



Touched by Joy

Joy: what depth and breadth of meaning for such a small word! When you are filled with joy, you seem to have reached the peak of spiritual experience. You think you will burst and that your whole body will explode. Tears of happiness come from an abundance of joy and you can find no words to express your feelings.

What brings joy so intense that it hurts? You might think that inheriting a great fortune or the birth of a child would bring much joy. But initial feelings of joy might be followed swiftly by worry about how to keep your riches safe or how to protect your baby.

It seems to be generally true that the simple things in life bring the most joy. Often joy comes upon you unexpectedly. Suddenly you find yourself overwhelmed with great love for someone. Perhaps he or she has looked at you, said something, or because of something indefinable, you are very happy and your heart is full of joy.

Children can bring great joy. The first sight of the child at its mother's breast; pain suddenly forgotten in overwhelming, indescribable happiness. Nothing is more common than birth, yet it is always miraculous. A baby, full of trust, smiles and puts her arms up to you. With great excitement, a small child brings you something she has found and treasures so much that she wants to share the pleasure of discovery with you.

Nature can evoke wonder and joy. Consider the awesome brilliance of the night sky filled with stars or the sun, setting in all shades of red and pink and yellow. Feel the wind in your face, hear the crash of waves on a rocky shore; listen to the dawn chorus of birds or other animals.

Unanticipated joy comes when you suddenly accomplish something on which you have worked hard with little success. You hear good news about something that had seemed hopeless. This may be personal or it may affect whole communities and nations. Think for example of the joyous celebrations that accompanies the end of a war or that marked the start of the new Millennium. People gather together to share their joy in a particular event. Human relationships and a sense of community can promote joy. Being loved and cared for can be a joy-filled experience.

Joy is often experienced in acts of service to other people. Service is very much at the heart of the Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting Movement. The Original Promise makes this clear:

*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 explains this principle of service:

*A Guide is to be useful and to help others.
A Guide is a friend to all and a sister to every other Guide.*

The 21st World Conference of WAGGGS that took place in Toronto, Canada in 1972 stated:

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

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We help others when we carry out a Good Turn. We are a friend to all when we help and care for everyone we meet within our own community and internationally. We are sisters to over 10 million Girl Guides/Girl Scouts world-wide when we offer friendship and service across language, culture, tradition and faith. Such service and friendship is a potential source of much joy.

The World Song highlights both the principle and spirit of service that underlies the Girl Guides/Girl Scouts Movement. It also reflects the hope and joy that springs from this.

*Our way is clear as we march on
And see! Our flag on high
Is never furled throughout the world
For hope shall never die!
We must unite for what is right
In friendship true and strong
Until the earth
In its rebirth
Shall sing our song! Shall sing our song!*

*All those who loved the true and good
Whose promises were kept
With humble mind, whose acts were kind,
whose honour never slept
These were the free!
And we must be
Prepared like them to live,
To give to all
Both great and small
All we can give! All we can give!*

(Music by Jean Sibelius; words by Gavin Ewart)

¹ Barbara Crossette, New York Times Service, 1996, quoted in Toronto Globe, May 18, 1996.

² Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human?* Grand Rapids, MI Eerdmans, 1971



Why is there suffering and pain?

Our journey through life is a mixture of joy and adversity. Events, both good and bad, can cause us to ask questions about the meaning of life. For example, if God is both loving and all-powerful, why do terrible things happen to people? Why is there pain? Why do wars break out and dreadful natural disasters occur? Most of us have asked these questions at some time. Some find them a compelling reason to believe that there is no God whilst others find the reality of God through adversity.

We know a lot about suffering. Everyone experiences pain sometime in life, some much more than others. Innocent people suffer as much as, if not more than, the wicked. We are especially distressed and angry when bad things happen to infants and children who seem so helpless and vulnerable. When something bad happens to us, we say, 'Why did this happen to me?' We rarely ask this question when something good happens!

No one is immune from adversity. It seems to happen by random chance. Living a good life is not a guarantee of freedom from suffering. Disease strikes indiscriminately. There are no easy answers. The problem of pain is very real and troubles many.

Some tragic events come about because of things quite beyond our control, like the weather. When major natural disasters happen, such as earthquakes, cyclones and floods people often respond quickly and generously to human need.

