



Who I am as a Woman in Today's World?

Do you know what your great-grandmother or great-great-grandmother looked like? Do you know what her life was like? She probably expected to get married, have children and spend the rest of her life looking after a household, perhaps her own, perhaps as part of an extended family. She may never have expected to move far from her own town or village.

On the other hand, perhaps she may have had other ambitions. During the last part of the 19th and throughout the 20th century, women (and some men) were fighting for the right of women to vote and to hold public office. As nations overthrew autocracies or colonial powers, women won many of the rights men gained and began to have a small share in their government's decision-making process. Often the idea of gender and economic equality is a part of a vision of a free nation.

Education

Education is the key that unlocks many doors. Throughout the twentieth century, education became more accessible to girls who yearned for training in every profession and trade. After long and persistent struggles, women in some countries succeeded in being admitted on an equal footing to most faculties of higher education. In other countries, it is possible but still difficult. Lack of money is often a deterrent. Even so, education and ability are no guarantees of employment.

Discrimination continues against women in the workplace, especially for the top jobs and sexual harassment is common even where legally forbidden. In some countries, even at primary school level, males still have more educational opportunities than girls and girls and young women in several countries are still barred from secondary and technical education.

Religion

Traditionally in the practices of most religions, women were subordinate to men in every way: in formal worship ceremonies, at home, in sexual relationships, in decision-making. But as women's role in society generally expanded and developed, some religious teachers looked more closely at the origins of their religion. They discovered that although many sacred texts discriminate against women, the true spirit of most religions is the reverse. Most faiths expect all people, men and women, to be treated justly and equally. Women are gradually taking a fuller part in the rites and ceremonies of their own religions. In some, they are accepted as leaders of their faith communities, as priests or rabbis, something almost unheard of half a century ago.

Today, there is a small but widespread women's movement working for change in the lives of women of different cultures who share many of the world's major faiths. Women who embrace Christianity, Judaism and Islam are trying to speak about their faith in a way that is relevant to women in the 21st century. For example, a prominent Muslim academic, Boutheina Cheriet said, *'There is an intrinsic interest in women in the Islamic legacy. It started with the first Islamic discourses, that is, the Koran, the Hadith and the Sunna – the behaviour of the prophet himself. You cannot find any chapter in Islamic history that has not brought up the question of women in one way or another – in literature, in politics, in pleasure, in art, what have you.'*

In Pakistan, some Muslim men and women are trying to eliminate local customs, developed over the centuries, that prevent women from taking their full place in religious practices. Begum Raa'na Liaquat Ali Khan has been a great support for the All Pakistan Women's

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Association, which has worked diligently for the rights of women while ensuring that they are consistent with Islamic beliefs.

Dorothy Sayers, an English Christian, wrote frankly about the discrepancy she had observed throughout her life between what the Gospels said about Jesus' attitude towards women and the Church's attitude through the ages. 'Perhaps,' she writes, 'it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this man – there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronised; who never made arch jokes about them, who praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious. There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything 'funny' about women's nature.'²³

The paradoxes of life

We live in a time of paradox. Our knowledge of the world and its peoples is immediately available through communication technologies that we know what is going on throughout the world. We know how wonderful life is for some and how terrible life is for others. We can witness the horrible effects of sexism and racism and their toll on the human spirit. We perpetuate centuries-old enmities and feuds. There is always an abundance of armaments that fuel old wars and begin new ones.

There is more than enough food produced in the world to feed everybody, but millions go to bed hungry every night. Everywhere greed

abounds, making the rich richer and the poor poorer. Women and children always seem to suffer the most.

HIV/AIDS is on the increase. Countries in the developing world bear the brunt of the epidemic where more women than men are becoming infected and where medicines are both scarce and expensive.

In the Far East, just as women were apparently able to leave their homes to play a larger part in society, the last part of the 20th century has seen hundreds of thousands caught in a new trap. Women have become part the service labour market. In the countries of the South, wealthy industrialists exploit women's need to earn money for their family. They make them work long hours for little pay in very poor working conditions. There is little to nourish the spirit in this sort of life.

The world is so wealthy that nobody should be really poor but extreme poverty makes families do desperate things. Child labour, child prostitution and child slavery are common. For girls and women caught up in these industries, the advances of the 20th century mean nothing.

This is where we stand as women at the beginning of the 21st century. Although traditionalists oppose women claiming their just place in society, more and more people refuse to accept that exploitation is inevitable. International movements such as the Jubilee 2000 campaign that calls for the cancellation of Third World debt bear witness to the desire for equal sharing of the resources of the world. All over the world, women have banded together to raise women's consciousness. Once consciousness is raised, there is no turning back.

