



THE MEANING OF FAITH By Hazrat Inayat Khan

Often people use the word 'faith' in the sense of a particular religion they follow, whether a person belongs to the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or another religion. And in this way they obscure the real meaning of faith, but faith is the culmination of belief. Belief is a conception, a conception which one has made oneself or a conception of a certain idea made by reading something. One will hold this belief as long as one's reason is not strong enough to root it out, or as long as one will not meet someone who will dig it out, or as long as one has not met with an experience which entirely destroys it. How many do you see in this world, counting spiritual words on their rosary, sitting in churches with eyes closed, worshipping - every Sunday; and yet if someone who is more intellectual and whose reasoning is more powerful meets them, this person changes them completely! From orthodox one has become a practical man, from a dreamer one has become wide awake.

No doubt one belief can be stronger than another. A sheep-like belief is a belief which everyone holds without admitting it. People think that they have a reason for believing that which they believe, but this is not always so. Often someone thinks that one has a reason for something, but one may be wrong. Religious questions apart, when one comes to political questions, one may be raised high by the doings of one person and the whole country follows the one who becomes the man of the day. Everyone follows him with closed eyes. But then this one may be despised by one other person and the crowd despises this one too. That is crowd psychology. At the same time everyone says, "I am an intellectual. I always tell the truth for I know what I am speaking about." But is it so? It is not. When I went to Russia I saw in every little shop the picture of the Czar and the Czarina. Do you think the people did not have a feeling of adherence towards the Czar? Was it all hypocrisy? It cannot be so. And what happened the next day? They broke the crowns in the street with hammers and carried them in their processions. Where had that belief gone, which one day was so great that they thought that the picture of their Czar was sacred? Next day this belief was changed; it took no time. You may think, "This happened in Russia"; but you will see it in every country just by studying the psychology of the crowd.

Therefore wise people never depend upon the praise of the crowd. They always knew what it was worth: nothing. Buddha, with all the worship and praise given to him did not even look at it. He kept his work before his eyes, his service to humanity, and so did all the sages and prophets and seers and thinkers; they never believed in the praise of mankind, in its love and affection. What is it? Those who have not reached the realm of faith are not living; they do not yet know their mind. One day they believe something, the next they do not. Therefore faith is not only to adhere to a certain religion or to belong to a certain church; faith is much greater than that.

The next step on the path of belief is that one does not believe because the crowd believes something, but because it comes from a certain authority. This is the child's belief, but at the same time this is the way one has to go. The child progresses when the mother says, "This is called water", and it repeats, "Water". It does not argue and say, "It is not water, it is bread". It just listens and believes, and that is the way it begins to learn.

Then there is the third step, when the belief has a reason, when one says, "Why do I believe? Because I have a reason for it. I can explain my belief; therefore I believe it is such and such". This belief is more

dependable. Yet, is reason always dependable? Reason sometimes proves to be so tricky that one day one may reason out a certain thing, and the next day one has every reason to root one's belief out. For is it not reason that makes the evil-doer commit evil? No one does anything without reason. One day a person reasons how to do something, and after only a couple of hours one may discover that it was not a right reason.

But there is a fourth belief, which alone can be called belief, a belief which does not even depend upon reason, a belief which is a natural belief; one cannot help having it. Nothing can root it out, no argument, no reasoning, no study, no practice, nothing can take it away from you, for it is a natural belief. This is what is faith. The one who has not reached this belief is still on the way and cannot say, 'I have faith'.

Faith is such a great virtue. Even in our everyday life we cannot enough value a companion, a relative, a servant, or a friend who is faithful. There is no price for it, it is beyond price to have some persons who are faithful, some in whom one can have confidence, upon whom one can rely with closed eyes, of whom one can say that one can be sure that they will never change their affection, their love, their kindness, their right feeling. If one has someone like this it is to be most thankful for, as it is more precious than any worldly treasure.

