

Peace: The Virtue of Faith
by C. Forrest McDowell, PhD

What comforts you in the face of life's challenges?
What calls up a deeper form of courage or conviction in exercising your beliefs?
What allows you to entrust yourself to others or God?

The answer is Faith.

You can have faith and believe in yourself. You can have faith in another. You can have faith in God. And you can have the faith of a certain spiritual path or religious doctrines. The outcome of faith-inspired living is almost always the feeling that a refuge for our will and motivations, our wounds or doubts, our beliefs and reason is our faith. Therefore, to practice faith in daily life is to offer oneself a portable sanctuary in which to deal with the world. In many ways, our faith gives us peace of mind.

Practice Faith in Yourself

One of the greatest obstacles to living a worthwhile life is to not believe in oneself. The culprit is almost always flawed reasoning: you believe you are not worthy, talented, or smart enough.

The philosopher Voltaire reminds us: "Faith is believing when it is beyond the power of reason to believe." What he means is that the way to see by faith is to shut the mental self-critical eye of reason and to believe in your self-worth and the conviction of your heart. History holds many examples of people who made a difference in their life, family, community, country, work, or spiritual path simply because they had faith or conviction that their life was worth something. Not limited by reason such people are driven by an inner faith in themselves as it extends into something beyond them. This is what the writer Oliver Wendell Holmes meant when he said: "It's faith in something and enthusiasm for something that makes a life worth living."

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have a Dream" speech in the 1960's was a rallying call for faith, courage and unity among Afro-Americans and the downtrodden, but it was also a statement of his own faith. Later he encouraged: "Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step." The philosopher Goethe says it even more succinctly: "Just trust yourself, then you will know how to live."

Do you believe enough in yourself to take the first step toward something? Do you have, as Jesus Christ asks in the Bible, the faith of a mustard seed or the faith to move mountains? Faith must be an everyday force in your life, from the most miniscule to the grandest of your heart's desires. The Sanskrit word *shraddha* (which means *that which is placed in the heart*) addresses faith as that which we deem worth having, doing, attaining, or being. In the Bagavhad Gita of Hinduism, we are told: "Our faith conforms to our nature. Human nature is made of faith. Indeed, a person is his faith." (17:3)

A weak faith is harmful to the soul, whereas your future and inner strength can belong to you if you believe in the beauty of your dreams.

Perhaps the greatest potential for your success in exercising faith in yourself lies in these words of inspirational author Marianne Williamson: "What would you attempt to do if you knew you could not fail?"

Practice Faith in Others

When we extend our faith to others we extend the scope of our life. Faith then becomes more than something we have; it represents something we are in — a relationship. Such a relationship has as its root trust. It is this trust in another that we can also find daily refuge and peace.

At times in our life we must extend our faith/trust to others. As an infant we have a natural trust in our parents and relatives. In school we trust that our teachers are giving us educational guidance that will positively direct our future livelihood. As adults we are asked to have faith in our leaders or government. When ill or wounded we must have faith in medical practitioners and treatment. When needing consoling or spiritual guidance, we put our trust and faith in a close friend or spiritual figure.

It would be a very lonely ship on life's sea if you were not able to have faith in others to help support and guide you, if not to caution or heal you. Therefore, seek abiding relationships with others that enhance your life's journey. If you cannot place some of your faith in others whom you can trust, then you may not be following your heart's desire or conscience. Your faith, therefore, can be seen as either a fragile and vulnerable vessel or a seaworthy ship. When your conscience or heart tells you that something is not right, it is okay to jump ship for a more worthy shore. Such action does not betray your faith or trust. It simply makes you wiser and more informed, thereby hopefully leading you to a safer shore.

Practice Faith in God and/or a Spiritual Path

For most people the spiritual practice of faith is their greatest sanctuary in life. It is what gives, sustains and regenerates an inner peace, safety and comfort in face of life's buffeting winds. This spiritual form of Faith (often capitalized) depicts a personal relationship with an unseen yet omniscient and omnipotent force, such as God or Creator, including a spiritual teacher or master.

Perhaps the biggest challenges to Faith are disbelief and doubt, cynicism and fear. Such blocks often freeze life, whereas Faith can thaw it out and set life free. The physicist Albert Einstein said: "It is better to believe than to disbelieve, in so doing you bring everything to the realm of possibility." To believe in God or Creator, in a Higher Force or Guide, is to engage in a spiritual relationship that should have as its goal an open heart that can live and love without fear, and that can relax in the process.

Inspirational author Marianne Williamson speaks to this goal of our heart by asking these vital questions: "What if we truly believed there is a God — a beneficent order to things, a force that's holding things together without our conscious control? What if we could see, in our daily lives, the working of that force? What if we believed it loved us somehow, and cared for us, and protected us? What if we believed we could afford to relax?"

To believe in such a compassionate God asks of us a tremendous amount of faith. Why? Well, sometimes life does not appear fair at all. Amidst war, violence, deception by leaders; because of natural disasters that destroy homes, families, livelihoods and land; in light of devastating illness or loss of loved ones — we ask for mercy from a God we cannot see or touch in real skin, a God who at times seems indifferent to our pain, suffering and grief.

It is exactly because we have Faith that we can face the challenges in our lives. Our Faith allows us a worthy use of our time and attention. It allows us to face life's mysteries and difficulties as catalysts for renewable Faith in a Greater Power, and thus in our self. In a sense, our Faith demands us to relax and surrender our life to God, at the same time we are expected to actively live with an attitude of devotion to God.

Many people find that a personal relationship with God is enhanced by a spiritual fellowship. In belief systems such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Native American, among others, Faith is defined by an acceptance of certain religious doctrines and teachings, and an attitude of devotion and reverence. In all instances, it is the ethics of goodness and the responsibility to do good — to oneself, others, creatures, and the natural environment — that should encourage your pursuit of the truths of a certain Faith of worship.

Remember:

Your faith can never fail your need for daily sanctuary. By practicing everyday faith — in yourself, others, God, a spiritual path or teacher — you are reinvesting in the sacredness of life on Earth. You are creating peace in yourself and others.

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