

Virtue Workshop

Children, Youth and Adults Learning Together

Printable resources are included

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Immortality

General Introduction

This Material is designed for workshops/conferences, children's classes, families, and individual learning.

Unless we can make deep spiritual concepts understandable, we risk losing future generations to the distorted thinking of a deteriorating materialistic world.. Each spiritual concept explored includes activities specifically designed for groups of youth and adults and activities designed for children.

It is a method of group learning, based on the model of the oneness of humanity. Everyone is a student, and everyone is a teacher. Our mission is not to provide exhaustive research and explanation of concepts for scholars. Our goal is to enable everyone to gain a basic knowledge of concepts indispensable for spiritual survival. It is our hope that parents and teachers gathered in living rooms, backyards; in cities and villages, will use these spiritual concepts to improve the lives of children, youth and adults.

The writers, as members of the Baha'i Faith, are guided by its teachings and principles. We have used language that allows the concepts to be accessible to the wider community. Reference is made to the sources of authority of the Bahá'í Faith. We are referring to the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice.

This material reflects the personal interpretations of the authors and should not be taken as authoritative.

Instructions

Materials listed in the Resource section of each activity, including images, should be carefully prepared. Images can be enlarged and are essential for presentation. If some of the materials listed are not available, facilitators may modify and adapt material to best meet the unique needs of different groups.

Activities for youth/adults may be completed in approximately one hour.

Activities for children are approximately twenty minutes to an hour in length.

Adult Activity

“Drops of One Mighty River”

Document with text to be read aloud by participants. Facilitator may choose to use a projector.

Materials in Resource Section

Place trough, pitchers of water and cups on table accessible to participants

Facilitator says: There are many references in the Bahá'í Writings that tell us that any thoughts of going out of existence are pure illusion. We can be comforted by knowing that our souls will never cease to exist.

Let's hear what 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us about our souls:

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following quotation in a loud voice:

**“But the spirit of man is essential and therefore eternal.
It is a divine bounty.”**

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Reference Library: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*: 24

Facilitator asks: Why is it so important that we understand that we will never go out of existence?

Participants respond - Allow 2-3 minutes

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following quotation in a loud voice:

“Spiritual existence is absolute immortality, completeness, and unchangeable being.”

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Reference Library: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*: 38

Facilitator says: We will hear another quotation from 'Abdu'l-Bahá and then briefly share what we think it means.

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following quotation in a loud voice:

“The conception of annihilation is a factor in human degradation, a cause of human debasement and lowliness, a source of human fear and abjection.”

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Reference Library: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*: 38

Facilitator says: Let's read the definitions of some of the words in this quotation:

Facilitator asks: four participants to read the following four dictionary definitions:

1. **Annihilation means “complete destruction or obliteration”**
2. **Degradation means “humiliation, shame, loss of dignity, loss of self-respect, loss of pride”**
3. **Debasement means “to lower in rank, dignity, or significance”**
4. **Abjection means “the condition of being servile, wretched, or contemptible”**

Facilitator says: Let's listen to the whole quotation again.

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following quotation in a loud voice:

“The conception of annihilation is a factor in human degradation, a cause of human debasement and lowliness, a source of human fear and abjection.”

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Reference Library: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*: 38

Facilitator says: A belief in immortality, rather than annihilation gives us a higher quality of life.

Now that we know what the words mean, how has what 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains about life and death affected our own perceptions of our life and our death?

Participants respond - Allow 3-5 minutes

Facilitator says: The concept of something having a fixed shelf-life affects the value we place on that object. A bottle of fresh milk that we buy in the grocery store has a shelf-life of a week. We attach way more value to a new car that will last for 15 years. We value a new house even more, because it will last over 75 years.

If we believe that the average physical lifespan of a person is not too much longer than that of a new house, then we could assign only slightly more value to a human being than we do to a new house. The same is true if we don't adequately value our own life. We will also tend not to adequately value the lives of others. This tendency will negatively affect all of our relationships resulting in the “human degradation” that 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentioned.

We should take comfort in knowing that we are not just physical beings with a limited shelf life.

Think of our physical bodies as the clothes we put on our soul. Clothes can be outworn. But our soul is eternal and it progresses eternally toward the Presence of God.