There are many evils for which people are clearly responsible. Unroadworthy and overcrowded buses overturn and hundreds die. People are ravaged by lung disease yet the tobacco industry is allowed to flourish and people continue to smoke. Allergies unheard of at mid-century abound today as chemicals circulate in air, food and water with unknown

long-term effects. Hundreds of thousands of women and children, as well as soldiers, are killed, maimed and left homeless yet the sale of armaments and use of landmines go unchecked. The list goes on and on. The cause of many tragedies can be traced directly to human activity.

But all suffering cannot be traced to human error, weakness or vice. How can a loving God let a child who is full of life and promise suddenly die? You will hear many pious reasons given to explain the problem of human suffering. Thinking they are offering comfort to someone who has suffered a terrible loss or hurt, people will say strange things: 'It's all for the best, you'll see.' 'God won't make you suffer more than you can bear.' 'It's God's way of testing you.' 'You must have been bad for this to have happened to you.' 'Suffering makes you a stronger person.' These sentiments do not always bring instant comfort.

The Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions teach that we are created with free will. We can choose freely to do good or evil. If we have the capacity to choose to do great good, the potential to do the opposite, to do great evil also exists.

A striking feature of all religions is that their great teachers and exemplars faced anguish and pain. Down through the ages countless followers have faced terrible situations. At first, they have struck out in despair and railed against God, but then they turned to their God for help and strength to endure. Their faith grew and they were able to cope. No one welcomes suffering, but it might help us to acknowledge that God is alongside us in our distress. In living through the experience of suffering, we can learn more about ourselves. If we allow suffering to strengthen us we may become more compassionate towards others.



Death and Dying

A story is told.....

'When I was a child, I had a very specific and quite secret prayer. It was a deal I had worked out with God. I don't remember my age when I first made up this prayer, but I was old enough to understand basic arithmetic. I had a problem. I wanted to live to be very old, but I also wanted my parents around. They were in their late 30s when I was born, their only child. I calculated their maximum possible life span and prayed that God would let me die one day before that, although it made my life considerably shorter than I preferred.

One night my mother overheard my prayer. Horrified, she told me never to say it again. She did not say why and something in her voice prevented me from asking. I continued saying the prayer for some time but my enthusiasm for it had gone.

When I was 13, during what turned out to be my mother's final illness, I started making deals with God again, this time in writing. I wrote things like 'God, if you make my mother better, I will...'

My fear of death was the fear of being a survivor. I did not want to be without anyone I loved. Who of us has not had such fears?'

Anon.

The American physician Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross wrote a very important book about death and dying that is still influential even today.¹ It was based on her experience with terminally ill patients. She discovered that they all reacted in similar ways, as did those family and friends who were close to them as they died.

When people learn they are near to death or when someone close to them dies, they are shocked. At first they want to deny it. 'It can't be true!' they say, grasping for a different diagnosis. Then they get angry with God or fate or other people. 'Why did you let this happen to me?' Or at the deceased: 'Why did you have to go and die now?' Some people try and bargain with God in exchange for some additional time whilst others may feel guilty and think that if only they had done something different they might not be terminally ill. Or they blame the doctor or the hospital. They may sink into depression, even deep depression, having lost all hope.

At some point the mood changes from depression to acceptance. The patient or family realises that death is an inevitable part of life. They may think about and discuss the future, as well as meditate on past happiness. It is the beginning of a shift in relationships, simultaneously trying to hang on to life whilst beginning to let life go.

In listening to terminally ill patients, Kübler-Ross observes that many maintain a glimpse of hope through all their suffering. Some people hope for a miracle remission, drug or cure for themselves or for those whom they love. Some hope to discover some meaning in their suffering. Although there are those who vigorously deny the possibility of an afterlife, many hope for and believe in eternal life. All patients seem to retain some small amount of hope and are nourished by it in especially difficult times.

All these reactions are normal. However, if we let ourselves get stuck in the stages of denial, anger or depression, our life will be bleak and we may become physically ill. Eventually we can, and must, accept the fact of death and go onward.

Death and Dying

Care for the dying takes place in different ways in different communities. Some people still have the comfort of dying in the company and care of their families. They are treated with love and respect. Others die lonely and afraid in hospitals or ostracised from their community because of their illness, such as AIDS or leprosy.

