



## **FAQ—Religion**

### **What is the BSA's current policy on religious belief?**

The BSA has adopted a Declaration of Religious Principle which is included in the [BSA charter and bylaws](#). It states:

*"The Boy Scouts of America maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God... The Boy Scouts of America, therefore, recognizes the religious element in the training of the member, but it is absolutely nonsectarian in its attitude toward that religious training. Its policy is that the home and the organization or group with which the member is connected shall give definite attention to religious life."*

Although the BSA states a nonsectarian approach to religion and is not based on any one religion, they also state that a Scout cannot fulfill their potential without "recognizing an obligation to God".

### **What about nontheists in Scouting? What is Scouts for Equality's position on "A Scout is Reverent"?**

Reverence is a deeply-held, constantly evolving set of beliefs and ethics. For some, it is embodied by organized religion. For others, reverence is represented by a respect for others and the world around us. Reverence is as much about respect for one another's beliefs—or lack thereof—as it is about a Scout's own beliefs.

The Boy Scouts have said as much in their own teaching about reverence.

From the [BSA's charter and bylaws](#):

"The activities of the members of the Boy Scouts of America shall be carried on under conditions which show respect to the convictions of others in matters of custom and religion, as required by the twelfth point of the Scout Law, reading, "Reverent. A Scout is reverent toward God. He is faithful in his religious duties. **He respects the beliefs of others.**" (emphasis added)

Consistent with the BSA's policy, Scouts for Equality believes that showing respect towards the beliefs of others is consistent with the Scout Oath and Law. We expect all of our members to show reverence and respect for all religious beliefs and philosophical positions.

We believe Scouting is a force more powerful than one person or one religion. By welcoming people from all religious beliefs and philosophical positions, including non-theistic ones in Buddhist, Unitarian, and other traditions, Scouting can better fulfill its vision of preparing youth in America to become responsible, participating citizens and leaders.

### **What if someone's religion says that it's immoral to discriminate against others? How can a Scout with these beliefs reconcile being "reverent" with being "obedient"?**

Many of the world's religions hold the view that discrimination against others is wrong for any reason. This sets-up a moral dilemma since to be "reverent" is one of virtues promoted by Scouting. Since it would also be a violation of a Scout's vow to be "honest," a Scout must find a way to express his true beliefs even when they are in conflict with BSA policy. A good way to express this disagreement in a forthright, non-confrontational manner is to wear the [Inclusive Scouting Award Knot](#) in an obvious place on the Scout uniform. Enlist your religious leader and congregation to provide support for your decision. If possible, have them award it to you privately or as part of a religious service. By doing this, the award in effect becomes another religious award in the same category as the purple and silver knot award.

**What should I do if one of my Scouts tells me he/she is an atheist or agnostic?**

Keep them in Scouting! No one should be excluded; many adolescents are unsure of their beliefs at one point or another — they may be exposed to religion in Scouting, or come to a different understanding later. Faith is very personal and it can be a journey. No one should be punished for asking questions about faith and they should never be afraid to speak truthfully about their beliefs.

**The Boy Scouts were founded on the principles of God and country. Surely you don't expect them to abandon the cornerstone of their philosophy?**

The Boy Scouts of America would not be abandoning their principles by allowing inclusion of atheist or agnostic members any more than an atheist abandons his beliefs by attending a friend's wedding at a church. The issue is not whether the BSA believes in God, but rather whether the organization accepts members with differing beliefs. Excluding members due to a stated belief or non-belief is contrary to the teachings of many religions and creates a conflict of principles for BSA members whose religious organizations teach inclusiveness. Multiple Scouting organizations outside of the US have adopted more inclusive policies with regards to nontheists.

**If a Scout has no formal religious background and feels there is no superior being, could his ethics and humanistic beliefs be enough to earn an Eagle?**

Officially, these beliefs are insufficient. In practice, however, this seems to vary a great deal, depending upon the unit and the members of the Eagle Board of Review. Many Scouts are able to provide well-thought out answers regarding how they live every point of the Scout Law, including reverence to things beyond themselves. Since the BSA does not go to great lengths to define God, individual interpretations may vary.

**If the BSA states that a requirement for membership is the belief in a deity called "God", then the doesn't the BSA also discriminates against those who are Hindu, Buddhist, Shinto, Taoist, Confucianist, Sikhs, Pagans, Wiccans, and those of Native American religions?**

The BSA currently recognizes religious awards and programs for various religions and faiths that do not have a strictly defined God or that recognize multiple deities. As such, there is a discrepancy between "*recognizing an obligation to God*" and allowing religions that vary from strict monotheism. This policy allows some minor flexibility with regards to specific religions, although it still discriminates against individuals with other personal and philosophical beliefs.

**How can I push for a more inclusive position toward religious beliefs?**

You can wear our Inclusive Scouting Award, a knot similar to other awards given by the BSA. It is a sign that you support a safer, more inclusive Scouting experience for all people, regardless of sexual orientation and religion. You can learn more about the award [here](#).