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following quotation in a loud voice:

O SON OF MAN! Thou art My dominion and My dominion perisheth not; wherefore fearest thou thy perishing? Thou art My light and My light shall never be extinguished; why dost thou dread extinction? Thou art My glory and My glory fadeth not; thou art My robe and My robe shall never be outworn. Abide then in thy love for Me, that thou mayest find Me in the realm of glory.

- Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Reference Library: *The Hidden Words: Part One: Arabic: 14*

Facilitator says: We do not perish. Our souls do not become extinct. They are deathless in their duration. Science is now gradually coming into alignment with Abdu'l-Baha and Bahá'u'lláh's pronouncements that nothing ceases to exist.

Peter Tyson, writing for Nova science, says that every single atom in our bodies was created from an exploding star billions of years ago.

- <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/star-in-you/>

Facilitator says: Take a look at your hands. The same atoms which make up our hands could have been part of a star in a distant part of the universe. The Bahá'í Writings go further:

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following quotation in a loud voice:

“Thus, as that Essence of Oneness, or divine Being, is eternal and everlasting -- that is, as it has neither beginning nor end -- it follows that the world of existence, this endless universe, likewise has no beginning. .” -

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Reference Library: *Some Answered Questions: 47*

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following quotation in a loud voice:

“But the inner and essential reality of man is not composed of elements and, therefore, cannot be decomposed. It is not an elemental composition subject to disintegration or death. A true and fundamental scientific principle is that an

element itself never dies and cannot be destroyed for the reason that it is single and not composed. Therefore, it is not subject to decomposition.”

Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Reference Library: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*: 123

Facilitator says: Everything in our lives may be outwardly ideal -- healthy family; great job; modern house; etc. But when we look to the future, we know that all these earthly things will come to an end.

If we are only looking at creation with our material, physical eyes, we could come to believe that none of our accomplishments and possessions have any long-term value. It's possible to leap to the conclusion that the individual has no long-term value.

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following in a loud voice:

The belief that each person dies and is no more devalues the meaning of life. The end result is that we degrade what it means to be human for ourselves and others. This leads to poor self-esteem. Individuals are more likely to engage in risky behavior if they believe that they only live for a few years. Nations are more likely to enter wars -- what would the life of one soldier mean -- not much! What would the life of another country mean -- not much!

Facilitator says: We would look at ourselves and others as not being valuable. Like the bottle of milk in the refrigerator, we think that we all have a short shelf life. Believing that we will go out of existence at the time of the body's physical death, injects an unhealthy element of fear into every decision we make in our life. Instead of fear-based illusionary decisions, we can make reality-based decisions. Reality-based decisions eliminate unhealthy fear from our lives.

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following in a loud voice:

The beginning of eternal self-worth is believing that our existence is eternal.

Facilitator says: Let's take a moment and quietly think about what this means:
The beginning of eternal self-worth is believing that our existence is eternal.

Participants respond - Allow 1-2 minutes

Facilitator says: Let's take a couple of minutes to share our thoughts as a group.

Participants respond - Allow 2-3 minutes

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following quotation in a loud voice:

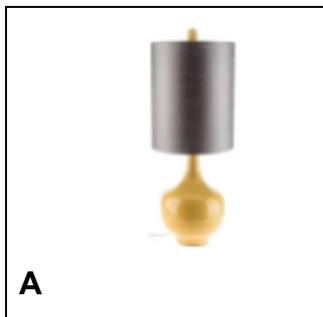
“Know thou that the soul of man is exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind...Consider the light of the lamp. Though an external object may interfere with its radiance, the light itself continueth to shine with undiminished power. In like manner, every malady afflicting the body of man is an impediment that preventeth the soul from manifesting its inherent might and power. When it leaveth the body, however, it will evince such ascendancy, and reveal such influence as no force on earth can equal.”

-Bahá'í Reference Library: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*: LXXX

Facilitator holds up and then places: lampshade on table or floor in front of participants

Facilitator says: It is possible to put a shade, **“an external object”**, on a lamp that would keep the light from becoming visible.

Facilitator shares Image A with participants:



Facilitator says: The shade is like the physical body that covers the brilliance of the light. The body acts as a shade that prevents the true intensity of the light within from being completely seen.

Not only does our body act as a shade, but so do our poor behavior choices.

Let's look at some preventable decisions that we make that are like putting a cover -- a lampshade -- on the eternal light within us.

For example; we can make poor decisions in the pursuit of short term material gain that cause long term spiritual harm.

