

Faith and Loss of Faith

By Susan Gammage ¹

To help answer the questions posed by my Bahá'í-inspired life coaching clients, I put together the following Q and A.

What is Faith?

The first sign of faith is love. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 337)

By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v3, p. 549)

The essence of faith is fewness of words and abundance of deed. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 156)

Faith is the magnet which draws the confirmation of the Merciful One. (Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 62)

Faith does not consist in belief, it consists in deeds. It is not sufficient to believe in Bahá'u'lláh and to say, "I am of the people of El-Abhá"; we must act in accordance with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, who commands us to become centers of divine attraction, so that the attributes of God may emanate from us, that we may become wise and well intentioned to all the peoples of the earth in order to better the condition of all. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Divine Philosophy, p. 41)

Regarding the "two wings" of the soul: These signify wings of ascent. One is the wing of knowledge, the other of faith, as this is the means of the ascent of the human soul to the lofty station of divine perfections. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 382)

This spirit of faith is the flame of reality, the life of humanity and the cause of eternal illumination. It inspires man to attain the virtues and perfections of the divine world. It is my hope that each one of you may become conscious of this flame. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Divine Philosophy, p. 122)

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There are three kinds of Faith: first, that which is from tradition and birth. For example: a child is born of Muhammadan parents, he is a Muhammadan. This faith is weak traditional faith: second, that which comes from Knowledge, and is the faith of understanding. This is good, but there is a better, the faith of practice. This is real faith. ('Abdu'l-Bahá in London, pp. 64-65)

In future, of course, certain people will come to you claiming faith; do not believe them nor trust them, unless after critical examination, search and investigation, and a long period of waiting, they shall appear to be faithful and truthful in word, confident in heart, attracted in spirit, pure in intention, patient in hardship, enduring the most severe tests; then associate with them. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 412)

THIS IS FAITH

Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum

To walk where there is no path
To breathe where there is no air
To see where there is not light-
This is Faith.

To cry out in the silence,
The silence of the night,
And hearing no echo believe
And believe again and again-
This is Faith.

To hold pebbles and see jewels
To raise sticks and see forests
To smile with weeping eyes-
This is Faith.

To say: "God, I believe" when others deny,
"I hear" when there is no answer,
"I see" though naught is seen-
This is Faith.

And the fierce love in the heart,
The savage love that cries

Hidden Thou art yet there !
Veil Thy face and mute Thy tongue
yet I see and hear Thee, Love,
Beat me down to the bare earth,
Yet I rise and love Thee, Love !"
This is Faith.

Why is it important to have faith?

But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it cannot discover the heavenly secrets. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 208)

Shouldst thou remain firm and steadfast in faith, the desire of thy heart and soul will become realized, thou wilt find the utmost joy and wilt be assisted. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v3, p. 669)

I say unto you that any one who will rise up in the Cause of God at this time shall be filled with the spirit of God, and that He will send His hosts from heaven to help you, and that nothing shall be impossible to you if you have faith. And now I give you a commandment which shall be for a Covenant between you and me: that ye have faith; that your faith be steadfast as a rock that no storms can move, that nothing can disturb, and that it endure through all things even to the end; even should ye hear that your Lord has been crucified, be not shaken in your faith; for I am with you always, whether living or dead; I am with you to the end. As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be. This is the standard -- this is the standard -- this is the standard. ('Abdul-Bahá, Bahá'í Scriptures, pp. 504-505)

... there is no greater torture than being veiled from God, and no more severe punishment than sensual vices, dark qualities, lowness of nature, engrossment in carnal desires. When they are delivered through the light of faith from the darkness of these vices, and become illuminated with the radiance of the Sun of Reality, and ennobled with all the virtues, they esteem this the greatest reward, and they know it to be the true paradise. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 324)

Oh, trust in God! for His Bounty is everlasting, and in His Blessings, for they are superb. Oh! put your faith in the Almighty, for He faileth not and His goodness endureth for ever! His Sun giveth Light continually, and the Clouds of His Mercy are full of the Waters of Compassion with which He waters the hearts of all who trust in Him. His refreshing Breeze ever carries healing in its wings to the parched souls of men! ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 108)

How do we acquire faith or help it grow?

