



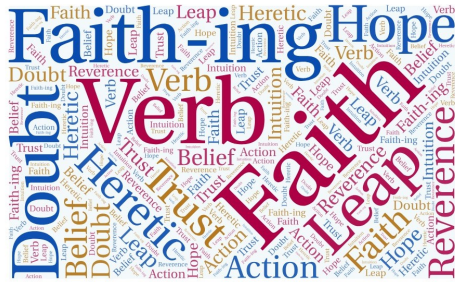
Touchstones Project

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Faith

Wisdom Story



religious tradition in some cases and to some degree by its doctrines, but it is a quality of the person and not the system. It is an orientation of the personality to oneself, to one's neighbor, to the universe; a total response, a way of seeing whatever one sees and of handling whatever one handles; a capacity to live at more than a mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of a transcendent dimension.... Faith, then, is a quality of human living." Belief is content; faith is a process that influences the way we live, and makes it possible for us to live with meaning. In this context, we can view faith as a verb, as well as a noun. While not probable, it is possible that we could one day say, "I faith." The point is that faith as a noun has limitations.

Introduction to the Theme

The word faith comes from the Proto-Indo-European root *bheidh- meaning "to trust, confide, persuade." It leads to the Latin *fidere* (to trust), a verb, and *fidēs* (faith), a noun. While we could have ended up with the English verb, "to faith," we did not. English already had the verbs "to trust" and "to believe," which covered the semantic ground that "to faith" would have.

Most of the time people use the word faith as if it were a synonym for belief. It is not. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a historian of religion wrote the book, *Faith and Belief: The Difference Between Them*. For Smith, belief was "the holding of certain ideas." He wrote, "Faith is deeper, richer, more personal. It is engendered by a

James Fowler, author of *Stages of Faith*, considers faith to be our response to essential questions regarding our hopes and dreams, our commitments, and what we trust in life. He writes, "Faith is not always religious in its con-

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It's Not What You Believe, But How

Rev. Gary Kowalski

Babies don't believe anything. Babies aren't born Buddhists or Baptists or believers of any sort. But soon after we arrive in the world, we start to gather ideas.

We pick up beliefs and ideas about people and animals and families. We collect ideas about stars and comets and how it all got started. We accumulate beliefs about good and bad, right and wrong, what's healthy and unhealthy, and what is important in life.

All these beliefs, which we get from our parents and playmates, from the TV and from Sunday School, go into our belief bag.

Now, most religions define themselves by what they believe, or by what's inside the bag.

Christians, for instance, believe in Jesus. Muslims believe in Allah and in the prophet Mohammed.

Buddhists believe the Four Noble Truths.

But Unitarian Universalists don't have just one set of beliefs. What makes us different is the *way* that we Unitarian Universalists carry our beliefs—because there are different ways of holding your belief bag.

For example, some people ...clutch it close and make sure the top is tightly sealed, because they don't want their beliefs exposed to any new ideas that could threaten what's inside. They've got their world wrapped up in a nice, tidy package. And because their bag is all closed up, we call these people close-minded.

On the other hand, some people are just the opposite: they don't pay much attention at all to what goes into their bag. One idea is a good as another, and if other folks believe it, or if they read it on the internet, or heard

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Faith & Reimagining the Common Good

Faith is necessary to reimagining the Common Good. Faith provides an ethical foundation and promotes values like justice and compassion, inspiring social activism and community solidarity. It critiques existing systems, advocating for transformative change and a broader, inclusive vision of the Common Good. Faith fosters interfaith collaboration, respects diversity, and emphasizes environmental stewardship and sustainability. Additionally, it supports healing and reconciliation, promoting restorative justice and long-term well-being. Faith plays a crucial role in shaping a more just, equitable, and compassionate society that prioritizes the well-being of all individuals and contributes to the Common Good.

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

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Reimagining the Common Good

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it on talk radio, then it must be true. Because they carry their bag in such a sloppy manner, we call these people sloppy thinkers.