Let's turn and talk with someone next to us. What are some examples of poor decisions can we think of that cover our spiritual light?

Participants respond - Allow 1-2 minutes

Facilitator says: Now let's share our thoughts with our whole group.

Participants respond - Allow 2-3 minutes

Facilitator shares **Image B** with participants:



Facilitator says: In this image, we can see that the shade on the lamp allows more light to come through. The increased light from this translucent shade is symbolic of an individual who has made better behavior choices.

The goal is that an ever increasing amount of spiritual light shines forth in this world.

Most of us think in terms of beginnings and endings. We go to work, eat dinner, go to bed, all at certain times. This is a practical necessity of everyday life. There is a comfort to having a daily structured life. The problem comes when our daily routine is altered, we move to a new unfamiliar home. Any change in our routine can generate fear, sometimes overwhelming fear. Bahá'u'lláh takes away this fear.

Facilitator says: Have we ever been overwhelmed by fear when our daily routine has changed?

Participants respond

Allow 2-3 minutes for discussion

Facilitator says: Let's listen to Bahá'u'lláh's words:

Facilitator asks: participant or participants to read the following quotations in a loud voice:

O son of Man!

Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.

- Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Reference Library: *The Hidden Words*: Part One: Arabic: 3

O son of Man!

I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.

- Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Reference Library: *The Hidden Words*: Part One: Arabic: 4

“...Out of the essence of knowledge I gave the being...Out of the clay of love I molded thee...”

- Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Reference Library: *The Hidden Words*: Part One: Arabic: 13

If the spiritual world has no beginning and end, it follows that the material world does not either. The physical world is a mirror image of the spiritual world. We were created out of knowledge and love of God. The knowledge and love of God has no beginning or end. Our individuality comes into being at conception. At that time, love and knowledge is uniquely combined to form each person. The knowledge and love of God are immortal. Likewise, we are immortal and will never die. We live forever.

Knowing that our existence is eternal eliminates fear of death and creates faith in a God that will be by our side forever.

Facilitator: shares Image C with participants:



Facilitator says: When the soul is released from the body, the full brilliance of our souls shines even brighter.

Facilitator shares Image D with participants:



Facilitator asks: participant to read the following in a loud voice:

**“I am an eternal shining lamp, who for a short period of time, wears a lampshade.
I will live forever.”**

Facilitator says: Our thought processes that go into generating our spiritual acts of service, are what we take with us after we die. All of our unreal vain imaginings will fade away and be no more.

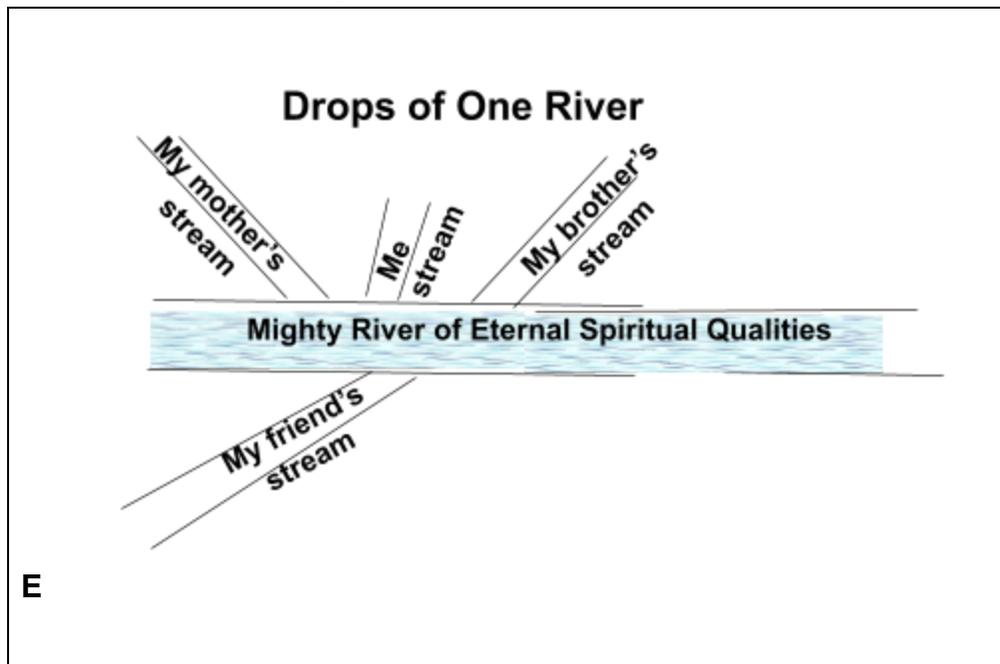
Facilitator asks: participant to read the following in a loud voice:

“Servitude is a substance, the essence of which is Divinity.”
- Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Reference Library: *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*

Divinity lives forever and so do we. All our acts of service that we either give or receive is our eternal contribution to the wellbeing of all life.

