

# FAITH AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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## **Faith and Grace**

As much as Grace is a factor throughout our lives, for the most part, this goes on without our conscious acknowledgement. To complete its work, which is the salvation (or *realization*) of the soul through the process of transformation, Grace must be supported by our conscious participation, and this involves conscious decisions. This is where faith comes in.

Faith<sup>1</sup> maximizes our receptivity to Grace because situations which are the bearers of Grace are difficult to discern without faith. These situations seldom promise a compensation or a payoff at an egoic level. Most (but not necessarily all) occasions where Grace operates in our lives are recognizable most clearly in retrospect. The exercise of faith enables us to recognize opportunities which are the bearers of Grace because it is through faith that we are able to progressively retrieve our attention from the gross and place it on *that* which can be discerned only with the heart. The absence of immediate compensation provides a clue to discerning the difference between situations which bring Grace and those which offer temptation. Actually, situations of Grace tax us deeply in the moment and rarely promise an immediate or palpable reward. They encourage us to deepen our commitment or give expression to a principle which we may have upheld only as an abstraction.

Our faith helps us to see our opportunities for change, for the greater the faith we touch into, the more aware we become of situations where we need to make conscious choices. This is because faith enables us to become more aware of the possibilities that Life places before us to give expression to our deeper, divine nature. This occurs in each moment that we live, but if we're short on faith, these opportunities go unrecognized.

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<sup>1</sup> **Author's Note:** I would like readers to be aware that when I speak of "faith," I'm speaking of a "thing" in itself. An editor once responded to a reference to faith that I made in my recent book with the query, "Faith in what?" Of course, this was the wrong question, for she was interpreting my use of the word to mean "belief in," whereas the faith I was writing about is something that you either have or you don't and is not dependent on another object to be realized.

We can think of faith as autonomous knowing, a way of knowing not dependent on our external senses. The operative principle of faith is that which is perceived with the heart is more real than what is seen with the eyes. Or at least, what is *perceived* with the heart is not accorded a lesser status than what is seen with the eyes. What is *that* which can be discerned only with the heart? Visions, dreams, aspirations; yearnings for our ideal, and above all, a yearning to realize our purpose for being.

### **The Birth of Faith**

*How do we acquire faith?* Faith is already potentially present in our capacity to *wonder*, to experience *awe*, and as such, is every individual's natural birthright. To sense that a solution to the riddle of one's existence exists, is the birth of faith. We acquire faith when we are able to turn from any life orientation which we know to be incongruent with our wholeness as we intuit it, or which has not brought us fulfillment. This re-orientation does not even require us to be clear on the things we feel are worth going after. All it takes is an assessment of whether the existence we already have is congruent with our reason for being.

In many respects, faith is a paradox. The act of exercising our faith is usually not very certain, but is much like trying to recall a dream, or a name we have temporarily forgotten. Usually, it is the desire to bring the details of the dream, or the name, into conscious memory that actually facilitates the process of recall. Likewise, *our desire to have faith* actually adds to our faith. Thus, when we wholeheartedly embrace and move toward the wholeness we perceive in ourselves, we grow in faith.

Our movement into a life of faith is aided by self-observation, by our being honest with ourselves, and by knowing that in turning part of our attention from the gross towards the subtle we have nothing to lose. Honest self-observation then sets into motion a virtuous circle. For it is only through quiet time spent with oneself that we experience the full intensity of our need to be our truest self. As we seek to fill this need, we're drawn to new frontiers in the pursuit of the wholeness which we seek to experience. It is in this pursuit that we encounter opportunities for transformation, and eventually the attainment of the higher consciousness necessary to realize our truest self.

From the perspective of the higher consciousness we are striving to attain and embody, transformation can only occur at our *edge*. This is where our self-definition is fuzzy, and where we are not yet crystallized. That is why our opportunities for growth are greatest when we are challenged, uncertain, when we are "unbalanced." If we demand certainty before we make a move we will not get anywhere and will stay in a stagnated condition. This is how we become crystallized. Ultimately we miss out on opportunities for actualizing our life purpose.

### **Commitment And Faith**

Here is another paradox of faith. Without spiritual or mystical experiences, faith is difficult, but faith preconditions our capacity to have spiritual and mystical experiences. Without the assurances that come from such experiences, we must be willing to *risk* something in the

effort to energize our spiritual search. We must be willing to *ante up* out of what we have, no matter how difficult our circumstances may be, or how little we seem to have. The example readily comes to mind of a farmer having to choose between consuming all of a meagre harvest of grain and setting some aside for seeding the next season's crop. The farmer's *ante* is the portion he sets aside for planting. Likewise, one of the ways that one can express faith is to commit to an act without first having a sign of assured success.

Commitment and faith are linked in the sense that commitment is the seed from which faith grows. Sometimes we are so afraid of committing to a decision as if we might discover a preferred choice the very moment we have decided. It is possible to live in a state of limbo, always waiting for the best option without ever being definite about anything in life. So we end up living our lives by default. Or it is possible that we are so afraid of the possibility of disappointment that we would rather choose less than our ideal because that gives us a sense of security. We think our ideals are best left in a "safe place," where they will remain untarnished, but alas, unrealized. This situation is not unlike stories that appear in the news from time to time about some poor recluse who dies in a condition of appalling poverty, and, to everyone's surprise, leaves a small fortune stashed away somewhere. No doubt, such a person might have started out saving for a rainy day, but has perhaps gotten so used to a life of privation that when that rainy day arrives, does not recognize it as such.

The same can happen in most of the departments of life. For instance, someone may not want to risk being hurt in a relationship with another, so withholds from loving another person as fully as he/she is capable. Or he/she may hold back something in reserve just in case the relationship does not work out. But this holding back reduces the chances of the relationship working out.

Actually, our ability to make commitments is a measure of our faith. For example, keeping our word on a promise helps us to objectively determine if we have faith or not. At the same time, the very experience of making and being able to keep a commitment increases our faith. This makes our capacity to make and keep commitments one of our more important spiritual growth levers.

Without commitment it is not possible to establish a connection between subjective (or personal) reality and Objective Reality. It is this sense of harmonious functioning between subjective inner and objective outer that eventually becomes faith.

### **Religion and Faith**

It is the responsibility of religion to help us to learn faith, and suitably equipped with faith, we will find within ourselves, the motivation to love. It doesn't matter from which religion we get our motivation to love—as long as we love.

Beliefs are important only so far as they take us to the point where we are able to act on our faith. However, when we use beliefs as a point of leverage to extract what we want out of life, the result is blind faith.

Blind faith is acting on external, rather than internal cues, but faith that is true is a product of the awakened heart. And the heart is awakened as we sense into our higher human possibilities. How do we know when we are acting on blind faith? Blind faith is engaged when we focus on a specific outcome from a situation and are not prepared to accept that events could turn out contrary to our expectations. This kind of faith is blind because it is based on a fixed definition of who we are. Instead of helping us in the process of letting go in order to let Life reveal itself to us, we allow our desires to get in the way. Blind faith is blind because it does not take us any closer to enlightenment.

Sometimes even the act of “having faith in myself,” to use a well-worn expression, can be blind, particularly when it is prompted by the need to make a good impression on others. For me to have true faith in myself is for me to know that no one will ever know me as I want to be known. It should be sufficient that I know myself, and that in itself is not a simple feat.

### **An Exercise for Strengthening Our Capacity for Faith**

We can use affirmations to help us strengthen our faith. The affirmations that are of value are the ones that serve to establish in the mind, a truth which is already contained in the heart.

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