And then there are people who carry their bags ...like a club they use to hit other people. What's inside their bag may sound very nice and sweet, for instance "I believe in peace and kindness and the Golden Rule." But they use their bag like a weapon. "You don't believe in peace? Why you nasty person, shame on you!"

But none of those is the Unitarian Universalist way. Instead, we carry our bags ...with the top open, so that new ideas and experiences can get inside, and old beliefs can be tossed aside if needed.

We carry our bags in front of us, so



that we can see and examine what goes in, to be sure it makes sense and fits with other things we know. And also so that we can see what our neighbors think, and share our thoughts with others. Above all, we never use our beliefs to beat up or bully other people.

That's what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist. The next time somebody asks you what do the people in your church believe, you can tell them: for Unitarian Universalists, it is less important what you believe than how you hold your beliefs. It's how you acquire them, how you share them, and above all what you do with them that counts.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/time-all-ages/its-not-what-you-believe-how>

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction**

tent or context. To ask these questions seriously of oneself or others does not necessarily mean to elicit answers about religious commitment or belief. Faith is a person's or group's way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person's way of seeing him- or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose."

At its core, faith is a confidence in and commitment to something or someone. Its primary association is with religion, e.g., faith in God or Allah, or faith in Jesus or the *Quran*, or the Eight-Fold Path. People have faith in many other things, as well, like democracy, believing in its processes and outcomes, and science, trusting in the scientific method and its capacity to uncover truths about the universe.

While faith and trust are sometimes used interchangeably, they are distinct. Faith is intuitive, while trust involves cognitive judgment, which relies heavily on empirical evidence. By contrast, faith is less dependent on evidence and more on personal conviction.

While it is true that our faith can emerge without intention as we respond to life, an unexamined faith like an unexamined life does not serve us well, nor does blind faith. Unitarian Universalist scholar James Luther Adams writes, "An unexamined faith is not worth having, for it can only be true by accident. A faith worth having is a faith worth discussing and testing."

An examined faith takes into account all of the reasons in the world for pessimism, of which there are many, weighs them in light of what is possible, and finds reason for optimism. An examined faith never allows the enormity of a mountain to get in the way of trying to move it bit by bit for as long as it takes. An examined faith understands the leap of faith as one made "half-sure and whole-hearted." When we begin to examine our faith, to make sense of it, we understand how vital it is to life itself.

Hebrews 11:1 offers a well-known defi-

nition: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." This may not be a definition that we would endorse, yet we have faith in our first principle, the affirmation of the "inherent worth and dignity of every person." We can't see this worth and dignity, yet we affirm and promote its existence. Likewise, we can't see the "interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part," yet we respect it and work for climate and environmental justice.

The importance, value, and necessity of faith is demonstrated by the consequences of when it is lost or crushed. Emotionally, we can respond with grief, anger, a sense of betrayal, fear, anxiety, and profound mistrust. Cognitively, we may experience confusion, doubt, and disillusionment. All of this can prompt an existential crisis where we question the meaning and purpose of everything.

The terrible consequences of losing faith are embedded in the challenge of restoring faith. It involves emotional healing, which can involve the grieving process, overcoming depression and hopelessness, and rebuilding trust. It may be necessary to reconstruct a new worldview, a daunting intellectual and emotional task, that accounts for betrayal and goes beyond it. Restoring faith is more difficult than developing faith in the first place.

Without faith, we have little reason to even get out of bed in the morning. With faith, our reasons for living and loving multiply exponentially. Faith cannot be prescribed or proscribed. It must be uniquely fashioned out of your experience of life. Unlike belief, faith is individual. No one else has your experience, your values, your dreams, or your faith. You can share and examine your faith with others in religious community as a way of making sense of your faith. Through such examination, faith becomes an even more compelling motivation and compass in our lives, as it ignites our commitment. Since we are made of the stuff of stars, let our faith burn brightly, pushing away the darkness and challenging those forces seeking to destroy faith.

Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: "Faith is not a thing which one 'loses,' we merely cease to shape our lives by it."

Georges Bernanos

Day 2: "Faith is a knowledge within the heart, beyond the reach of proof."

Khalil Gibran

Day 3: "You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is like an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty." Mahatma Gandhi

Day 4: "None of us knows what might happen even the next minute, yet still we go forward. Because we trust. Because we have faith." Paulo Coelho

Day 5: "You can never really know someone completely. That's why it's the most terrifying thing in the world, really—taking someone on faith, hoping they'll take you on faith too. It's such a precarious balance. It's a wonder we do it at all." Libba Bray

Day 6: "You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope." Thomas Merton

Day 7: "I don't think that we're meant to understand it all the time. I think that sometimes we just have to have faith." Nicholas Sparks

Day 8: "Faith is about doing. You are how you act, not just how you believe." Mitch Albom

Day 9: "No, I would not want to live in a world without dragons, as I would not want to live in a world without magic, for that is a world without mystery, and that is a world without faith." R.A. Salvatore

Day 10: "Faith is walking face-first and full-speed into the dark. If we truly knew all the answers in advance as to the meaning of life and the nature of God and the destiny of our souls, our belief would not be a leap of faith and it would not be a courageous act of humanity; it would just be... a prudent insurance policy." Elizabeth Gilbert

Day 11: "When you get to the end of all the light you know and it's time to step into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing that one of two things shall happen: either you will be given something solid to stand on, or you will be taught how to fly." Edward Teller

Day 12: "Faith is universal. Our specific methods for understanding it are arbitrary.

Some of us pray to Jesus, some of us go to Mecca, some of us study subatomic particles. In the end we are all just searching for truth, that which is greater than ourselves." Dan Brown

Day 13: "Faith does not eliminate questions. But faith knows where to take them." Elisabeth Elliot

Day 14: "Faith is about what you do. It's about aspiring to be better and nobler and kinder than you are. It's about making sacrifices for the good of others—even when there's not going to be anyone telling you what a hero you are." Jim Butcher

Day 15: "In order to have faith in his own path, he does not need to prove that someone else's path is wrong." Paulo Coelho



Day 16: "The greatest act of faith some days is to simply get up and face another day." Amy Gatlif

Day 17: "Love is an act of faith, and whoever is of little faith is also of little love." Erich Fromm

Day 18: "Faith gives you an inner strength and a sense of balance and perspective in life." Gregory Peck

Day 19: "I do respect people's faith, but I don't respect their manipulation of that faith in order to create fear and control." Javier Bardem

Day 20: "To have faith is to trust yourself to the water. When you swim you don't grab hold of the water, because if you do you will sink and drown. Instead, you relax, and float." Alan Watts

Day 21: "Faith is raising the sail of our little boat until it is caught up in the soft winds above and picks up speed, not from anything within itself, but from the vast resources of the universe around us." W. Ralph Ward

Day 22: "Faith and doubt both are needed—not as antagonists, but working side by side to take us around the unknown curve." Lillian Smith

Day 23: "Faith is not trying to believe something regardless of the evidence; faith is daring something regardless of the consequences." Sherwood Eddy

Day 24: "Faith enables many of us to endure life's difficulties with an equanimity that would be scarcely conceivable in a world lit only by reason." Sam Harris

Day 25: "The faith of a church or of a nation is an adequate faith only when it inspires and enables people to give of their time and energy to shape the various institutions—social, economic, and political—of the common life." James Luther Adams

Day 26: "Worry is spiritual short sight. Its cure is intelligent faith." Paul Brunton

Day 27: "The opposite of love is not hate, its indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, its indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, its indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, its indifference." Elie Wiesel

Day 28: That is the definition of faith—acceptance of that which we imagine to be true, that which we cannot prove. Dan Brown