Facilitator says: Our contributions to the world of humanity -- our acts of service live forever. Every act of service generated by our unique spiritual qualities recirculates forever in the hearts of humanity. It can be likened to water that can be recirculated in streams and rivers.

Facilitator: Share **Image E** with participants:



Facilitator says: This River of spiritual qualities has been forever changed by our own spiritual qualities and acts of service.

For example: we can view our service in helping to feed a group of hungry people as a **temporary contribution** to people in our community. If our act of service is motivated by an attribute of God, such as compassion, our service then rises to a higher level.

This act of service helps create a compassionate humanity. Our service becomes an **eternal contribution** to the timeless **stream** of spiritual qualities which flow into the eternal **Mighty River** of the attributes of God. Our contribution, along with the contributions of countless others, eternally **recirculates** through the hearts of humanity. In a materialistic society, one in which we all live, the average person can experience low self-esteem. We fall into the habit of comparing ourselves to who we think makes more money, is a better parent, who is more attractive, etc. High self-esteem is reserved for only a privileged few. However, we all should have a high level of self-esteem because every one of us is contributing our unique spiritual qualities and acts of service to the oneness of humanity - the Mighty River.

Have you ever done a good deed for someone? Did the effects of that good deed die or does it's influence continue to live on? Please share your stories.

Participants respond - Allow 3-4 minutes

Facilitator says: Everyone please come up to the table and take a cup. We will fill our cups halfway with water from one of the pitchers and return to our seats.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: An act of service that emerges from a spiritual quality, will achieve immortality. Any purely material act, not coming from a spiritual quality, will dissipate and have no lasting influence.

Let's think about what this means. Turn to a neighbor and discuss.

Participants respond - Allow 1-2 minutes

Facilitator says:

Now, while holding our cups let's quietly think for a minute of an act of service which we have done that was generated by a spiritual quality.

Participants respond - Allow up to one minute

Facilitator says: Now we will all contribute our unique acts of service, generated by our spiritual qualities, to the Mighty River.

We will become **Streams of Spiritual Qualities, flowing into the "Mighty River"**

Let's count off by 4 to make four streams starting from each corner of this room.

Participants respond by counting off by four

Facilitator directs all 1s, 2s, 3s and 4s to gather separate corners of the room.

Facilitator moves the table with water trough to the center of the room.

Facilitator says: Everyone slowly walks together toward the center of the room and adds our spiritual qualities and acts of service to the Mighty River of Spiritual Qualities (trough) and then returns to our seats.

Participants respond

Facilitator asks: How did we feel about adding our contributions to the Mighty River? Did you notice an increased feeling of humility and self-worth?

Participants respond - Allow 1-2 minutes

Facilitator asks: Did you experience immortality?

Did you notice that some fears have begun to melt away?

Participants respond - Allow 1-2 minutes

Facilitator's Closing Comments: When we filled our cups from the **Mighty River filled by the Streams of Spiritual Qualities**, we received the benefit of all the infinite acts of service which have been contributed by all life. All spiritual qualities originate from God. Our spiritual qualities are timeless and immortal.

Each time we contribute a spiritual act of service to the world, we experience immortality. As we experience immortality, we lose our fear of going out of existence. The root cause of all our fear and anxiety is the fear of going out of existence. Our unique spiritual qualities and acts of service live forever. This means that we will live forever.

Facilitator asks: participant to read this quotation in a loud voice:

“He who is a true believer liveth both in this world and in the world to come.”

- Hadith of Islam

Facilitator says: There is no need to wait until the end of our earthly existence to experience immortality. We experience immortality each time we give or receive an act of service.

To the Facilitator and all participants:

The physical world has been created by God to teach us deep spiritual concepts. It is the hope of the creators of this activity that we all make the transition as quickly as possible, from being student participants, to being teachers, sharing these ideas with others. Spiritual concepts are the building blocks for an ever-progressing world civilization.