The work of Mother Teresa (1910–1997) amongst the dying of Calcutta, India is famous. In 1952 Mother Teresa founded the Nirmal Hriday Home for the Dying in a former Hindu temple in Calcutta. She and her nuns, the Missionaries of Charity, dedicated themselves to the poor and the dying. They see Jesus in everyone they meet and ensure that people die in peace and with dignity. The sisters run homes for the dying in 120 countries world-wide.

Many countries in both the northern and southern hemispheres have hospices that care for the sick and the dying or hospice staff who care for the sick and the dying in their own homes. Hospice employees and volunteers are trained to attend to the needs of both the dying and their family and friends. Dame Cecily Saunders, founder and director of St Christopher's Hospice in London, UK has been an inspiration to hospice workers throughout the world. She says: 'The dying need the community, its help and fellowship....The community need the dying to make it think of eternal issues and to make it listen. We are debtors to those who can make us learn such things as to be gentle and to approach others with true attention and respect.' Cecily Saunders is a Christian but those of other faiths and none share her feelings.

A Jewish perspective is represented by Rabbi Moses ben Maimon who writes: *'Oh, let me ever behold in the afflicted and the suffering only the human being.'*

A Buddhist perspective is represented by Baba Ram Dass: 'To be with a person who is dying, to share consciousness with him, and to help him die consciously is one of the most

*exquisite manifestations of the Bodhisattva role.'*²

The rituals associated with death are closely identified with religion. From the beginning of time, human beings are the only creatures known to bury their dead. Some religions and cultures that believe in reincarnation or the continuing existence of the spirit freed from the limitations of the body burn the body to dispose of it. Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism all practise cremation because these religions teach that the earthly body has no further use after death. Muslims and Jews always bury the body. In Christianity both burial and cremation are common.

Different cultural rituals associated with death and dying do not replace the grief process but help the normal process of grief. Some people are able to talk about death with great ease concentrating on celebrating the life of the person who has died and has gone to rest with family and friends or ancestors who have already died. But others deny the word itself and talk about someone having 'passed on', 'passed away' or 'left us'. Problems can arise if language such as this is used as a denial of the reality of the death. Mourning rituals can help people to come to terms with the reality and acceptance of death.

It is interesting to learn how different cultures use different mourning rituals to help people to grieve. For example, the Yolngu Australian Aborigines who live in north-eastern Arnhem Land, Northern Territory practice an elaborate ritual when someone dies based on ancient rituals modified because of modern hygiene laws and urban influences. The rites of the Yolngu help both the dying and the bereaved. They recognise that death is a part of life and that people have both to face it and to accept it.

Many religions have rituals they observe which have deep meaning to that particular religion.

¹ Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, London Tavistock 1970

² All quotations are taken from Sandol Stoddard, *The Hospice Movement* Vintage Books 1991



Life after death

One thing is certain: we don't know what happens to us when we die. We know what happens to our physical body. But when we believe that we are more than a body, that we have a spiritual identity, then faith and hope lead us to believe that there is life after death. Different faiths have different ways to explain this and differing views concerning an after-life and a future mode of existence will affect the ways in which the bodies of the dead are disposed of.

Considering life after death brings us up sharply against several barriers to understanding what it might be like. Firstly experience, or lack of it. We ourselves have not experienced death so we do not know what it is like. Those we know who have died have not come back to describe their new circumstances. So it is easy to think that death is final.

And yet many people claim to have had 'near death experiences'. People who have been briefly clinically dead express amazingly similar things. Common features include an impression of dazzlingly bright light and of being cared for and loved. Many people who have had loved ones die have felt their presence very near, even heard their voices. Doubtless some of these incidents can be explained or explained away, but not all.

The second barrier is language. How can we describe what we have neither seen nor heard? How can we even imagine existence that is beyond the constraints of time and space? Only through metaphor, the language of poetry, by saying 'it is like...' and by searching for images significantly different than anything we have ever known.

Death is 'going home'. Engraved on the headstone in Kenya of Robert Baden-Powell, the Founder of Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting is a circle with a dot in the centre, the trail sign that means, 'I have gone home'. It was put there in recognition that in death, Baden-Powell had indeed gone home, home to God.

