

DISCOVERING THE SPIRITUAL

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Let me make it clear from the beginning that in no way are we in the Scout Association suggesting that our approach to Spiritual Development in the blueprint for all, nor are we suggesting that we have finalised all the details. However, it seemed right to accept this opportunity to share our thinking so far for two reasons -

first, that others might be stimulated to do their own thinking on the subject whether or not they go down the same or similar roads, and

secondly, because our thinking might be stimulated, challenged, clarified and strengthened by the dialogue that may arise later this morning.

In other words, what I have to say is only the beginning, the beginning of a process which I believe to have been dormant in Scouting, or nearly so, and to its detriment for much of its life.

To start at the very beginning - it is a fact of history that before Baden-Powell started Scouting he took advice from Sir William Smith who had established in Glasgow the Church-centred, Christ-orientated Boys' Brigade and made a superb job of it. But Smith encouraged B-P to start his movement; and B-P set his principles down - Scouting requires in its promise a belief in God; the policy of the movement is that every member should be encouraged to follow the practice of his - or her - particular faith and the aim of the whole thing is the physical, mental and spiritual development of its members through a progressive and enjoyable training programme. And for a long time the spiritual was indentedified, rightly or wrongly - and I think wrongly, with the practice of Christianity with the activity of the Church, primarily the Anglican Church, and couched in terms of prayers and parades and formal recognition of God. Not that B-P saw it that way, or if he did, he reached beyond it at the end of his

days, for when he died, his gravestone was raised in St John's Churchyard, Nyeri Kenya and it was engraved with the Fleur-de-lys, the trefoil, his name and the tracking sign of a dot surrounded by a circle, the symbol for the message "I have gone home". And whether he realised it or not, he set the pattern for the future in the movement: God and tracking in one symbol.

Of course the Scouting idea spread with an amazing rapidity across the world and it wasn't very long before the movement was welcoming Jews and Sikhs and lots of Hindus and Moslems, Buddhists, even Animists into its fellowship, all able, at one level or another, to accept a belief in God within the limitation of their understanding whether that understanding was limited by age or opportunity, by heredity or environment, by tribe or colour. And that welcome was perfectly right and proper, still is for that matter, because the Movement is not religious, it is God-centred or it ought to be.

Just yesterday someone at Scottish Headquarters enclosed in my regular mail a cutting from a Canadian Scout paper which set out with clarity the problem when leaders are faced with a third of the Aim which appears to be the province of the padre which, as often as not, they haven't got. The article made the point that the spiritual part of Scouting got left aside, uncared-for, because we got it mixed up with religion.

Spiritual development, you see, is something wider than narrow religion, any religion. The tracking sign is a symbol that God is out in his world and it is there that He is to be found. Not that church or chapel, temple or mosque, synagogue or monastery have not a place; but spirituality is about God, about being aware of Him - not religion. So Scouting is not Christian, nor Muslim, nor Jewish, nor Mormon nor Sikh. Scouting doesn't set out to make little Christians nor any other of the assortment of divisions humanity has made of the one God, creator of all; instead, it tries to put God at the centre and open the eyes of the young people involved, to His glory and His power, His majesty and His love, through the ordinary activity of its training programme - God and the tracking sign.

The encouragement of Spiritual Development through the ordinary programme, week by week, is identified under five headings or principles,

which go something like this:

- First, the development of an inner discipline and training;
- Second, the development of the ability to be involved in corporate activities;
- Third, the development of an understanding of - and care for - the world about us;
- Fourth, the development of a desire to help create a more tolerant society; and
- Fifth, the discovery of the need for prayer and worship, both personal and shared.

Discipline
Brotherhood
Conservation
Tolerance
and Worship.

Discipline and training are about exploring and controlling the potential of every young person, opening up the possibilities locked within them by stretching their bodies and minds, challenging their ethics, by a whole range of training, and, at the same time, helping them set the limits and the framework within which their individual potential can best be exploited for good.

So, it is about freedom and self-control. It is about right and wrong and the response to each. It's about little things like tidiness, neatness, promptness - the point where obedience is important; where hygiene is essential; where temperance is vital. It is about becoming a whole person: complete, rounded, shaped with care on the potter's wheel of youth.

So is learning to work as a team: being able to do things together - not just play, but work, in situations where they depend on each other; where their life itself depends on a colleague - a fellow-member.