Day 29: "All the world is made of faith, and trust, and pixie dust." J.M. Barrie, Peter Pan

Day 30: "At the point where hope would otherwise become hopelessness, it becomes faith." Robert Brault

Day 31: "A faith of convenience is a hollow faith." Father Mulcahy, M*A*S*H, "A Holy Mess," 1982



Forming an Authentic Faith

Unitarian Universalist theologian and social ethicist James Luther Adams did not conceive of faith in terms of being true or false. Rather, he was a champion of the development of authentic faith as opposed to faith that was inauthentic because of idolatry, dogmatism, self-righteousness, etc. In summarizing Adams' concept of authentic faith, George Kimmich Beach writes in *Transforming Liberalism: The Theology of James Luther Adams*, that an authentic faith

- ◆ "Focuses our attention on ultimate issues, such as God, human nature, and the meaning of life, but in a way that connects with our ...life concerns. It links ...the intimate and the ultimate dimensions of life.
- ◆ "Elicits ...a commitment that is costing in some significant way and degree. The primacy of the will ... follows from the commitment ...in favor of faith and its subsequent life decisions.
- ◆ "...wrestles with ...'principalities and powers'.... It takes responsibility for the shape of things to come in the human community. It ...even ventures a new beatitude, Blessed are the powerful.
- ◆ "Seeks to incarnate its spiritual and moral value commitments ...in social institutions. ...Therefore we may say, By their groups you shall know them.
- ◆ "Takes shape in history through the commitments that we, the promise-making animals, make with others. It is shaped by the historical covenants we form within the ...covenant of being.
- ◆ "Locates itself within the encompassing drama of history. It believes that there is a meaning in history ...that [requires] responding faithfully.... The heart of Adam's thought about the character of faith is that it takes time seriously." (pp. 289-290)

The final task of faith is its continuous renewal. Beach summarizes Adams's belief about renewal when he writes,

"Faith is formed through the historical process of human communities, and reformed through processes of 'deliberation and decision' within those communities." (This recalls the rallying cry of Ferenc Dávid, the Transylvanian founder of Unitarianism: *semper reformanda*, always reforming.) According to Beach, Adams's understanding of authentic faith involved a moral directive (i.e., "a way of living") and a critical principle (i.e., "a way of assessing life").

Crucial to this understanding was that per Socrates, an "unexamined life" is not worth living and that, per Adams, an "unexamined faith" is not worth "faithing." Both forfeit one's freedom. Adams wrote, "The free person does not live by an unexamined faith. To do so is to worship an idol whittled out and made into a fetish. The free person believes with Socrates that the true can be separated from the false only through observation and rational discussion. In this view the faith that cannot be discussed is a form of tyranny. An unexamined faith is not worth having, for it can only be true by accident. A faith worth having is a faith worth discussing and testing." For Adams, Beach writes, "The quest for a reasoned understanding has no less religious significance than faith itself and it expresses an important form of faith, namely fidelity to truth." Adams would have had no patience for either "fake news" or "alternative facts." He would have called both demonic because they are products of the dark side of human existence.

For Adams, faith is not fundamentally about one's beliefs but about one's commitments. With regard to belief, Adams developed what has been called his *Pragmatic Theory of Religious Beliefs*. By pragmatic, he was not interested in the content of belief, per se, but in how you act based upon your belief and feelings that are related to or are in tension with your action. For Adams, the concern went beyond one's personal belief. He also invited consideration of the ways in which a belief was aligned with or opposed to the



behavior exhibited by social, political, religious, and economic institutions.

Emerson wrote, "A person will worship something—have no doubt about that." In like manner, Adams wrote, "The question concerning faith is not, shall I be a person of faith? The proper question is, rather, which faith is mine? Or better, which faith should be

mine? For whether a person craves prestige, wealth, security, or amusement, whether a person lives for country, for science, for God, or for plunder, that person is demonstrating a faith, is showing that he[*she*] puts confidence in something. ...Find out what that is and you have found his[*her*] religion. You will have found his[*her*] god."

