can spirituality be fully explored in its widest context.



You and the Promise: 1

Purpose

To encourage people to look at the link between the Promise and spirituality in their own lives.

Materials needed

Paper, pens, paint, glue, (clay optional), a copy of the Promise that everyone can see.

What to do

Spirituality

The recognition of a spiritual dimension to life is one of the universal core values of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts. These values are at the heart of the Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting Movement. But what do we understand by 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.

Read out or distribute the following quotations:

'Our spiritual pilgrimage is not within an artificial religious world, but within the real world in which coal is mined and lemon meringue pie is made, the world in which companies are taken over and homeless people die in the streets, the world in which wars are declared and millions long for peace and justice.'

(Kenneth Leech *The Eye of the Storm: Spiritual Resources for the Pursuit of Justice* DLT London 1990)

'Islam gives you entire freedom of thought and deeds. It allows humanity and soul to develop for the good and nobility; in such a case no fighting would exist, peace and elevation of feelings should prevail.'

(Muhammed Toufik Ahmad, *Islam the Religion of All Dar Tabliegh El Islam*, Alexandria, Egypt 1973)

'God is in the world, the world is in God, the world is God. God is distinct from the world, but the world is not distinct from God.'

(Hindu saying)

On a sheet of paper, invite each participant to draw, symbolise or write anything that expresses what she experiences or understands by what is termed spirituality. Some people might prefer to express their understanding in song or dance or clay or by finding something in nature such as flowers or leaves with which to make an arrangement or picture.

Give people plenty of time for this exercise and then invite participants to look at each other's work.



You and the Promise: 2

Purpose

To encourage people to look at the link between the Promise and spirituality in their own lives, specifically Duty to God.

Materials needed

Paper, pens (optional), a copy of the Promise that everyone can see.

What to do

Duty to God

The Promise and Law of all National Organizations that belong to WAGGGS must contain the essence of the fundamental principles defined at the 21st World Conference in 1972. The Conference struggled with the phrase, Duty to God in an effort not to compromise the basic principle yet to embrace as wide an interpretation as possible. This definition was adopted:

'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.'

Today we would use a gender-free phrase rather than the word 'man' but otherwise the definition is still valid.

It is important to point out that the essence of Duty to God encompasses all world faiths represented in the World Association. Working in groups of four, invite participants to discuss the following questions.

How different is your own Promise to the original Promise?

What do you understand by the phrase, Duty to God?

Do you have a different language for Duty to God?

Think about people you know whose lives you respect and admire. Can you see how the qualities in their lives acknowledge Duty to God or witness to their commitment to their spiritual beliefs?

As an individual, how do you acknowledge Duty to God or your commitment to your spiritual beliefs in your own life? Give a specific example.

Think of one small way that you can show your Duty to God or your commitment to your spiritual beliefs in your own life. Invite the other people in your group to encourage and to support you as you undertake this.

As a group, how do you acknowledge Duty to God or your commitment to your spiritual beliefs in your time together? Give a specific example.

As a group, think of one small way that together you can show your Duty to God or your commitment to your spiritual beliefs.

Brainstorm the answers in the wider group.