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



Who I am?

One of the surprising things about life is how little we sometimes know about ourselves. *'Did I really say that?'* she asks herself. *'That didn't seem like me. Who am I anyhow?'* Even the most self-assured person can be taken aback when she reacts differently than expected.

This needs thought. Who are you in the eyes of people you know? There are many answers to this question: daughter, wife, lover, friend, neighbour, employee, boss, teacher, the woman who travels to work on the bus, the woman who walks quickly, the woman who looks away when looked at, the woman who listens to people's troubles, cook, gardener, driver, swimmer, skier, comforter, story-teller, singer, artist, senior executive, company director. The list goes on and on.

These descriptions describe relationships, talents, skills, knowledge, jobs, and attributes. Although they say something, they are not totally satisfying. Each of us feels as if we are much more than the sum of our relationships to other people and the things that we do.

Who am I? I am unique. Physically, genetically, intellectually and spiritually I am different from everyone else. And if I look at myself in appreciation and acceptance of the talents and gifts that I have, hopefully I will like what I see. I will like me.

This is not to say that I will like everything I do or say. We all fall short of the best that we are capable of being or doing. At times we fail miserably. What is important is to learn from our mistakes. Refusing to learn and being content to stagnate rather than grow into maturity, shows a lack of acceptance of who we are. We have to be convinced that each of us is an individual of value.

Those who respect others, friends and strangers alike, acknowledge by their actions their belief in the worth of all human beings. As soon as we say this, we have to face the fact that there are many people who act in ways that are contrary to everything we hold dear. How can we respect drug dealers, murderers, thieves, pimps, and those people whose lives centre around being able to control other people? Surely there is no way that we can condone such behaviour.

And yet, many people believe deeply that each person is precious in the sight of God. Or that behind the most offensive behaviour is someone who shares our humanity. Although it is a sobering and sometimes distressing thought, it is an idea that is filled with hope.

Wherever we live in the world we are part of a community. Indeed we are part of many communities: our immediate and extended family, our neighbourhood, village, city, nation and ultimately the whole human family. Our faith communities and those communities we belong to through work and leisure activities such as WAGGGS also influence us. Each of us is of intrinsic worth and a valuable member of our various communities where we learn to share with others and to co-operate with them.

Who on earth am I? We can be certain of one thing. As a member of the global family, we have much to give and much to receive. Life is indeed worth living.



What others have said

'I doubt that there will ever be a genuinely secular society in Africa. For the African the spiritual realm has an abiding reality, and belief in the supernatural – in a God – is something we Africans appear to take in with our mother's milk.'

Desmond Tutu in *The Wisdom of Desmond Tutu* compiled by Michael Battle Lion, Oxford 1998

'All too commonly, some things are thought of as spiritual while others are excluded. Is science spiritual? Is being a mother or father spiritual? Are dogs spiritual? Is the body spiritual? Is the mind spiritual? Is childbirth? Is eating? Is painting, or playing music, or taking a walk, or looking at a flower? Is breathing spiritual, or climbing a mountain? Obviously, it all depends on how you encounter it, how you hold it in awareness.'

Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go There You Are* (publisher and date unknown)

'It is not permissible to oppress women, children, old people, the sick or the wounded. Women's honour and chastity are to be respected under all circumstances. The hungry person must be fed, the naked clothed and the wounded or diseased treated medically irrespective of whether they belong to the Islamic community or are from among its enemies.'

World Assembly of Muslim Youth, Saudi Arabia (date unknown)

'What then is a womanist? Her origins are in the black folk expression 'You acting womanish,' meaning, according to Alice Walker, 'wanting to know more and in greater depth than is good for one...outrageous, audacious, courageous and wilful behaviour.' A womanist is also 'responsible, in charge, serious.'

Delores S. Williams, 'Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices' in *Weaving the Vision: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* edited by Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, San Francisco Harper & Row 1989

*'Triumph be to True religion,
Triumph be to noble deeds.
Triumph be to humanitarianism,
Triumph be to all people.
None will remain backward,
Love and brotherhood would be there.
Be related to country and religion.
Let us maintain company of the truth
We shall remove all sufferings,
We together shall enjoy happiness.
We together shall sing the glory of God
And spread the fame of the saints.'*

Hamara Solah Geet The Bharat Scouts and Guides, New Delhi 1996

'Beckoning God, you invite us to journey with you, stepping out in faith to encounter we know not what. Give us the courage to follow where you call. Give us the generosity to greet others on the road and to welcome the stranger in our midst. We pray this in the name of God, Source of all being, Eternal Word and Holy Spirit. Amen.'