Please feel free to adapt this material to best meet the unique needs of different groups.

Children’s Activity “Drops of One Mighty River”

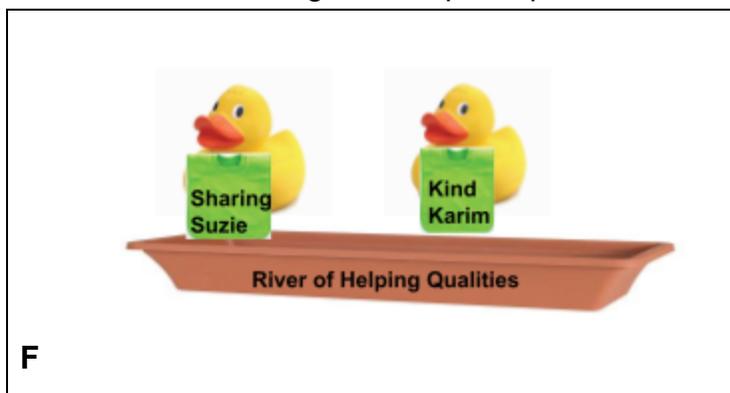
Document with text to be read aloud by participants. Facilitator may choose to use a projector.

Materials in Resource Section

Facilitator presents: a basket (without label) of small rubber ducks.

Facilitator says: Right now these ducks are just plain rubber duckies. But we are going to turn them into special superhero “Helping Ducks”. We will give our ducks names of helping qualities.

Facilitator share image **F** with participants:



Facilitator says: For example, This duck is Suzie’s duck. It is wearing a bib labeled “Sharing Suzie”. And this duck is Karim’s duck. It is wearing a bib labeled “Kind Karim”. Our rubber ducks in the basket are waiting for us to put helping quality bibs on them.

Facilitator shows: empty basket labeled: “Helping Qualities” and blank bibs to participants.

***Note to Facilitator:** Depending on age, participants may think of and write their own helping qualities on the bibs and add these to the basket. Alternatively, bibs with pre-labeled spiritual qualities may be used.

Facilitator says: Let’s write some helping qualities that we all have onto the bibs and put them into the basket. I’ll go first. I think that being a good friend is a helping quality. I will write the word “friendly” on this bib and put it in the basket. And we know that Suzie is sharing and Karim is kind. I will write sharing on one bib and kind on another bib and add them to the basket.

Facilitator asks: What other helping qualities can we think of to write on our blank bibs?

Participants respond

Facilitator writes these qualities on bibs and adds these to the basket.

When children have finished suggesting qualities,

Facilitator says: Hey look! I found this sealed envelope. Let's all read together what is written on it.

Participants respond: **"TOP SECRET" HELPING QUALITIES"**

Facilitator says: I will open the envelope and we will see what helping qualities are inside. Maybe there are some of the same ones we have thought of and maybe there are some new ones we haven't thought of.

Facilitator removes the bibs from the envelope one at a time. Group reads qualities written on each bib and it is added to the basket.

Facilitator says: We are going to turn our plain rubber ducks into superhero helping ducks.

First, we will each take a bib from our Helping Qualities basket. It does not matter which bib we take from the basket. It may be a helping quality you thought of, or it may be one that someone else thought of.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: To prepare our bibs to put on our ducks, we will each write our name under the helping quality written on our bib.

Facilitator directs: participant to give a permanent marker or pen to each member of the group.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: We are each going to have a duck to put a bib on.

***Note to Facilitator:** depending on number of participants, two children may share one duck. Each child will have his or her own bib to place on a duck.

Facilitator directs: participant to distribute a rubber duck to each member of the group.

Facilitator says: Now we will carefully put our helping quality bibs around the necks of our ducks.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Now these ducks are no longer just plain rubber ducks. We have turned our ducks into superhero ducks by giving them helping qualities.

Now do we all think our superhero ducks can change the world?

Participants respond yes.

Facilitator presents trough: half filled with water.

Facilitator says: Sure, our superhero ducks can change the world -- especially when they work together.