How can one increase in faith? You must strive. ('Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 64)

... love strengthened the disciples when their faith was failing. ('Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 88)

The second Tajalli is to remain steadfast in the Cause of God -- exalted be His glory -- and to be unswerving in His love. And this can in no wise be attained except through full recognition of Him; and full recognition cannot be obtained save by faith in the blessed words: 'He doeth whatsoever He willeth.' Whoso tenaciously cleaveth unto this sublime word and drinketh deep from the living waters of utterance which are inherent therein, will be imbued with such a constancy that all the books of the world will be powerless to deter him from the Mother Book. O how glorious is this sublime station, this exalted rank, this ultimate purpose! (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 51)

As affirmed by the Centre of the Covenant, Huqúq offerings constitute a test for the believers and enable the friends to become firm and steadfast in faith and certitude. (the Universal House of Justice, Huqúqu'lláh, #100)

Whosoever and whatsoever meeting becometh a hindrance to the diffusion of the Light of Faith, let the loved ones give them counsel and say: "Of all the gifts of God the greatest is the gift of Teaching. It draweth unto us the Grace of God and is our first obligation. Of such a gift how can we deprive ourselves? Nay, our lives, our goods, our comforts, our rest, we offer them all as a sacrifice for the Abhá Beauty and teach the Cause of God." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 448)

The beloved of the Lord must stand fixed as the mountains, firm as impregnable walls. Unmoved must they remain by even the direst adversities, ungrieved by the worst of disasters. Let them cling to the hem of Almighty God, and put their

faith in the Beauty of the Most High; let them lean on the unfailing help that cometh from the Ancient Kingdom, and depend on the care and protection of the generous Lord. Let them at all times refresh and restore themselves with the dews of heavenly grace, and with the breaths of the Holy Spirit revive and renew themselves from moment to moment. Let them rise up to serve their Lord, and do all in their power to scatter His breathings of holiness far and wide. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p9. 9-10)

Do not allow your minds to dwell on the present, but with eyes of faith look into the future, for in truth the Spirit of God is working in your midst. (Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 169)

Thank God for that He enlightened your faces by the light of guidance, deposited in your hearts the sign of faith, and made you of the chosen ones in this new century. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 70)

Having received such favour be thankful unto God, and never doubt His Goodness and Loving Kindness but have undying faith in the Bounties of the Kingdom. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 170)

If any test fall upon thee, it will be conducive to the strength of thy faith. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v3, p. 552)

Faith in God, and the knowledge of Him cannot be fully realized except through believing in all that hath proceeded from Him, and by practising all that He hath commanded and all that is revealed in the Book from the Supreme Pen. (Bahá'í Scriptures, p. 153)

Meekness and humility are the hallmarks of faith. As soon as a believer feels himself the least degree superior to others, the beginning of his spiritual decline has set in, all unaware to himself. (Bahá'í Scriptures, p. 449)

The quintessence of this chapter is that travellers in the path of faith and seekers for the cup of assurance must sanctify and purify themselves from all material things; that is, the ear from hearing statements, the heart from doubts which pertain to the veils of glory, the soul from dependence upon worldly belongings, the eye from contemplating mere transitory words. (Bahá'í Scriptures, p. 3)

Why don't we always feel faith?

O MOVING FORM OF DUST!

I desire communion with thee, but thou wouldst put no trust in Me. The sword of thy rebellion hath felled the tree of thy hope. At all times I am near unto thee, but thou art ever far from Me. Imperishable glory I have chosen for thee, yet boundless shame thou hast chosen for thyself. While there is yet time, return, and lose not thy chance. (Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words, Persian 21)

What happens when we don't have faith?