Nikki Arthy Guildford, UK 1999



What is spirituality?

It is easy to define the material world: what we can touch, see, hear, smell and taste. These are the material aspects of life; concrete, measurable, solid and easily described.

Defining spirituality and things spiritual is much more complex. The root of the word itself is interesting. The English word and equivalents in other romance languages are derived from the Latin 'spiritus', a word meaning breath or wind. Similarly, the Greek word 'pneuma' means breath, wind and spirit. The Arabic 'ruh' means spirit, and the Hebrew 'rwach' adds to the ideas of creation. Many other languages embrace breath, wind, spirit, soul: words that express creative activity.

Wind is invisible. We know it only by its effects. It can be incredibly, frighteningly powerful.

Breath is invisible. When we drew our first breath, independent of our mother's body, a new life was born. When we draw our last breath, a mirror held to our mouth shows no mist. We are dead, at least to this life.

Spirit, our sense of self, is invisible. Our body is very obvious: skin, muscle, organs, bones, liquid and other tangible components. But spirit or soul is the very essence of our persona, who we are. It is what defines us as unique individuals. It is our inner self, our real self.

There is little doubt that from the beginning of human existence, people felt themselves to be part of something greater than themselves. The miracles of birth, the wonders of growth, the mysteries of death, the interrelationships of nature and the tragedies and suffering they experienced filled them with awe. They began to search for the meaning and purpose of life. Their elemental questions

are ours. Why are we here? What should we do? Is there a grand cosmic design? If there is, how do our relationships fit into it? Are we truly free? What are the implications of that? The search and the answers we find underlie our spirituality.

In some societies, spirituality is closely tied to family and community, whilst in others the link is less obvious. Spirituality is expressed through moral principles and behaviour; relationships and communal ceremonies that are handed down from generation to generation. They give a strengthening sense of identity.

Our spiritual growth is stunted if cultivated in isolation. We are all connected and mutually responsible for each other's well-being. Each person in the world has value and purpose. The truly spiritual person does not withdraw from the world but plunges into it and brings hope, joy and reconciliation to all she encounters.

As people grow up, they make their own decisions about their spiritual values. These may be affected by peer pressure, either positively or negatively. Within Girl Guiding/ Girl Scouting, there are many opportunities for girls and young women to develop or to deepen their spiritual awareness and to express their spiritual beliefs through action. For example, the way we act, the way we speak and the way we deal with people should all be consistent with our spiritual beliefs and values. Our body language reflects our inner attitudes.

In times of suffering and anguish, we may feel betrayed, angry and spiritually dead. Yet it is our spiritual life that brings us through such times, giving us strength to face pain, to ask for help, to hold on to our faith, however fragile it seems.

What is spirituality?

Our search for meaning in life with all its ups and downs and contradictions is a spiritual journey towards a goal. Our vision of the goal will differ and, if it grows faint, we have many ways of rekindling it. Music, literature, painting, quiet reflection, conversation with a friend, doing an act of kindness, religious observance and care for others and ourselves can all give us a new perspective.

Many people chose to make that spiritual journey within the context of a faith community. They find strength, guidance and companionship within one of the great religions of the world such as Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam or Buddhism. For them, religion and spirituality are intertwined.

Their spirituality is supported by communal worship and celebration and by the moral and ethical framework promoted by their particular faith community. Their concept or understanding of God or gods is expressed through language and images familiar to each religion.

For others, their spiritual journey does not include involvement in formal religious practices. The natural environment can provide them with an understanding of the link between spirit/soul and life and the purpose of life. Yet they would still emphasise and celebrate the importance of the spiritual aspect of life.



The reason for my name

Purpose

To enable introductions and make people feel more relaxed in the group environment.

Materials

None

What to do

Divide participants into groups of 3 to 5. Invite them to tell each other their names, why they were given them and what they know about them. Even good friends often don't know this about each other and there are amusing or touching stories told. Ask each small group to share unusual stories with the whole group.

Note for leaders:

Ice-breakers are often used at the beginning of training sessions. They have several purposes.

- They help participants to feel comfortable being part of a larger group.
- They allow the trainer to learn something about each individual.
- They provide an opportunity for general introductions to each other.
- They engage everyone in a relaxed activity that is fun.
- They can help participants to feel good about themselves.