While theology has often been defined as "faith seeking understanding, Adams was more concerned with ethics, which he defined as "faith seeking understanding in the realm of action." In this, Adams argued that an inauthentic faith is a "faith that is not the sister of justice."

For Adams, authentic faith is prophetic faith. Beach writes, "Prophetic faith yields a theology of hope. It means proclaiming in the face of present injustice, a justice to come, and in the face of present hatred and fear, a peace to come—both as moral commitments and as articles of faith. It means knowing that the sin of religion is 'cheap grace,' offering spiritual comfort without 'the call to make some new sacrifices.'"

Given different approaches to faith, how can we distinguish between authentic faith and inauthentic faith? The challenge is similar to distinguishing between false and true prophets. In speaking about a tree and its fruit, Jesus spoke of the good fruit of true prophets and the bad fruit of false prophets. Jesus concluded by saying, "Therefore, by their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:20). For Adams writes Beach, "The principle is also an ethics of consequences as distinct from an ethics of conscience, an ethics concerned not only with right means but

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with good ends and not only with motives but with outcomes." Adams' tests for the authenticity of faith are these: "By their roots, you shall know them" and "By their groups, you shall know them."

Given this commitment to a very intentional form of faith, what are we to do with inauthentic faith, our own and others? For us, it means ongoing self-criticism and openness to reform. It means resisting groupthink, which is the consequence of dwelling within ideological bubbles. It means taking seriously that with which we do not believe to be true. It means thoughtfully engaging the authentic criticism by others. Beach writes, "An authentic faith is not a 'blind' but an 'examined' faith, Adams says. Its integrity depends on its ability to maintain a self-critical rather than a dogmatic or unquestioning stance."

Beach continues, "It is of course natural to resist criticism, and when it comes to matters of personal devotion, in which an emotional investment has been made, it is even more natural to resist self-criticism. While all religious traditions teach humility before the transcendent, many regularly violate the principle of humility, especially with respect to their own brand of religion." While we may be reluctant to do it, we are also required to make judgments about the faith of others, at least in terms of the fruit that they are peddling in the public square.

Adams was fond of repeating Goethe's maxim, "A tradition cannot be inherited, it must be earned." Whether born into this faith or someone who arrived in it as soon as they could, regardless of their age, how are you earning this faith? Beach suggests that "You earn a tradition in the process of making it your own. You live with it, argue with it, and restate it in the language of your own experience." And you listen carefully and critically to the language and experience of those in this faith with whom you are journeying together. The journey of faith is one of ongoing renewal and action in service of justice.

Source: Touchstones

Faith Is Different Than Beliefs

Reb Zalman

Where there is faith, there are fewer beliefs. We use beliefs to shore up opinions, rather than a relationship with the cosmos. Faith is what we call the relationship with the cosmos. It's different than beliefs.

Beliefs would be sort of the candy that comes in a candy wrapper, out of faith. But faith is the function, the deep deep function. So when you use the word faith as a noun, it doesn't work. "I should have faith." You know, I should go to the



The faith of a mustard seed

grocery store and see if I can buy some faith. It doesn't go that way.

So what is faith? Faith is "faith-ing." It's a verb. It's an activity. It's a function. And the function goes like this: "I open myself up to the central intelligence of the universe, so that I might live for the purpose for which I was made."

And when I can come with that attitude, which is the attitude that seeks to be in truth, which seeks to be able to say: what does surrender mean? Surrender means, I'm letting go of how I would like the world to be, and I'm asking the universe, "How do you want me to understand you?"

The beliefs are always going to get us into trouble! ...I remember the bumper sticker that said, "Don't believe everything you think!" In a way it's saying, your mind and your usual way [don't] have it together.