If the heart turns away from the blessings God offers how can it hope for happiness? If it does not put its hope and trust in God's Mercy, where can it find rest? . . . Is it wise to turn away from such a loving Father, Who showers His blessings upon us, and to choose rather to be slaves of matter? ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 108)

How do people lose their faith?

How many a soul hath turned itself unto the Lord and entered into the protective shadow of His Word, and become famed throughout the world -- for example, Judas Iscariot. And then, when the tests grew harsh and the violence thereof intensified, their feet slipped on the pathway and they turned backward from the Faith after having acknowledged its truth, and they denied it, and fell away from harmony and love into mischief and hate. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 162)

It is not unusual for people to be drawn to the Faith because they see in it the fulfilment of the ideals which are dear to their hearts. But, if a soul truly recognizes Bahá'u'lláh, and his understanding of the teachings deepens, he will gradually see how his own ideals are but facets in the all-embracing Purpose of God, and will be willing to endure all manner of suffering and frustration for the sake of the fulfilment of that divine Purpose. If, however, the believer allows his own ideals and purposes to retain their pre-eminence in his thinking, and he finds he cannot pursue them as he wishes, it may result in his leaving the Faith to pursue them in other ways. This is what would seem to have happened to the friends you speak of. (From a letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 21 Jun 1989)

In large part, therefore, loss of faith in traditional religion has been an inevitable consequence of failure to discover in it the guidance required to live with modernity, successfully and with assurance. (Universal House of Justice, One Common Faith, para 19)

What can we hold on to, when our tests are so great, that we lose hope?

O My servants! Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things contrary to your wishes have been ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight, are assuredly in store for you. Worlds, holy and spiritually glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes. You are destined by Him, in this world and hereafter, to partake of their benefits, to share in their joys, and to obtain a portion of their sustaining grace. To each and every one of them you will, no doubt, attain. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 329)

Are there role models we can follow?

Her life was full of events, full of sacrifices in the path of God. Ever since her childhood she had to endure hardships and share the exile and persecution that Bahá'u'lláh had to suffer. In her face one could easily read the history of the Cause from its earliest days to the present moment.

Notwithstanding all this she never grumbled nor lost her faith in the future. She kept cheerful and tried to give cheer to others. She was a real source of inspiration to every person that met her. (Bahíyyih Khánum, p. 89)

May her glorious spirit inspire us with faith and hope, steel our energies and enable us to make every sacrifice in the path lighted by her saintly and eventful life. (Bahíyyih Khánum, p. 69)

May the memory of her saintly life inspire you with faith and hope, cheer and strengthen your heart and make of you a servant worthy to promote and consolidate the interests of the Faith! (Bahíyyih Khánum, p. 71)

To begin with, they were far from home, surrounded and cut off by the foe; again, they were starving; and then there were the army's sudden onslaughts and the bombshells raining down and bursting in the heart of the Fort. Under such circumstances to maintain an unwavering faith and patience is extremely difficult, and to endure such dire afflictions a rare phenomenon. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Memorials of the Faithful, p. 7)

What prayers can I say to help it grow?

Verily, I beseech the Lord of Hosts to increase thy faith each day over that of the previous day, to confirm thee through His Holy Spirit, to give thee capacity to partake of the lights of knowledge and wisdom, to make thee a herald of the Covenant in those

regions, and to instruct thee in that which thou knowest not. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 166)

I beg of God that He may increase joy and fragrance in thy spirit, give thee power and strength, and that He may help thee at every moment in faith and assurance. Verily my Lord is powerful in all things! (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 219)

O Lord my God! Assist Thy loved ones to be firm in Thy Faith, to walk in Thy ways, to be steadfast in Thy Cause. Give them Thy grace to withstand the onslaught of self and passion, to follow the light of divine guidance. Thou art the Powerful, the Gracious, the Self-Subsisting, the Bestower, the Compassionate, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful. ('Abdul-Bahá, Bahá'í Prayers, p. 165)