

FAITH: from Anthony's Prelude Invocation:

However incomprehensible, a *faith* settles into our hearts that awakens the desire to understand infinity and forever. --*Invocation to Astronoesis*



Faith is not the same as opinion or belief. Faith has a “gold backing” in the immediate experience. The faith in the divine is already the presencing of the Divine. Belief is a concept based on no backing. Can you write a poem about “faith settling into your heart?” There are perspectives on faith from different traditions: the awakening of faith in Buddhism; the strong conviction of truth (shraddha) in Vedanta; Faith and Eros in Platonism; and a discussion on “The God Created in Faiths” in Corbin, about the way the divine is theophanized in the heart of each individual aspirant. I think that Brother David also has good discussions of Faith. The beginning of the way to truth is to take the “truth” words to heart.

Faith and Eros

“A faith settles in our heart” from reading the scriptures. There is a resonance in us, a recognition or reminiscence which the truth words set off. Perhaps we can see can see the role of faith in a devotion (bhakti) path, but what is its role in Wisdom (Jnana)?

Faith, as incomprehensible, has something akin to the non-discursiveness authentic nature we seek: beyond the intellect, ineffable, open and spontaneous mystery. Faith does not know the *what* of what is, but it knows the *IS*, or knows *That it is*. Reasoning can strengthen faith, and faith seems to be needed before reason can become fruitful. Reason is incapable of giving us the direct immediate experience of reality, but can clear the ground, and ultimately point us beyond... to apprehend Truth. Truth must be self-revealing. Science knows that all deductive reasoning is based on presuppositions. Only the reasoning which inquires into suppositions per-se can go beyond presuppositions, and get to the un-hypothetical. To do this, it must burn itself up as well, or surrender into the intelligence which is its source.

Faith is something which responds, or is based on what co-responds, or co-vibrates, to the reality. When faith is awakened, it is the awakening of a seed which is already in us, a recognition that “yes, this is so.” It must be because there is already in us a particle of what we seek. This is the “prayer of the heliotrope”: particle of the Sun (God) in us turns to Sun (God.)

Faith is aligned to Eros, insofar as Faith is a mixture: it knows That there is some truth, but does not know what it is. Faith is already the presence of truth working in you to draw you to Truth. If we did not have that ray in us, there could be no response. And if we already possessed, there would be no need for faith, for attraction. Eros too, as Plotinus defines it in tractate 3.5, is a mixture of plenty and poverty. We long for the object of love, because we already have tasted it. When eros fulfils itself, we have become one with the beloved or beauty, and eros is absorbed. Yet eros is the offspring or

relation of Aphrodite, the beloved. Similarly, faith is part lack and part taste. Maybe you have a seed of the truth. Maybe you have had a direct glimpse of truth. Something in you resonates when you hear the person or the words. You are not in the experience now, but you had it. Or: you have only “rumors in the ground of the soul.” Because soul is an offspring of the divine. Eros, when it attains, becomes orosis: seeing. And faith, when it attains, becomes direct experience of truth.

Will anyone really have a commitment to a path or practice without faith? At the start, how do we have the certainty that a path will do something for us if we have not yet set out on that path? What gives us the intuition to follow it before it is followed? Even when we are along some way, and are in difficult periods, what keeps us going on? Something of the goal must be there in the beginning, and in the journey. There must already be a taste in the first contact with a teaching, that gives us this assurance. And this assurance itself is part of the path and goal: faith is the presence of the desired in us from the start.

For example, you read a sentence in Plotinus, or in Nagarjuna, which is difficult, or which you don't quite agree with. What is the role of faith in reading this sentence? If you have a conviction that Plotinus is speaking valuable and truthful words, you will read carefully. If you are immediately struck and resonate with the words, you get inspired, stop reading, breathe the words in and let them open you to deeper experiences. If you are not immediately taken by the words, you may just read on. If you find an objection or doubt arising, what will you do? You might just disregard the passage. But if you have faith, you will keep at it, and try to make sense of what is written. This will cause you to inquire more deeply and ultimately to get a response. You will gain a new understanding, experience, or inspiration.

This faith in the teachings depends on our previous discipline, not just good luck. How strongly we hold on to, or can let go of, our own presuppositions and emotions and filters affects our ability to listen deeply. On the other hand, if we just believe everything we hear, blind faith, and leave it at that, “yes, I believe,” then we are left on the surface. We go on to the next quote without taking it in. So faith can take us more deeply and we can actualize the faith by experience and understanding.