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/v2/read/view.php?tid=2573>

Faith After Doubt

Brian McLaren

The road to faith after doubt is often lonely. But beyond the loneliness, you discover a place of solidarity where everything is sacred and everything belongs, including your doubts and including you.

...We surrender the supremacy of our ego, our self-centered demands for power, pleasure, prestige, prominence. We surrender the supremacy of our group, whether that group is defined by religion, race, politics, nationality, economic class, social status, or whatever. We even surrender the supremacy of our species, realizing that humans can't survive and thrive unless the plankton and trees, the soil and bees, and the climate and seas thrive too. We gladly shed supremacy to make room for solidarity. That gain, we discover is worth every cost.

Faith after doubt, we might say, means living beyond supremacy. ...Our religious communities began speaking humbly to God, and then they spoke boldly about God, and then they spoke proudly for God, until too often they spoke arrogantly as if they were God. Our gods became our mascots and symbolized the supremacy of our race, nation, tribe, or religion.

Doubt, we might say, can liberate us from these supremacist projections. It is our way of deconstructing a foolish, ego-driven faith and preparing the way for a meaningful life—and a life-giving faith—beyond supremacy.

As we release our desperate grasp on supremacy ...something in us dies. Much is lost or forgotten, deemed not worth remembering. But in the letting go, something new comes, ...communion and union and belonging. We descend from the ladders and pedestals we have erected, and we rejoin the community of creation, the network of shalom, the ecosystem of harmony. The loss is no small thing, ah, but the gain is incomparably greater.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28653>

Family Matters



ceives those things so everyone can learn and grow together, even if what they need is different.

Transformation involves changing into something new and better. It's like when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. At first, it's a small, crawling insect, but then it changes into a beautiful butterfly that can fly. Transformation is about growing and becoming the best version of yourself.

Pluralism means welcoming and respecting different beliefs, cultures, and ideas. Imagine a

big playground where kids from many backgrounds play together. Each brings their games and stories, and everyone listens and learns from each other, making the playground an enjoyable and interesting place for all.

Generosity requires sharing what you have with others. It's like when you share your toys or snacks with friends, even when you don't have to. Being generous means you care about others and want to help them feel happy and loved.

Justice means treating everyone fairly and equally. It's like making sure everyone gets a turn on the playground or helping someone who got hurt. Justice means standing up for what's right and making sure everyone has the same chances to play, learn, and be safe.

Source: Touchstones

A Rainbow of Values

Love: Red is commonly associated with strong emotions, warmth, and affection, making it a fitting color for love.

Generosity: Orange represents warmth and enthusiasm, reflecting the kindness and energy involved in being generous.

Justice: Yellow symbolizes brightness and clarity, aligning with the idea of fairness and transparency in justice.

Transformation: Green is linked with growth and renewal, echoing the idea of change and becoming better.

Interdependence: Blue is often associated with trust and harmony, symbolizing the cooperative and connected nature of interdependence.

Pluralism: Indigo represents depth and inclusiveness, which are key aspects of embracing diverse perspectives and cultures.

Equity: Violet combines the stability of blue and the energy of red, symbolizing balance and fairness, which are central to equity.

Family Activity: *Living our Values*

Read your children the description of each value, then discuss how your family already lives this value or could live it. As a reminder of the values, get seven large, smooth stones. Write using a permanent marker one value on each stone until you have created your seven touchstones. Put these in a basket on the table where you have dinner. On some regular basis as part of a meal, invite each member of the family to take one of these touchstones and share why that value is important to him or her.



Family Activity: *Rainbow Values*

Colors were assigned to the seven principles, and a different color is used for each petal for the new values: orange, pink, purple, blue, green and yellow. You can also consider the colors assigned in the list under *A Rainbow of Values*. Discuss with your children what color they think should go with each value. Then invite them to draw a rainbow with the name of each value and the color agreed upon.

