

What is Faith?

"You can be strong in your faith, but understand there are people of other faiths. Help others be strong in their faith"

Sri Ramakrishna, Hindu sage

Note: When discussing faith issues at any time, especially in a group of people representing more than one faith tradition, encourage people to clarify their own background.

At the WAGGGS 21st World Conference in 1972, it was determined that the Promise of each Association must express a spiritual dimension as detailed below:

'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.'

The philosophy of the Girl Guides of Canada-Guides du Canada is expressed in the Promise and Law, which include the following Fundamental Principles:

- a search for a higher spiritual being
- commitment to country or community
- the principle of service.

In the Canadian Promise, we express this spiritual dimension as follows:

'I promise to do my best,
To be true to myself, my God/faitth and Canada.'

Each individual who makes the Promise has the responsibility to explore and develop her own spirituality.

What is Faith?

Life has been described as being a spiritual journey. Some people make that journey within the context of various faith communities, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Others profess a belief in a Devine Being yet do not identify themselves with a formal faith system.

Many people want to have faith in something or someone who typifies meaning in life and who brings them hope and peace. The materialism of today's world leaves them feeling empty and barren. They are yearning for a spiritual sense of belonging, for faith in something beyond themselves.

Faith in a higher force, no matter how it is defined, has given people of all cultures strength to endure incredible hardships and hope against seemingly impossible odds. The stories of people of faith are inspirational. Many have changed the course of history and enriched the lives of millions. They are ordinary people doing extraordinary deeds.

Language about God

When discussing faith, Christians, Jews and Muslims will use the word God to define the higher force they believe in. Hindus however don't have a word for God. For Hindus, God is symbolized by the monosyllable AUM. In Hinduism, God is all powerful, omnipresent and omniscient, and within Hinduism, there are gods and goddesses. Of the five major world religions, Buddhism does not have a doctrine of God.

If you belong to one of the major world religions, you will probably cherish a definition of a higher force from within its traditions. For example, Islam, Judaism and Christianity all teach that there is only one God who is the creator of everything, eternal, all-powerful and all-knowing. For followers of these religions, God is holy and perfect, just and merciful. And because of who God is, each follower is taught how to behave within the ethical framework of their religion. But teaching is overlain with an individual understanding of God that is bound up with an individual's life experience.

Who is God?

The idea of god is the most important and yet the most questioned of religious beliefs. Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity all claim to reveal something of who God is through their holy books or scriptures, through their prophets and teachers and through the traditions and experience of their faith. For followers of these religions, God is real and active, a powerful force for good that enables women and men, girls and boys to reach their full potential as human beings. Yet the idea of God remains elusive and frequently challenged.

For some people, the word God is laden with autocratic authority. God is experienced as exclusively masculine with no feminine attributes. For some, God is judgmental and punishing, whilst for others God is loving and forgiving. Some people cannot believe in something that cannot be explained whilst others are happy to believe in the mystery of the divine.

The concept of a deity is older than recorded history. It is the strongest component of oral tradition in many cultures. Within the word "God" are many ideas that are basic to human thought.

Discussing Spirituality and Faith

Many leaders are looking for new ways of helping young people grow spiritually. In today's multicultural and ever-changing society, this is no easy task. Without proper guidance some leaders may impose moral and religious attitudes on young people.

Spirituality underlies both WAGGGS' call to action and the contribution of its members through friendship to world peace and understanding. Service and friendship are important elements of a spiritual dimension to life recognized not only by all the major world religions but also by people of good intent who do not profess a faith.