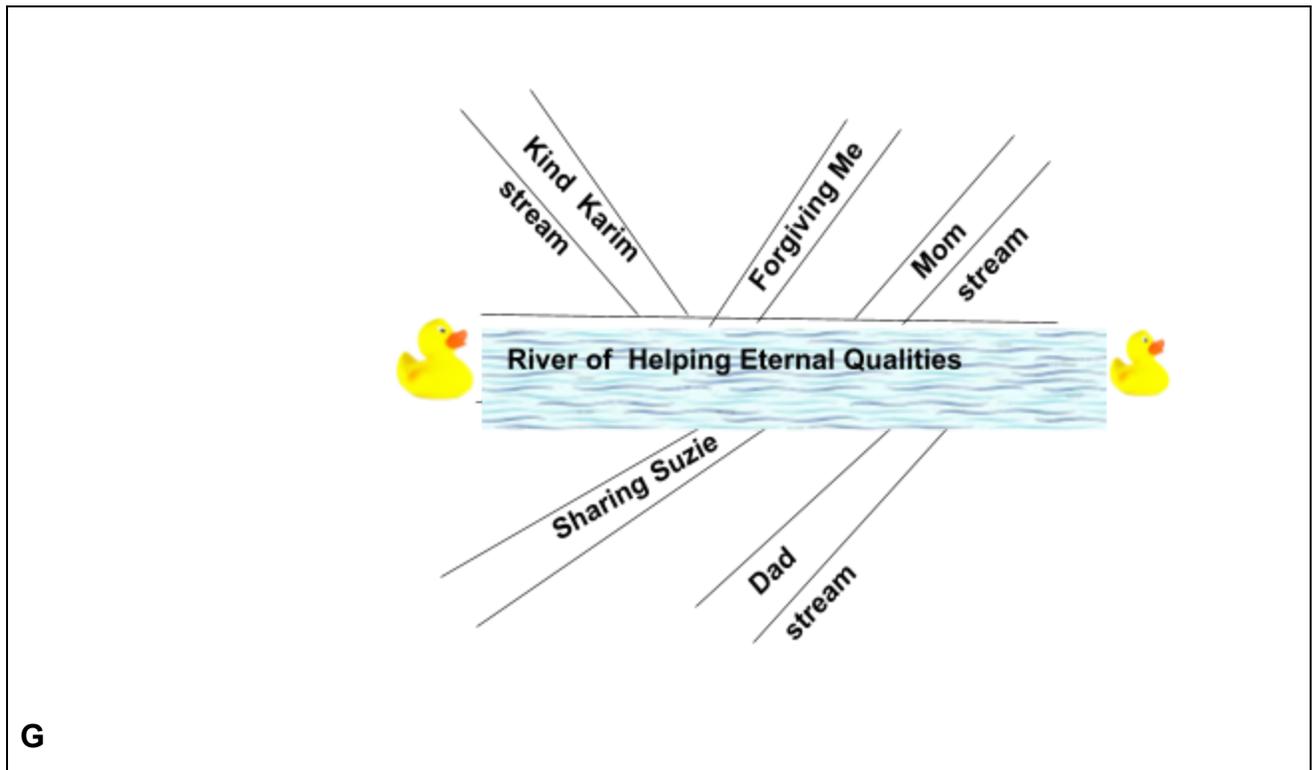
Each of us will come up one at a time and add our ducks with their helping qualities to our one river. We will all be able to observe all our superhero helping ducks floating together.

Participants respond

Participants gather around the water trough and observe all the ducks floating together.

Facilitator says: Now we will let our ducks swim around awhile. Let's sit down again.

Facilitator shares **Image G** with participants:



Facilitator says: Each person is like a stream that flows into one great big river. When we add our stream to the River of Helping Qualities, we change the river forever. It is like an eternal river. Eternal means never going out of existence -- never ending -- never dying. When Suzie adds her action of sharing to the river, she changes the river forever. The river becomes cleaner and more powerful. When Karim adds his action of being kind to the river, he changes the river. The river becomes stronger. Mom and Dad each add their own streams to the eternal river of helping qualities. We become superheroes when we add our own streams of love and kindness and all our other helping qualities and actions to the eternal river. Our own special spiritual qualities and our own acts of service live forever. The effects of every good thing we do for other people will last forever. Our good qualities make us want to do good things for other people. This is how we can all change the world.

Facilitator's closing comments:

We will look at two more images as an ending to our activity:

Facilitator shares **Image B** with participants:



Facilitator says: In this image, we can see that the shade on the lamp covers the light, but allows light to shine through it. This lamp is like a person. The light shining from it comes from our superhero helping qualities that we add to the world.