Whatever we may individually believe about life after death, it is good to widen our view and to keep all options open. If death is a stepping-stone to a new and happier life where there is neither pain nor sorrow nor weeping, then it is an unparalleled source of hope.

How do different religions view life after death? Islam teaches that there are two parts to life: the part here on earth and the part in the hereafter. The dividing line between the two is known as death, followed by the Day of Judgement or resurrection. Everyone will die, but on the Day of Judgement people will be sorted out into different categories as stated in the Qur'an: 'Every human being is bound to taste death; but only on the Day of Resurrection will you be requited in full (for what you have done)...' (3:185)

Hinduism believes in the theory of rebirth or reincarnation. The body is mortal but the soul is immortal. The theory of karma teaches that as you sow in this life, you will reap in the next birth. People pay for the wrongs committed and are rewarded for the good things they have done in the previous life.

In Christian teaching, death is viewed as a passageway to eternal life with God, with the assurance of the resurrection of the body on the Day of Judgement. The New Testament speaks of life after death where the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished. Some Christians believe that hell will be a literal place of punishment for those who die without

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repentance, whilst others believe that Jesus Christ assumed this punishment so will come to judge people on the basis of how they treated others in this life.

Buddhism firmly believes in life after death or reincarnation as a result of 'karma'. Karma is understood as being the result of deeds previously done and the destiny that flows from them. Lord Buddha meditated deeply on the issue of transmigration of souls and karma and found the truth that lies in them. 'The doctrine of karma is undeniable,' he said. 'The transmigration of the soul is subject to its karma. We inherit from former existences the evil effects of our evil deeds and the good effects of our good deeds. If that were not so, how could we be different? Like everything in nature, the life of man is subject to the law of

cause and effect. The present reaps what the past has sown, and the future is the product of the present.' Thus this life is merely a temporary state of rest amidst that more permanent state, the continuous motion of the wheel of life.

Judaism also believes in the immortality of the soul. Traditionally Jews look forward to a bodily resurrection of the dead. This will coincide with the arrival of the Messiah, a person invested by God with special powers and functions who will inaugurate a time of justice and peace for the world. At that time God will raise the dead, reward the good and punish the bad. Many today reject the idea of a bodily resurrection but still believe that the soul is immortal.



Celebrations of Light

We have used a picture of a candle for the background reading in this document. It marks pages designed to enlighten the reader. Besides shedding real light in dark places, the candle is also a powerful symbol. Light can signify knowledge. It can signify warmth and love. It can mean guidance. An unexplained bright light may accompany a spiritual experience.

When Peruvian villagers were killed by mudslides, grieving friends lit candles and set them in the mud, a poignant token of light to people buried in darkness. When you light a candle for a cause such as Amnesty International or for a prayer, it really does seem as if you are bringing some light into a dark situation.

Candles or lamps are often used in worship services and celebrations of special festivals. In most religions, Light is one of the names of God and the use of light has many layers of meaning.

Diwali, the Festival of Lights for Hindus, Sikhs and Jains, is celebrated with tiny clay oil lamps (divas) or coloured light bulbs. Diwali means, 'garland of lights' and strings or rows of lights decorate windows and doors in homes, temples and shops. Sparklers and fireworks are also popular. Diwali celebrates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness, heralding the victory of Rama who defeated the demon king Ravana. Diwali celebrates Rama's coronation ceremony. It is also a time to welcome the New Year and to give thanks for the harvest.

There is a Hindu saying: '*How far that candle throws its light, so shines a good deed in a naughty world.*'

Hanukkah is a Jewish festival that commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem and the struggle to regain religious freedom. Over 2,100 years ago, the Jews, led by Judas Maccabaeus, overthrew the Greeks who had conquered Israel and defiled the Temple. There was only enough oil for one day when the Jews re-lit the lamp whose light symbolised the presence of God. However, miraculously it burned for eight days. On each of the eight days of Hanukkah, families retell the story of the struggle and victory of the Maccabees. They light one candle a day on an eight-branched candlestick (with a 'servant candle' from a ninth branch) until all are lit.

Vesak marks the Birth, Enlightenment and Death of the Buddha which falls on the day of the full moon in the month of May. Buddhists celebrate this by lighting clay oil lamps, lanterns of various shapes and sizes and pandals with hundreds of lights. Religious customs are observed.