Living our Values

The UUA's Article II Study Commission has proposed seven values to replace our current seven principles and six sources. These values place Love in the center of the flower, designed by Tanya Webster, with the other six values as petals. This indicates that there is no hierarchy among the values, although the Commission has indicated that Love is the purpose of Unitarian Universalism. The following describes living our values in language accessible to children.

Love is a warm feeling you have for people who are special to you, like family and friends. It's when you care about someone deeply and want to make them happy. Love is sharing hugs, smiles, and kind words to show how much you appreciate and care for someone.

Interdependence means relying on each other and working together. It's like when a team plays soccer—they pass the ball to each other to score goals. In nature, plants need sunlight and water from the earth to grow. We all need one another to make our world a better place.

Equity happens when everyone gets what they need to be successful. Imagine a classroom where some kids need extra help with reading or special tools to write. Equity ensures each child re-

Deep Faith Lasts

Faith Waxes and Wanes

David Wolpe

...Believing does not mean steady certainty. Believing means not despairing of the worthiness of the search. ...The world may seem drained, empty. Faith is the confidence that the search is not futile. An astronomer may scour the night sky not because he believes in the certainty of this or that star, but because he knows that diligent searching will yield something. "If someone says 'I searched and did not find,' do not believe him," says the Talmud. Perhaps the Talmud is trying to say that searching is the aim, and to honestly search is to show already that one has faith.



Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav said that he was "a moon man — my faith waxes and wanes." ...Yet losing faith can be integral to having faith. Believing entails doubting. The moon waxes and wanes.

...Growing in faith means learning its resiliency and complexity. We hold it before us as a simple, fragile vase that, once dropped, is irretrievably shattered. When faith is placed in the wrong arena, it is indeed fragile. We lose faith in people, in projects, in politicians. These are subsidiary faiths. Their loss is painful but inevitable. Ultimately faith finds its character not in one's trust of another, but in one's attitude toward the universe. Faith is a sinewy, complicated creation, capable of swelling and subsiding. ... Deep faith is tough and lasting. It is durable enough to outlast even its own periodic absence.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/11769>

Faith in Life

No Return to Childhood Faith

Christian Wiman

If you return to the faith of your childhood after long wandering, people



whose orientations are entirely secular will tend to dismiss or at least deprecate the action as having psychological motivations—motivations, it goes without saying, of which you are unconscious. As it happens, you have this suspicion yourself. It eats away at the intensity of the experience that made you proclaim, however quietly, your recovered faith....

In fact, there is no way to "return to the faith of your childhood," not really, not unless you've just woken from a decades-long and absolutely literal coma. Faith is not some half-remembered.... No. Life is not an error, even when it is. That is to say, whatever faith you emerge with at the end of your life is going to be not simply affected by that life but intimately dependent upon it, for faith in God is, in the deepest sense, faith in life—which means that even the staunchest life of faith is a life of great change. It follows that if you believe at fifty what you believed at fifteen, then you have not lived—or have denied the reality of your life.

To admit that there may be some psychological need informing your return to faith does not preclude or diminish the spiritual imperative, any more than acknowledging the chemical aspects of sexual attraction lessens the mystery of enduring human love. Faith cannot save you from the claims of reason, except insofar as it preserves and protects that wonderful, terrible time when reason, if only for a moment, lost its claim on you.

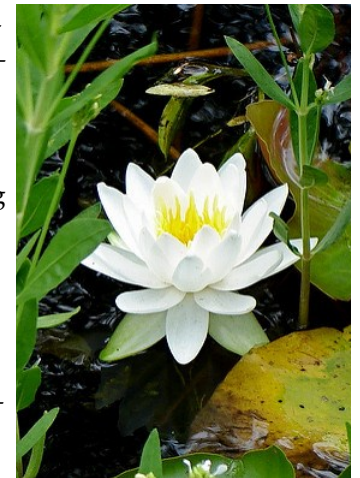
Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/25000>