Facilitator: shares **Image C** with participants:



Facilitator says: Many of us know of someone who has died -- someone who is not living with us here in our world anymore. When a person dies their soul is released from the body. The soul no longer has the body covering its light. The lampshade has been removed. This soul's light of superhero helping qualities can shine even brighter. It also adds to the one eternal river of helping qualities.

Resources

Adult Activity

Materials:

Water Trough: long plastic window plant box or other box - 60-90 cm

Label for trough "Most Mighty River"

half-filled with water

Table

small 4 oz paper cups (one for each participant)

1-2 large pitchers of water

Lampshade

Images A,B,C,D,E,

Children's Activity

Materials:

Water Trough: long plastic window plant box or other box - 60-90 cm

Label for trough "River of Helping Qualities"

12-20 small-medium sized Rubber Ducks - preferably enough for one for each participant. If not enough ducks, provide one for each pair of participants to share.

Thin permanent markers or pens

Envelope addressed: "Top Secret Helping Qualities"

Basket labeled "Helping Qualities"

Basket with no label

Small Bibs: paper (thick paper if possible) sized to fit around the neck of size of small rubber ducks used (hole cut in center for neck). with text of spiritual qualities written on them and or blank bibs - enough for one for each participant. if participants are older, they may write spiritual qualities on their bibs. If participants are younger, Facilitator or older participant may write spiritual qualities, dictated by participants on bibs. Bibs with pre-labeled spiritual qualities may be used (see below). Additional spiritual qualities may be added or the ones listed may be used multiple times.

