

BEING FAITHFUL

Nanci Shanderá, Ph. D.
©2001

What do you envision when you hear the word, “faith?” Perhaps you picture a monk in constant prayer, or someone who sets aside worldly concerns for the sake of spiritual experience. Maybe you imagine a person who has unrealistic ideals. What does the word evoke in you? Have you had challenges where nothing helped but faith in an ineffable something?

In his thought-provoking book, *The Mystical Christ*, Manley P. Hall defines mysticism as “...a conviction, deriving its authority from the natural instincts of the human heart.” He goes on to say that mysticism helps us to bridge the distance between ourselves and the Divine, and that this is done through faith.

I began contemplating the concept of faith from a mystical, non-religious standpoint. Faith seems almost foreign in our technological society. Many of our organized religions pass faith down to us as an impersonal encounter and we may therefore be disinterested in following it any further.

As I continued to delve into what faith is, I realized that it is something that must emerge organically and mysteriously (i.e., not having any logical explanation). It is that ineffable something that arises out of challenge, trauma, suffering, or deep loss. When our hearts or bodies break, or our minds are filled with confusion, or we find we have nowhere to turn, that is when faith emerges from the depths - and not from the depths “out there” somewhere, but from *within* us. We discover it was there all the time as a natural and instinctive part of being a Soul living a human life. I believe faith is the “communication software” that connects the Soul to our human aspects.

A few months ago, I experienced a severe cat bite on my left hand. Since I am left-handed, and am a writer and artist, using only my right hand was quite a challenge. Also, it was a shock when I discovered how long this type of injury takes to heal and what hard work is involved in the recovery process. At first, I despaired of ever having a normal hand again. It was quite a frightening thought. But because I’ve learned that fear can be quite an ally if I listen to it and then take action, I began to fight to regain the full use of my hand again. This process was to ultimately my faith in that invisible stuff of which all of life is made, without error or conditions. As my hand responded to my communications of love and appreciation, it showed progressive signs of healing. That increased my faith in the miracle of the intelligence of the human body. That, in turn, created an exponential faith in other parts of my life as well. I began experiencing a decrease in worry and other bothersome habits, an increase in joyousness about life as well as being alive, and a renewed passion for my work as a healer-teacher. I noticed an appreciation of physically-challenged people. I began taking joy in all the little things I could do each day with my hand. It was a sort of “stopping and smelling the roses” exercise. Buttering a slice of hot bread became a delicious victory and amazement at the delicate workings of the

hand and the vast intelligence of the maker of hands and all things.

When we neglect the wondrous offerings in challenges and sufferings by believing in only the trouble itself, we miss out on the incredible bliss of the call of faith. Hall says faith emerges as reason fails. and I can attest to the truth of that: my usually adept intellect had nothing to contribute to my feelings about the potential of losing use of my hand. There was only one place for me to go - and that was toward faith. Faith while I walked this precarious and mysterious path. Faith while doctors and hand therapists poked and pulled. Faith when "helpful" people shared their horror stories of cat bites and lifelong disabilities.

The faith that grew as my hand healed was most definitely orchestrated by my heart. In turn, that faith helped to open my heart to an even greater degree. Dancing on the mystical bridge between self and the Divine makes me smile at how unique are our calls to the bridge.