Eid ul-Fitr is a joyous festival that Muslims celebrate to mark the end of Ramadan. Ramadan takes place during the ninth lunar month when Muslims fast between sunrise and sunset. At Eid, Muslims eat celebratory food for three days, give food to the poor, send gifts and cards and visit friends and family. During Eid, in some countries young children celebrate by lighting traditional candles.

Advent, the four weeks before Christmas, is widely celebrated by Christians by the lighting of candles on an Advent Wreath, a custom that originated in Germany. A wreath, usually a ring of evergreens to signify eternity, has four candles on it and one in the middle. Traditionally the candles are purple, the liturgical colour for Advent (although one may be pink for Gaudete Sunday meaning 'rejoice').

Celebrations of Light

One candle is lit on each of the four Sundays in Advent. On Christmas Day, the white candle in the middle is lit to show that Jesus Christ the Light of the World has come.

In various parts of the world, the Feast of St. Lucia is celebrated on 13 December. Traditionally, the oldest daughter in the family dresses in a long white robe and wears a crown of candles on her head. It is her duty to serve coffee and sweet buns to her parents. St. Lucia's feast day is close to the winter solstice and an old rhyme says, 'Lucia light, Lucia light, shortest day and longest night.'

In the Northern Hemisphere, the winter solstice takes place around 21 December when the sun is farthest from the earth. Historically it is a favourite time of year for a festival of light. Our spirits wish for light when the days are short and for warmth when the climate chills us through. It is a time when many feel depressed and sad. A celebration centred on fire or light helps chase the darkness away. The Christian festival of Christmas takes place at this time. Candles are used to celebrate Christmas in many ways: on Christmas trees, in carol services and in windows as a light for travellers, symbolic of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.

Spring brings more festivals of light. Many Christian churches begin the celebration of Easter and the resurrection of Christ by lighting a real fire at the Easter Vigil along with the Paschal (Easter) candle. From it, individuals light small candles to mark the resurrection. Easter services are held at sunrise in many places.

The solar New Year falls on 13 or 14 April and marks the end of the harvest in Sri Lanka. The first crop of rice is used to cook the traditional milk rice, a symbol of prosperity. All preparations for the dawn of the New Year begin well in advance. Houses are cleaned and decorated, new clothes bought for the family and shopping done for presents for the whole family and friends. Traditional sweets are made ahead of time. On the day itself, at a given auspicious time, all work (especially cooking) stops and people spend time in religious worship and in fun activities. At yet another given auspicious time a few hours later, all work starts again, most importantly the cooking of the milk rice that is eaten by the family. At another given time and facing a given direction, the milk rice is eaten served with the traditional sweets. Usually the head of the family leads the ceremonies with his/her blessings. The day ends with everyone exchanging gifts of money and presents.



Personal lifeline

Purpose

To examine important life events and to assess their significance.

Materials needed

Paper and pens

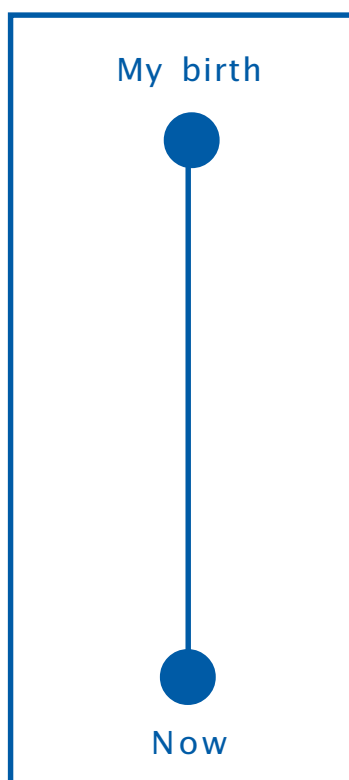
What to do

This exercise is reasonably straightforward, but occasionally there will be someone in a group for whom it evokes painful memories. Be prepared for this. Warn the group of this possibility and ask them to be sensitive to others' feelings. Sharing of your thoughts and views is voluntary.

Ask people to draw a vertical line down the left side of a sheet of paper. Place a dot at the top of the line and label it "my birth." Place a dot at the bottom of the line and label it "now."