Images B, C, F, G

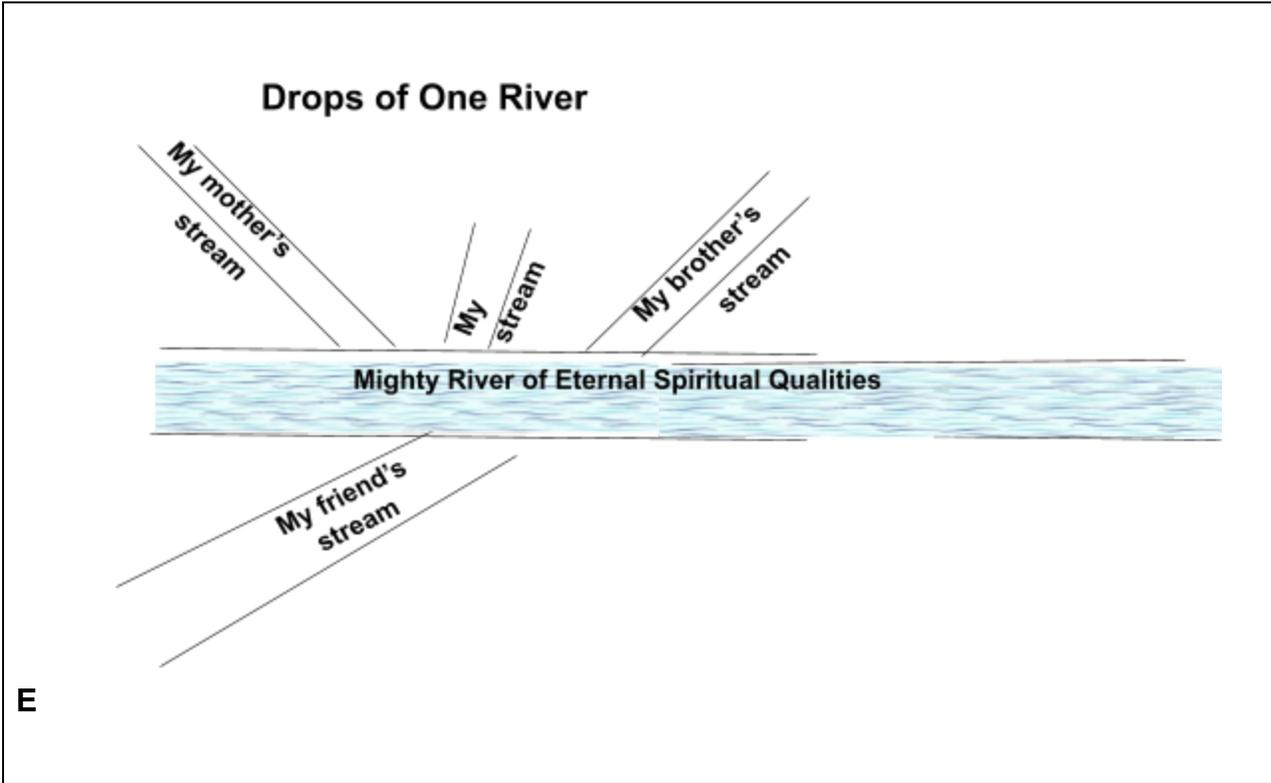


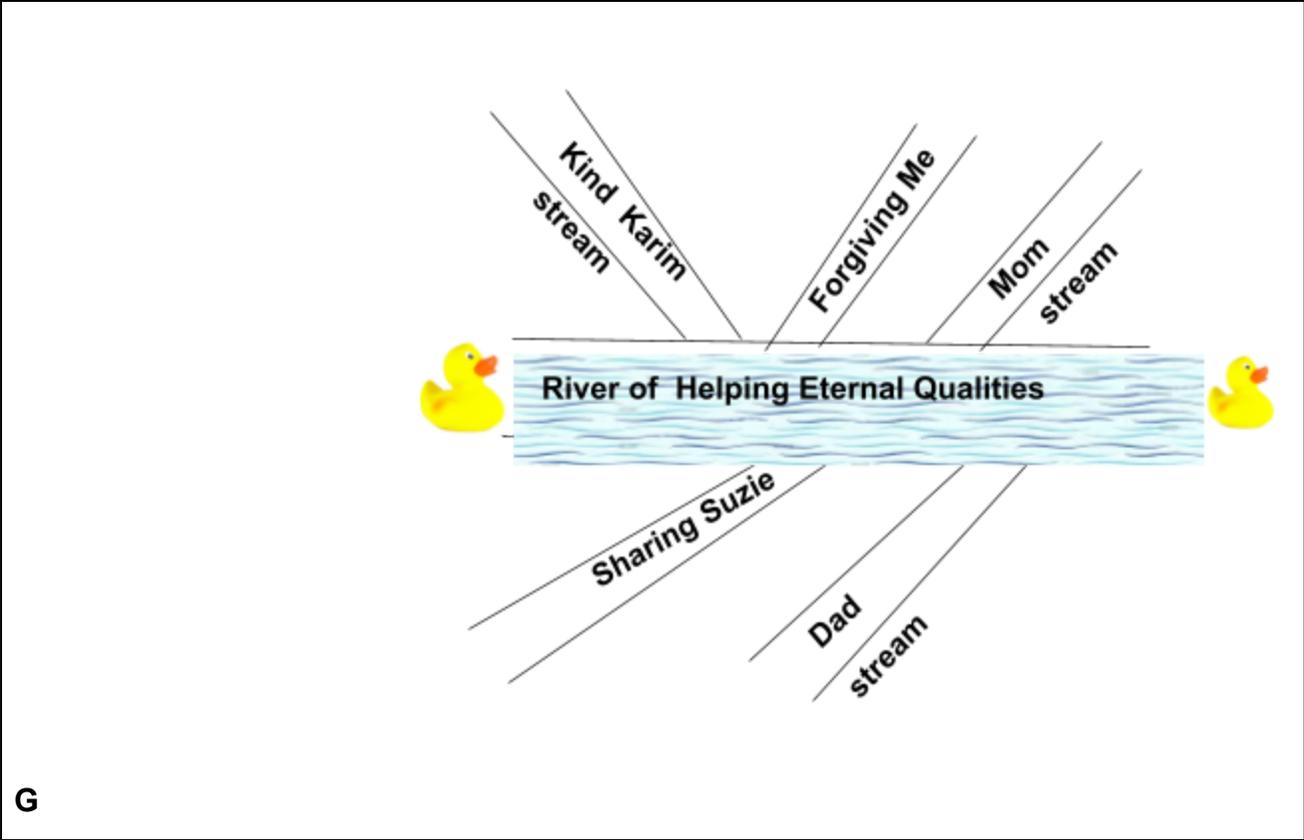


C



D





Spiritual qualities to be written on paper bibs:

- Kind, Sharing, Truthful, Loving, Caring, Friendly, Joyful
- Unifying, Forgiving, Helping, Thoughtful, Fair, Patient, Respectful, Responsible...
- Additional qualities or duplicates of listed ones may be included