A miner once told me that

"You may not like a fellow miner;
You may not agree with his views;
But you will never hate or harm him
because one day your life may depend on him."

Part of the growing up of young people must contain that element of the brotherhood of all humanity, the oneness of all creation where the value of the next person lies in the fact that your life could depend on him. Maybe the activity that teaches this is not so dramatic or threatening, but the reality has to be there. We need each other.

And that is spiritual development.

So is learning to understand nature and the need to care for it. Of course, that's obvious. Nature is necessary; trees bring rain and, at the same time, protect the earth from erosion; trees exchange the atmosphere with us; mountains shelter glens and rivers; hedges shelter fields and crops, worms aeriate the soil - break it down - freshen it; birds and beasts are part of the plan, the delicate structure, that is nature. And humanity itself is part of that structure - of course you know this - but because of human carelessness and lack of thought and unconcern, one species of plant or bird, insect or beast, becomes extinct in our world every day of the year and, unless we do something to stop it, the estimates are that by the year 2,000 one species of nature's frame will simply disappear every hour. Which makes it only a matter of time before homo sapiens itself will simply disappear.

Now to share that warning;

(Amid the wonder of a tiny leaf;
at the industry of the ant;
at the miracle of the bumble-bee)

that kind of need for care;
that demand for understanding;
that cry for action

with those who grow to become the scientists and naturalists, the politicians and industrialists, well, in my book, that is underlining the preciousness of nature and ourselves are part of it.

And that is spiritual development.

So is trying to create a more tolerant society. And that doesn't start with being kind to people who have a different colour, or customs,

or creed. It starts with coping with our family and friends under pressure or close confinement. It is about keeping one's temper or controlling it at least. It's about coping with frustration and apathy. It's about forgiving seventy times seven and then it's about accepting others as we ourselves would wish to be accepted. Tolerance is about being patient and long-suffering, about being understanding, about being colour-blind and class-unconscious.

And that is spiritual development.

Yet all these things happen in the course of normal training activities. They only need to be underlined, emphasised now and again, an activity ended instead of going on to another right away. To take a pause and examine what has been learned by the activity. Not every time, but just enough to make quite sure that as they go, the young people are growing aware of themselves, of others, of their world, of the pressures and strains that so often divide.

For that awareness is spiritual development.

And then, in the wonder of their possibility; in the wonder of humanity; in the wonder of nature; in the wonder of the variety of creation - it becomes possible to direct their minds to a power beyond us all, that started it all, shaped it all, sustains it all, to which and to whom we give the title "GOD" and upon which and upon whom we ultimately depend for our ability to live to the full.

That may be the point at which some young Scout shows wonder at the beauty of a butterfly, the majesty of a mountain, or the delicacy of a dawn. Or, it may be the point of exhaustion in the physical experience or the silence of fellowship in the crackling of a camp-fire.

And there's the crucial point of all this. For it is at that moment, that point of need, or emotion or wonder, that the right word or action or silence, is essential.

It is not a religious experience, though it may be the door to one. It is a spiritual experience, a kind of maturing, awakening.

And it cannot, and must not be, rushed or forced.

That is why I'm not in favour of too many church parades or just a nod of prayer at the end of a meeting, though both these have their place, may have their place. It is also why spiritual development is a far wider context than religious teaching. There is a place for religious teaching both in the church, or temple, or synagogue or whatever, and in the home - but not in Scouting.

And, while it is perfectly right and proper for a priest to invite Roman Catholic Scouts to Mass or for a minister to hold a Carol Service for Christians, it is not right and proper for a Scout worship time (a "Scout's Own" it's called) to be strongly Christian or to be strongly any other religion. It has to be God-centred, opening up young minds and hearts to a Creator God who gave to the peak of His creation - the ability to love and leading them in wonder to the glory of that love.

As a Chaplain facing thousands of Scouts of a when of different faiths, I am perfectly prepared to say that "as a Christian" I believe this or that, but not with the expectation that they ought to believe it if they are not Christian, nor to belittle their faith because they don't.

My job is to do what Jesus did - point each in his or her own way towards the God and Father of all.

That's my duty, our duty to God we promise to give. And that, and all the other principles which we see in "Spiritual Development" has the added benefit of bridging the religious divides we set between us, bringing the potential for unity and brotherhood closer than ever.

And that, too, is "Spiritual Development."

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