THE MOST IMPORTANT ICE-BREAKER IS THE TRAINER OR GROUP LEADER

The attitude of the leader towards the participants is the most important factor in fostering self-esteem and encouraging learning. Take every opportunity from the moment the participants arrive to make them feel welcome and at ease.

Find out and use people's names. Pay attention to what they are saying. Be concerned about their physical comfort. Remember that each person is unique, and accept what she has to offer. Seek out and respect her ideas and opinions.



All about me

Purpose

To encourage people to think about themselves and to share this information with others.

Materials needed

Pens, paper, list of questions.

What to do

Give everyone the list of questions entitled About Me. Ask people to complete the questions and then to share what they wrote with two others.

You may wish to discuss how people felt when they considered some of the questions. Did they learn something new about themselves? Were they reluctant to write down their good points? What was easiest or hardest to share? What made them feel good about themselves?

About me

- My name
- My mother's name/father's name
- Where I live
- Who I live with
- Where I lived when I was a child
- Where I work: at home, in an office, at school etc.
- What I do there
- My favourite place to be
- What I enjoy doing in my free time
- What I like doing using my hands
- What I like doing using my brain
- What I like doing using my whole body
- What I like best about being in Girl Guiding/ Girl Scouting
- A person who has had a great influence on me
- Why I came today
- A book I have enjoyed
- A film I have enjoyed
- My favourite kind of music
- The colour that looks best on me
- The most beautiful place I've seen



24 hours in my life

Purpose

To encourage participants to think about how they spend their time.

Materials needed

Circles, paper, pens

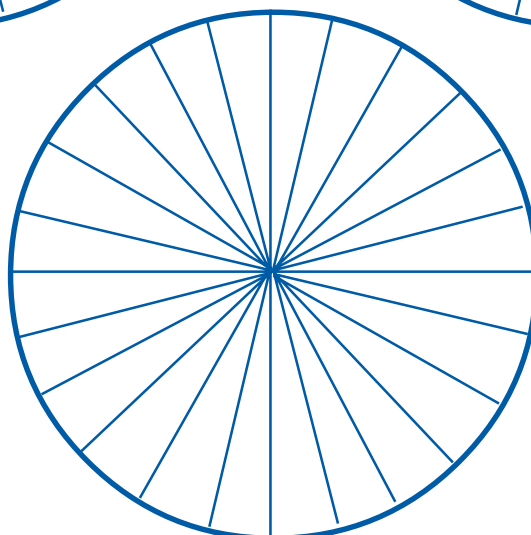
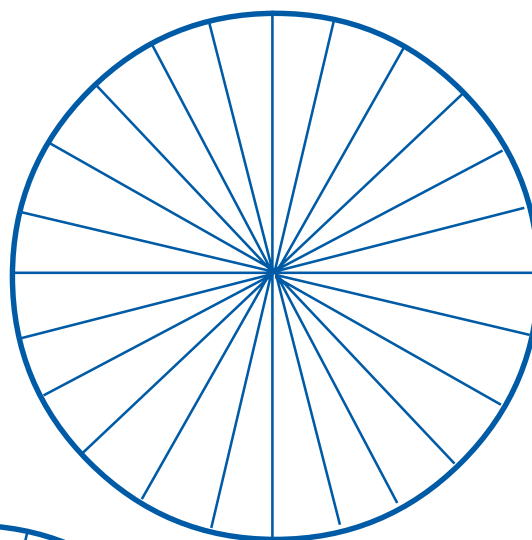
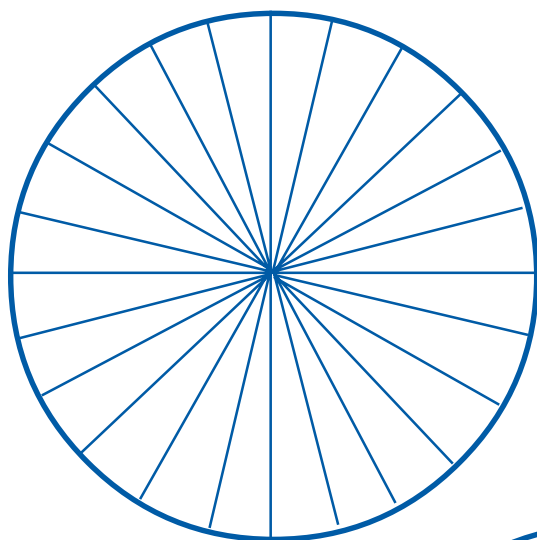
What to do

Invite people to think about their average day. How much time do they spend sleeping, working for pay, doing housework, caring for children, fetching water or fire-wood, caring

for an elderly person, playing, helping others, reading, sewing, gardening, playing sports, walking, driving, alone just thinking, praying or meditating?

