

“Faith” Is Your Attitude Toward Reality

Faith is belief. Faith is trust. Faith is a belief system. Faith is loyalty. Faith is oathkeeping.

“Faith” seems to be quite a lot of things. What holds these things in common?

I don’t normally fight to reclaim words, but this one has power. And its underlying meaning cuts through some of the clutter it’s acquired over the years.

In a spiritual context, I think that “faith” is neither about loyalty nor belief, but about the attitude that yields both justified belief and justified loyalty to the highest ideal. That attitude precedes belief and shapes interpretation. What you grok about the fundamental nature of the world will strongly determine the reality you encounter.

That attitude is what I’d like to call “faith.”

You can use another word for it if you’d like. Russian-American philosopher Ayn Rand called it a “sense of life.”

“A sense of life is a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence. It sets the nature of a man’s emotional responses and the essence of his character.”

To the extent that this predisposition isn’t gained consciously, people can’t be praised or condemned for the quality and nature of their faith. But it is true that it’s possible to cultivate and shape a sense of life once you know you have it.

The faith that actually matters is how you are predisposed to judge reality and to act. If you cultivate that, it will prepare you to act almost automatically for the good – particularly in crises, when it’s especially important that someone choose the good.

And that’s how “faith” can indeed be a virtue – if your sense of life gets the world right.

Namely, you need to believe that if reality is obeyed and acknowledged, your life will be better than if you did not. It’s simple enough, but many people never learn this. Those who do fear very little, because they know that they are at peace with reality. What can stand against people when people stand with the truth about how things are?

To have faith in this way means to have something more powerful than a conscience or a belief system. These are merely reactive.

Faith – your attitude toward reality – informs and grounds every decision. It does matter, and it can be developed. And you don't have to be religious at all to understand that "faith" in this sense is as important for the least pious as it is for the most pious. Faith is a moral operating system that does for you what calculation cannot.

Experience what it's like to work with reality instead of against it. Then remind yourself in every choice to choose the option that favors truth. When you do, that faith will come of its own accord.

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