Working alone, get participants to reflect on important happenings in their lives and place them on the timeline, e.g. birth of siblings, beginning of school, first awareness of a God, personal achievements, disappointments, accidents, learning specific skills, specific commitments, deaths, pets, first boy friend, first job, graduation, marriage, pregnancy. Make sure they realise it is all right not to mark something they would prefer to keep confidential.

Ask people to share as much or as little as they want to in pairs explaining to their partner whether the event was a positive or a difficult experience for them.





Recognising the joy in life

Purpose

To invite participants to celebrate things that make them happy and bring joy to their lives.

Materials

Paper and pens (optional).

What to do

The following exercises are good for building a positive feeling amongst groups of people who may not have met before or who do not know each other very well.

Joy Through Our Senses

Ask each participant to write the following list on a piece of paper:

- See
- Hear
- Smell
- Touch
- Taste

Ask people to think about what gives them the most joy through each of their five senses. If they could only see one thing or hear one sound etc. what would it be?

Invite people to share what gives them pleasure in groups of three or five.

Afterwards invite responses to the following questions:

How many favourite sights were natural? How many manufactured?

How many sounds were made by the human voice? From the world of nature? Produced by musical instruments?

How many smells were food? Flowers? Human?

How many liked best to touch something human? Manufactured? Natural?

How many favourite tastes were sweet? Spicy? Cold? Hot?

Daily Blessings

Hasidic Jews try to find 100 blessings in a day. When this practice becomes a habit, our perception of life changes. Complaining is replaced by contentment and thankfulness. Ask each participant to find a partner and to share together five blessings of the day.

Joy in Service of Others

Working in groups of three, ask each participant to call to mind one Good Turn that they have carried out recently. Ask each person to speak about what they did and in particular recall how they felt as they carried out the task.

Celebrate the Joy of being Female

The following poem expresses the writer's joy in being a woman. You may like to read it to the group.

Magnificat

*My heart is bubbling over with joy;
With God it is good to be woman.
From now on let all people
Proclaim:
It is a wonderful gift to be.
The one in whom power truly rests
Has lifted us up to praise;
God's goodness shall fall like a shower
On the trusting of every age.
The disregarded have been raised up:
The pompous and powerful shall fall.
God has feasted the empty-bellied,
And the rich have discovered their void.
God has made good the word
Given at the dawn of time.¹*

Working alone, invite each person to list five good things about being a girl/woman. Share the responses with the wider group.

¹Phoebe Willets in *Celebrating Women* ed. Hannah Ward, Jennifer Wild & Janet Morley SPCK 1995



Struggles and suffering

Purpose

To encourage people to think about adversity and how they deal with difficult situations in life.

Materials

Paper, pencils, paints

What to do

Working with a partner, discuss as much or as little as you want to of the following questions:

What are the most difficult situations that you have faced in your life?

Why were they so hard?

Who or what helped you to get through them?

What did you learn about yourself?

What did you learn about other people?

Draw a picture to represent something of what you have discussed.

Check out how everyone is feeling before they leave this session.



Discussion about death and dying

Purpose

To encourage people to explore different cultural and religious attitudes to death.

Materials needed

Pen and paper (optional).

What to do

Explain to the group that the discussion topic is about attitudes to death. Acknowledge that some people may find this too difficult, especially if someone close to them has died. Encourage people to participate but make it clear that they can opt out if they wish. As a group leader, be prepared for the possibility of strong emotions being expressed.

Different cultural rituals around death are closely identified with religion. Some religions believe in reincarnation. Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism all practice cremation because they teach that the earthly body has no more use. Muslims and Jews usually bury the body. Christians both bury and cremate the body.

Divide participants into groups of three in order to discuss the following questions.

- How do people in your community react to people who are dying?
- How do they dispose of their dead?
- Do you know of other cultures or religions that view death differently to your own?
- Invite comments from the whole group on anything that they have discussed.
- Check out how everyone is feeling before they leave this session.



Celebrations!

Purpose

To think how people celebrate different events

Materials

None

What to do

Divide participants into groups of four. Invite each person to tell the story of a celebration that they have taken part in during the last year. It may be a family celebration, a national or

religious celebration or a personal celebration. What did they do? How did they celebrate? Do people celebrate the same event in different ways?

As a group, brainstorm the different occasions that you celebrate together. Which celebrations do people enjoy best? What is the next thing to celebrate together? Start planning for it now!