An Inner Quality

Faith: Trusting Your Own Deepest Experience

Sharon Salzberg

One day a friend called to ask if we could meet.... Knowing that I was writing a book on faith from the Buddhist perspective, she was confused and wanted to talk. "How can you possibly be writing a book on faith without focusing on God?" she demanded. "Isn't that the whole point?" Her concern spoke to the common understanding we have of faith—that it is synonymous with religious adherence. But the tendency to equate faith with doctrine, and then argue about terminology and concepts, distracts us from what faith is actually about. In my understanding, whether faith is connected to a deity or not, its essence lies in trusting ourselves to discover the deepest truths on which we can rely. I want to invite a new use of the word faith, one that is not associated with a dogmatic religious interpretation or divisiveness. I want to encourage delight in the word, to help reclaim faith as fresh, vibrant, intelligent, and liberating. This is a faith that emphasizes a foundation of love and respect for ourselves. It is a faith that uncovers our connection to others, rather than designating anyone as separate and apart. Faith does not require a belief system, and is not necessarily connected to a deity or God, though it doesn't deny one.... It is an inner quality that unfolds as we learn to trust our own deepest experience.



Source: <http://www.uucdc.org/worship/sermons/all-will-be-well>

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion

Faith

Preparation: (Read *Touchstones* and the questions.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: "This is my living faith, an active faith, a faith of verbs: to question, explore, experiment, experience, walk, run, dance, play, eat, love, learn, dare, taste, touch, smell, listen, speak, write, read, draw, provoke, emote, scream, sin, repent, cry, kneel, pray, bow, rise, stand, look, laugh, cajole, create, confront, confound, walk back, walk forward, circle, hide, and seek."
Terry Tempest Williams

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake)
(In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: "Faith is a verb. You know, it's, I think, the difference between faith and religion, and — and the verb is that we — what — what joins all of us in faith, all people of all faiths, I think, is that we — we believe in — in a variation of the Golden Rule or karma, that you get back what you put in. And that if you want apricots, you're not going to grow them from tomato seeds or arugula seeds, and that we're here to take care

of one another and — and that if we want to have loving feelings, we need to do loving things; that it's really an action word...."
Anne Lamott

Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. How has your concept of faith evolved since you were a child?
2. In whom or what do you have faith? How does your faith influence how you live?
3. How would your life change if you did not have faith?
4. How has your faith evolved over time, and what experiences have influenced this evolution?
5. What does it mean to be faithful to yourself or to others? What does your faith demand of you?
6. How does your faith guide your ethical decisions and actions in daily life?
7. How can faith and reason coexist in our understanding of the world?
8. Have you ever made a leap of faith by risking trust in something or someone? How did it turn out? What lessons did you take from the experience?
9. Why, for some, is faith blind? What are some consequences of this stance?
10. In what ways is your faith a verb rather than a noun?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person for the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice (Elizabeth Selle Jones)
We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words

Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Faith Lets Go

Belief vs. Faith

Sharon Salzberg

When we hold a belief too tightly, it is often because we are afraid. We become rigid, and chastise others for believing the wrong things without really listening to what they are saying. We become defensive and resist opening our minds to new ideas or perspectives. This doesn't mean that all



beliefs are accurate reflections of the truth, but it does mean that we have to look at what's motivating our defensiveness....

With their assumptions of correctness, beliefs try to make a known out of the unknown. They make presumptions about what is yet to come, how it will be, what it will mean, and how it will affect us. Faith, on the other hand, doesn't carve out reality according to our preconceptions and desires. It doesn't decide how we are going to perceive something but rather is the ability to move forward even without knowing. Faith, in contrast to belief, is not a definition of reality, not a received answer, but an active, open state that makes us willing to explore. While beliefs come to us from outside — from another person or tradition or heritage — faith comes from within, from our active participation in the process of discovery. Writer Alan Watts summed up the difference simply and pointedly as, "Belief clings, faith lets go."

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/13797>

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