If I had to describe the meaning of faith I would say, faith means self-confidence. The secret of faith is that it can be used as a medicine and better than medicine, as wealth and greater than wealth; it can be religion and greater than religion, happiness and greater than happiness. For nothing can buy or sell faith. If there is anything that can be called the grace of God it is faith and self-confidence. It is something one cannot teach nor develop; it must be in you, and it can only be strengthened by loving it, by enjoying it. It develops by itself. If a person comes to me and says, "I believe in you so much that I will believe anything you say; but I do not believe in myself", I will say, "Thank you, I will not believe in you either. You better believe in yourself first; then I can depend upon you". What kind of belief is this? When one does not believe in oneself one will say one day, "I believe in you", and the next day, "I do not believe in you". Besides, faith is inspiring, faith makes one brave, courageous, successful, and faith gives a wonderful life.

Faith can be observed in five different aspects:

faith in one's impulses
faith in one's reason
faith in one's principle
faith in one's ideal
and faith in God.

It is the mystical temperament when one has faith in one's impulse. When a mystic thinks, "I must go to the North", the mystic goes there not wondering why; accepting the divine impulse, and going towards the North to meet what one will meet. If there comes an impulse, "I must do this business, I must enter this profession, I must accomplish this or that", when a person does it there is something wonderful about it. Columbus is an example of this. He had the impulse to go and seek for India, and he found indeed a continent. The outer form of the impulse was wrong, but the inner right.

The mystics of all ages have believed in this. They cannot help it, it is the mystical temperament. If a thousand people say, "No, it is not right", the mystic says, "Yes, it is right. I must do it". It is not necessary for everybody to become a mystic in order to have these impulses and listen to them.

Listening to one's impulses is a question of temperament. There is someone who has it, and another, perhaps a very intellectual person, thinks, "Is it right or wrong? Shall I do it or shall I not do it?" And the time passes and the chance is lost. Out of a hundred people only one will follow one's impulse, and ninety-nine will wait to see if something is right or wrong, light or heavy.

The second aspect is faith in reason. The success of great inventors such as Edison depends upon faith in reason. If they had not had this faith they would not have been able to create successfully, but by having it they made wonderful inventions.

The third aspect of faith is faith in one's principle. Principle makes one strong, if only one has faith in it. There is a story of the young Prophet, who was taking care of the cows in a farm. When some young men of his age came and said, "Mohammed, come along, we are going to town and have a good time there!" Mohammed answered, "No, I will take care of your cows and you go and have a good time. I won't leave my cows". With this principle the Prophet began; and one day the same principle made him what he was, so that thousands and millions of people for fourteen centuries have the name of the Prophet as their strength and power.

And then there is the faith in the ideal. Those who had a high ideal for the welfare of their nation, of their race, of humanity, kept their lives cheap. To give their life was nothing to them, their ideal was always greater. This ideal is not for the ordinary person, but it gives great power and upliftment, which raises one from earth to heaven.

Finally there is the faith in God. People may say, "Is it not imagination to have faith in God?" But the one who really has faith in God can work wonders.

Someone said to a Brahmin, "How foolish, o Brahmin, to worship an idol, calling it God"! The Brahmin answered, "If you have no faith and you worship the God who is in heaven He will not hear you. But if I have faith I will make this God of stone speak to me".

A preacher once told his audience, "When you speak the Name of God with true faith you can walk on the waters". There was a farmer standing there who was very pleased to hear this. He went home pondering upon it. Next day he went to the preacher and said, "I could not understand all the dogmas and morals you preached, but one thing impressed me very much. Will you do me the great honor to have dinner with me?" The preacher accepted, and the farmer said that he would come to fetch him the day after. This the farmer did, and on their way they came to a river which they had to cross. So the preacher said, "Where is the boat?" The farmer said, "Boat? You have taught me that if we pronounced the name of God we could walk on the water! Therefore I did not take my boat but walked on the water, as you said". The preacher was very much afraid that he would have to walk on the water too, for he had never tried this. He said, "Will you do it, please"? And the farmer did; but the preacher could not.

Such is the phenomenon of faith. We may say, "We have so much to do, so much to think about". But to have faith is beyond all this; it is something which words cannot explain, something which springs up from the heart and which elevates one, raising one from the earth to the sky.

May God bless you.