Ask people to draw three large circles and to divide the circles in 24 segments. One circle represents 24 hours of a typical day in the week and another 24 hours of a typical day at a weekend. Ask people to fill in their personal activity clock for each day.

The third circle is the dream clock. Get people to fill it in to represent their dream day.





This is who I am ... or is it?

Purpose

To invite participants to think about who they really are

Materials needed

Paper and pens

What to do

As a woman, we have to fulfil many roles in life: daughter, sister, wife, girl friend, mother, grandmother, employee/employer, friend, neighbour. As we carry out each role, different people see us in different ways.

Working alone, invite participants to write out a list of 10 words or 5 phrases that they would use to describe themselves. These might describe roles, tasks or qualities. For example: daughter, vegetable gardener, lawyer, brown eyes, sociable, good dancer.

In small groups, get participants to discuss the following:

If you were introducing yourself to a stranger, which 5 words would you use to describe yourself?

Put the top three you think your mother/father (if applicable) would think of. Check it out!

Put the top three you think your best friend would think of. Check it out!

Put the top three you think your daughter/son (if applicable) would think of. Check it out!

Put the top three you think your boss/employee would think of. Check it out!

Put the top three words you think your husband/boy friend/partner (if applicable) would think of. Check it out!

A Group Activity

On individual pieces of paper, using different colours for each set and leaving lots of white space:

Print about 20 human characteristics or traits, e.g., patient, perfectionist, calm, good-natured, happy, gracious, fair, good-tempered, witty, grumpy etc.

Print about 20 tasks, e.g., cook, scrub floors, look after garden, mend clothing, shop for groceries, drive children, pay bills, write letters, look after parents, chair a meeting, etc. Print about 20 paid occupations, e.g. school teacher, office manager, shop assistant, factory worker, computer programmer, health care worker, chef, child care worker, servant, engineer, musician, director, lawyer, politician etc.

Post these papers around the room on the wall. Ask participants to walk around and read them, then put their initials beside those that apply to them. Discuss. Which described most people? Were any categories not initialled?



The lives of several generations

Purpose

For participants to compare their life with those of their mother and grandmother when they were the same age.

Materials needed

The chart, pens

What to do

Invite participants to complete this chart to the best of their knowledge and then to discuss in small groups their findings. Are they surprised by anything? Have they discovered anything that they did not know?

EXPERIENCE	ME	MOTHER	GRANDMOTHER
Years of education			
Number of times changed home			
Number of times changed countries			
Age at first marriage			
Number of children			
Paid employment			
Unpaid employment			
Kind of stove used for cooking			
Access to money			
Kind and size of home			
Number of servants			
Access to books			
Religion			
Membership of Organizations			
Vacation time			
Recreational Activities			
Special Skills			
Serious illnesses			
Usual method of transportation			
Favourite memory			
Any other interesting points <i>(please list)</i>			

What it means to be human



My own spiritual journey

Purpose

To encourage reflection on our spiritual journey

Materials needed

Statements

What to do

Invite participants to reflect on their personal spiritual journey by discussing the following questions with a partner. It is important that leaders stress that there are no right or wrong

answers and that participants should only discuss as much or as little as they feel comfortable to share.

- How do you describe the meaning of life?
- How do you describe your faith or spiritual life?
- When and how did you learn about God or religion? e.g. through family, faith community, school, TV.
- Is your faith the same as when you were a child? What differences are there?



Being a woman in the 21st Century

Purpose

To encourage people to think about whether the role of women has changed in their country in the last 50 years.

Materials needed

Photos or slides, slide projector, list of questions

What to do

Show the slides or photographs of women from different parts of the world. In small groups discuss the list of questions.

With which woman do you think you would have most in common?

Which images are typical of women in your country?

How closely does life for women today reflect the dreams women had when they were adolescents?

Compare women's photographs taken 50 years ago, and those of today. In what ways are they different?

How much control over their own lives do women have today, especially compared with 50 years ago? Are women free to express themselves?

In your community, do parents treat daughters and sons equally in terms of chores, expectations and opportunities?

In your community, do women and men share equally in decision-making at home? In places of employment? In the leadership of the country?

In what ways can women and men work together to help each other to fulfil their potential?

What is unique about being a woman?