Making candles and other lights

CAUTION! Wax is highly flammable. Always put the wax to be melted in the top of a double boiler over hot water, or in a can in a pan of hot water. Never melt wax in a pan directly on a stove burner nor on an open fire.

Most wax melts between 43°C (110°F) and 93°C (200°F). Do not let it exceed that temperature. Have sand or baking soda on hand to extinguish a fire should one occur. Do not use water on a wax fire.

Purpose

To enjoy making candles together.

Materials needed

Old candle stubs, paraffin wax, bees wax, stearic acid granules, candle colouring, wicking, pencils, moulds, sand, dried leaves, ferns, flowers, clay, tins, access to an oven. (Find the equivalent in your country).

What to do

Candles are easy to make. You need some kind of wax to melt: old candle stubs, paraffin wax used to seal jam jars, commercial candle-making wax, bees' wax. Stearic acid granules will increase the candles' burning time and strengthen the colour. Candle colouring can be bought or made from plants. Melted wax crayons can be used instead for colour although the quality is not always consistent.

You will also need wicking made from cotton yarn that has been coated with a thin layer of wax. You can make your own wicks by dipping cotton yarn or string in melted wax.

General directions for melting wax
Place pieces of wax or old candle stubs in a tin can in a pan of hot water on a stove. Add crayon stubs for colour if you wish. Keep water simmering and watch carefully as wax melts. When it has all melted, turn off the heat. Let cool for a few minutes.

Hand-dipped candles

1. Melt wax as directed above.
2. Tie wicking as long as the height of your melting tin to a pencil or similar object. Prepare several of these.
3. Holding onto the pencil, dip wick into melted wax, pull out and wait for it to set. (You can hang it on a rack). Dip again and again.
4. Continue until candle is as thick as you wish. Hang for about an hour in order for the wax to harden completely.

Sand candles

You can make sand candles on a sandy beach as long as you have access to a means of melting the wax. Otherwise use a large container half full of sand.

1. Make hollow shapes in the sand e.g. scoop out sand with the shape of your choice such as a tea cup, tumbler, handmade free form, half globe with four finger spaces for legs.
2. Hold a wick tied to a pencil or stick in each hollow. Pour in melted wax, keeping the wick carefully in place in the centre. Untie the wick.
3. When the wax has set firmly, remove carefully. The sand will stick to the outside. Remove any loose sand.



Making candles and other lights

Moulded candles

You can use almost any kind of container as a mould. Wicks can be inserted after the candle is almost hard by making a hole with a heated wire or pick. Then insert a length of wicking.

Strengthen your wicking by dipping it into melted wax as a coating. Let it harden as straight as possible.

For easier release of candles, spray the mould slightly with oil or a silicone product made for the purpose that is available from hobby/activity stores.

Naturally decorated candles

A beautiful candle can be made using dried leaves, ferns or flowers. These are especially effective on candles at least 5 cm in diameter, which you can make yourself or purchase.

1. Press small leaves or flowers. For faster drying, press with a warm iron between pieces of brown wrapping paper.
2. Brush a thin layer of cooled, melted wax on the candle where you want to place the dried plant material.
3. Press leaves, flowers or ferns on the melted wax areas and brush a thin layer of melted wax on top of them. Let set and repeat if necessary to make them stick to the candle.

Floating candles

Shallow candles floating with flowers in a wide, low container are very beautiful. Use fluted tart tins with sloping sides for a mould. Small candles can be made in egg cartons.

Clay oil lamps

Use self-hardening clay or baker's clay to fashion small boat-shaped oil lamps. Place a wick in cooking oil in the lamp. These look lovely when lit and floating on water.

Make baker's clay by mixing two parts flour and one part each of table salt and water. Knead for about two minutes and then make into a hollowed out boat shape. Place on aluminium foil on a clean baking tray. Prick with a fork in a couple of thicker areas. Bake in a low oven (140°C, 275°F, Gas mark 1) until hard and light brown in colour. The length of time depends on the size of the lamp.

Tin can lights

Use shallow tins (such as those used to can tuna) and old candle stubs to make simple, practical, effective, inexpensive and safe lights. Partially fill the tins with sand and place candle stub in the middle. You can make lovely candlelight patterns by arranging a number of candle tins in designs or rows.