So there is a faith that comes from blind belief. There is the faith that comes from our pre-disposition to a particular path, maybe a remembrance of the past or of the timeless. There is the faith that comes from reasoning. There is the faith that comes from the residue or mark of a glimpse.

Awakening of faith

In a first century text The Awakening of Faith in Mahayana” Ashvaghosa writes about the awakening of the seed of enlightenment in us. The faith arising from these words awakens desire to understand.

“For the purpose of awakening in all beings a pure faith in Mahayana...I write this discourse”...”What is Mahayana? It is the hsin of all sentient beings, that constitutes all things in the world, phenomenal and noumenal; and through this hsin we can disclose what Mahayana signifies.” D.T. Suzuki Translation
Suzuki explains that the Chinese word *hsin* literally means kernel, heart or essence of things. In the text it is used to translate both *hridaya* (kernel or heart) and *Citta*

(Intelligence stuff). Suzuki uses the word “soul” to translate it. It seems that intelligence-heart is a good term here

In a teaching given in the Spring of 2004 HHDL talks about faith as a seed from which everything will grow. In his discussion of Dzog-chen, he says that Faith brings experience of the nature of mind.

His Holiness explains three levels of faith:

- a. *Hearing faith*: hearing the stories, hearing about the teachings ignites your longing and faith.
- b. *Aspiring faith*: suffering bring you a longing to get out of ignorance, and so faith in the teaching is born.
- c. *Trusting faith*: from your heart, the direct experience brings certainty that only by faith in the dharma can you get truth.

Once we have faith, we take refuge: we recognize our dependence on the Overself, the World-Mind and the community of Sages.

Sufism: “The God Created in the Faiths”

In "The Creative Imagination of Ibn Arabi," Corbin discusses the view of theophany and the presence of God in us as "the God created in the Faiths." Each being is an epiphany of the Divine, each being is an “instance” of God. As such, each being is invested with a divine ray or mark of intelligence, called a divine Name. This name is at once the Lord of our inner being, and the form of our beloved. This presence is recognized in the heart, and by the heart, when the heart is awakened. Thus “faith” is the aptitude of the heart, invested by God to receive God in a certain modality.

“the Divine Being is epiphanized in the heart of every faithful believer in accordance with the aptitude of his heart, or in other words, it always takes a Form corresponding to the exigence and receptivity constituting this aptitude.” P. 196

In opening our heart, the gnostics cease to impose their own images, conditioning and judgments on the incoming inspirations. Instead, “the gnostic’s heart is colored in every instant by the color, that is, the modality of the form in which the Divine Being is epiphanized to him.” This means we are open and receptive to the influx, and also that the influx is in a modality which resonates with our heart, the flavor of the Divine Name by which we are named. Arabi calls the unique window to the divine available to the heart of the mystic Gnostic “the God who is in a faith.”

“The god who is in a faith is the God whose form the heart contains, who discloses Himself to the heart in such a way that the heart recognizes him. Thus the eye sees only the god of the faith.” Since the form in which he discloses Himself in a faith is the form of that faith, the theophany takes the dimension of the receptacle that receives it, the receptacle in which he discloses Himself. The faith reveals the measure of the heart’s capacity. This is why there are many different faiths. To each believer, the Divine Being is he who is disclosed to him in the form of his faith.” 197

There is a paradox here. We, the non-gnostics, receive things only according to the conditioned mind, through our filters and presuppositions. The Gnostic heart is open, ready, passive to the Divine. And yet, Corbin says: “it is true to speak of an aptitude or capacity of the gnostic’s heart, for it is in this heart and there alone that the “god created in the faiths” shows His truth.” Corbin states the paradox like this: “the revelation or knowledge he has of god is the same as that which God has of him and the gnostic’s heart is predisposed to the reception of all forms of theophany...” 196 He makes the distinction more clear further on:

“this vision is no longer given him in the form of this or that faith prescribed and imposed by a religious or social collectivity. What is disclosed to the Gnostic is the form in which he himself is known to Him who evoked his being. .. whose knowledge of him has the same form as his knowledge of it.” 198

As a further dimension of this opening of the heart to the Divine, we find the fulfillment of the longing to unite with the beloved. The Gnostic will “understand his unity of essence... with the divine totality... the form of the particular faiths cease to be veils... and become manifestations in which God is contemplated.” And in this way “is confirmed the paradoxical depth of the bond between the Lord and his fedele.” Finally, he finds that “the God created in the faiths... is one of the forms of the Divine Imagination revealing himself to Himself...”