

1927**Al-kashfiyya khidma wataniyya (Scouting is a National Service)****Citation:**

"Al-kashfiyya khidma wataniyya (Scouting is a National Service)", 1927, Wilson Center Digital Archive, al-Kashshaf (1:4) (1927): 299-302. Contributed, translated, and annotated by Cyrus Schayegh.

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Summary:

Developed by British officer Robert Baden-Powell (1857-1941) in 1907, scouting was first introduced into the Middle East in 1912, a history analyzed in Jennifer Dueck's *The Claims of Culture at Empire End* (2010). It became more known after World War I, with the largest groups first forming in Damascus and Beirut. In the latter, a Sunni, Muhyi al-Din Nusuli, in 1920 founded al-Kashshaf al-Muslim, which in 1922 was recognized by the International Scout Federation (ISF) as the Muslim Scouts of Syria. Earliest recruits were at the school of the American University of Beirut, though most enrolled at the Islamic College (Kulliya Islamiyya) and the schools of the Maqasid Islamic charity organization. During the 1925-1927 anticolonial Syrian Revolt, the French Mandate authorities disbanded the scouting groups, though they soon recovered. In 1927, too, the pro-French Catholic Scouts de France were founded, and small secular French and Jewish units came to life as well. Moreover, scouting picked up speed also outside the French Mandate, e.g. in Egypt and Palestine, as Arnon Degani's "They were prepared: the Palestinian Arab Scout Movement 1920-1948" (2014) shows.

Back in the French Mandate, the Muslim Scouts of Syria and Lebanon joined ranks in 1931. In 1933, there were 45 troops involving 3,000 members. But in 1934 the French authorities clamped down on them, concerned about support for Syro-Lebanese unity. Lebanese and Syrian scouts split. If in the 1930s especially Muslim scouts formed part of a widening organizational involvement of youth in anticolonial nationalist politics, they had seen themselves as nation-building pioneers already in the 1920s. As the below text shows, in their eyes scouting allowed (male) youngsters to develop physical strength, be outdoors and get to know "their" nation's natural habitat, and hone self-help, leadership skills, and team spirit, among other desirable traits. In this sense the below text, which was printed without a byline in the Beirut journal al-Kashshaf (*The Scout*), was complex, not unlike Baden-Powell's beliefs as expressed in his seminal *Scouting for Boys* (1908). It meant to strengthen individuals' self-reliance while simultaneously serving a collective end, in Baden-Powell's case the British Empire, here the Lebanese-Syrian nationalist cause.

Original Language:

Arabic

Contents:

Translation - English

Scouting needs men—whether in the crisp air of the outdoors or in the cities, in the spirit of service and assistance which scouting propagates, in the high manner in which are hewn outstanding personalities.

Many comrades fall in love with scouting when entering its holy path. They look at it with all the advantageous strength and enthusiasm of their youth. Scouting looks back at them with great love and tenderness, for it wants to turn them into great men who will take their nation by the hand and guide it to life—a true life whose true nature is only understood by a great spirit.

They lay their pure souls on the altar of loyalty. But there are plenty of difficulties with realizing these wishes. Our environment is stagnant, and rejects out of hand anything that is new for itself or for its inhabitants. Moreover, there is no strong hand that thrusts the movement forward and that forces all schools, national or not, to make room in their curriculum for scouting.

A scout does not care for difficulties. He sneers at them, for he has a strong arm, an enlightened mind, a steadfast will, and sincere brothers on whom he can rely blindly. He will change this stagnant environment bit by bit, making it receptive to good new things and loathing what is worn-out and old—and this strong hand will be found and we will lean on it.

Whom I have in mind here when talking of the scout is our brother, the teacher, for on him relies the course of the movement, and he steadies its steps in the beloved nation.

The teacher who leads thousands of tomorrow's men, the teacher whose duty it is to commit his spirit to the spirit of those little heroes, the teacher who needs to be alive, awake, and enthusiastic: he is the soul of scouting and its innermost nature.

I thus send these words to my brother, the teacher, and to the little scout yearning to become a teacher, whom I may observe before I pass away, that leader whom my soul desires.

Scouting - a general program

Oh scouting teacher, do not think that scouting exists only in our beloved homeland, in the beautiful Syria. No! It is spread all around the world.

Fifty-seven nations, whose population is 1,540 million, i.e. 91% of the world population, adhere to the bonds of scouting, and its methods are succeeding in educating their sons. And the scout gives his guileless sweet oath, which fills the soul with its simplicity, in equal humility in all languages. You will find that the scout's heart—that noble heart that excels in being of service—beats in every heart equally, be it white or black or yellow or red. This is what makes scouting truly exemplary: it encompasses all of humankind and guides it to harmony, friendship, and love.

The growth of scouting: The new scouting teacher becomes part of a development movement. This movement was founded in 1329q [qamari] 1910m [miladi].^[1] Today, it includes half a million scouts and administrators and 35,000 scout teachers and assistants. But scouting has not yet really started. Thousands of children aged ten and above have not entered it. And in our beloved Syria, scouting exists only in Beirut and a few cities. Why? Because many youngsters are not enrolling, and are not content to study to become a scout teacher.

What do our scout children need?

Scouting invites youngsters to be scout teachers, in order to serve the sons of the nation and fulfill their obligation toward them.

What are our most important needs, sons of the nation?

1: Good health.

2: The hand of a wise leader who keeps walking on the path of Good; in times of anguish, the child can become the king of kindness and mercy or the Satan of evil and revenge.

3: Leisure time filled with all that delights the soul of the child and gives happiness to its mind.

4: Useful games that awaken the child's hidden facilities.

5: Being outdoors, to balance the inclination to live in cities.

6: Building up muscular strength, broad knowledge, and service through pleasing

deeds.

7: Good habits.

8: A democratic environment that leads to mutual understanding between the scout and all classes of the nation.

9: An enlightened mind that looks to the horizon, to the central position that he has to occupy in life. Who else but a teacher can create these prerequisites for a successful scout and carry out this national duty?

Moreover, scouting requires the teacher to serve not only the collective but also himself, enriching his life and filling it with all that's good and beautiful.

What are the requirements for scouting teachers?

Really good leadership of scouts is the merit of the scouting teacher:

1: to renew his boys, for he is in constant contact with them.

2: to live outdoors, which will fortify him.

3: To write up new information as his study of scouting becomes deeper, and to take it upon himself to train his boys accordingly; in result, you will always see him "ready" [a key scout term: *'ala al-isti'dad*].

4: To illuminate the scouts' oath and law by being a lofty model, and to write a daily report.

5: To strengthen his influence on each and person in his troupe who is his superior and his stronger protector.

6: To discover every day within himself hidden attributes that qualify him to be a real leader who is continuously improving, and hence becomes an engineer of man who understands his own duty.

7: Scouting makes the scouting teacher deeply happy, because he can easily feel the result of his toils—which is nothing less than improving humanity.

[\[i\]](#) *Qamari*: Muslim lunar calendar; *miladi*: Gregorian calendar.