SPIRITUAL LESSONS FOR YOUR PERSONAL GROWTH

UBJ Issue # 84

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Have Faith

What is the level of your faith?

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Revealing Word defines faith as "... a deep inner knowing that that which is sought is already ours."

Perhaps the simplest way to describe faith is a “belief in the seemingly impossible that goes beyond the knowledge of our experience. A belief in which we can put our trust."

When Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus, his faith that he could restore life in his friend, went far beyond the fact that Lazarus had been entombed for four days. Before a magician performs an impossible stunt, he must practice the process over and over until it is a routine he can perform without concern. Jesus didn't have a secret rehearsal with God to perfect his approach for the instant restoration of life. He just did it in the moment at hand because his faith was absolute. Not a single ounce of disbelief. He had 'a deep inner knowing that that which he sought was already his.'

So when we ask 'what is the level of your faith,' how would you respond?

I have some faith; [ ]

I have a moderate amount of faith; [ ]

My faith is strong; or [ ]

I have faith so firm it cannot be swayed. [ ]

Personally, my faith is basically 'strong,' but I admit to having moments when my faith gets pretty rattled. You see, even with faith I still get riled up over news of senseless carnage, yet on a day-to-day basis, my faith is filled knowing that everything in my life is working together to fulfill a Divine plan of good.

The reason for asking about your level of faith is because the world is giving us the appearance a pending apocalypse. Yet, there are
at least some faith-filled optimists who say we're going through a global cleansing process. The following observation by Alan Cohen is a good example.

"Is this madness an indication that humanity has sunk to the brink of oblivion? I have a different take on the craziness. I believe we are in the midst of a huge transformation--of which you are a vital part--and as a result, an abundance of muck, insanity, and weirdness are coming up for cleansing and healing. This process is like the agitation cycle in a washing machine. All the dirt comes to the surface so it can be purged. If you didn't know this was just one phase in a larger cycle, you would be disgusted by the sight and smell, and you would think that muck has triumphed. But it hasn't. It is in the final stage before it is flushed away. Behind the horrid news stories and media hypes, fundamental human goodness thrives. The darkness actually calls forth the light because it presents us with the stark and unmistakable contrast between what we want and what we don't want. When we make that vital choice, goodness ensues because it is connected to Spirit, and dysfunction is not. Nature bats last, and our deepest nature is to be divine." - Alan Cohen.

Personally, I like Alan's take on us going through a cleansing cycle; with the muck about to be rinsed and flushed away. The big question is, 'Do I have a strong enough faith to hold to this image during the tumbling, rinse, draining and spinning cycles?' I'm willing to give it my best, are you?

When we are inundated with news stories of young unarmed black men being shot to death by zealous cops, or police targeted and murdered by snipers, a deranged white boy killing several senior citizens in a bible study class just because they were black, a radicalized Muslim man and his wife killing a bunch of co-workers at a Christmas party, or another one gunning down over 50 people attending an LGBT night club, or the ISIS group attacking Paris party goers, or . . . the list goes on, seemingly endlessly, it's easy to let fear and anger reduce our faith in the goodness of humankind to almost zero.

But it is important to remember that with a population of over 9 billion, the percentage involved in these gross insanities is minuscule by comparison. For the vast majority of us life is not a fearful
experience. We can walk through our neighborhoods and talk to our neighbors, or go to a movie or the supermarket without ever looking over our shoulder or tensing our bodies, ready to fight or take flight at any second we hear a strange noise or see a shadowy movement. We go to work, take vacations and buy something new to wear 'just because' and think nothing of it. Our National Parks are overflowing with tourists and travelers from all over the world, and life is good. And it IS good!

In all likelihood we don't need stronger military defenses, we need better and more helpful psychological treatment of and for the people with stress-induced psychotic behavior. We need to remember that love conquers anger and fear.

What it appears we are going through - globally - is a time of transformation colliding with the resistance to any kind of change by those who are seeing the world passing them by, and in the process they feel their identity is being lost or destroyed.

Jesus was not only going through a time of transformation, He was helping to create it. He faced all kinds of resistance within his own religious group, and the Roman Empire was as dictatorial as they come. But his faith was limitless, whether he was dealing with healing the sick, facing temptations, raising the dead or feeding thousands of followers.

Jesus said, "Ask knowing you will receive and you will receive." His first miracle depicted in Scripture came at the wedding in Cana where he turned water into wine. Jesus asked the servants to draw the first glass and take it to the steward of the feast. There is no indication that he tasted it first to check his results, he had no doubt that he had done what he said and that it far surpassed what the host had served earlier. (John 2:1-11).

Faith and expectation are closely aligned. If we ask without any expectation, it is the same thing as asking without faith, and we will get nothing in return. No faith; no expectation; no results.

But with faith, expectations are limitless. After addressing the 5000, Jesus took five loaves of bread and two fish, "he looked up to
heaven, and blessed, and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were all satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over." (Matt. 14:19-20).

Faith and lack of faith are like the two dogs in the Native American legend. An Indian brave approaches the chief and tells him, "I feel as though there are two dogs at war inside me. One is good, the other is evil, and I don't know what is going to happen or what I can do."

The chief tells the brave, "Do not worry. The good dog will win."
"How do you know?" the brave asks.
"Because you will feed only the good dog and the unfed dog will go away."

Like the good dog, our faith will get stronger and stronger the more we feed it. And the more we feed our faith the weaker our lack of faith becomes until it too, simply goes away.

I mentioned my own faith a bit earlier and I am reminded that my faith was late in blooming and had to be nourished substantially before it became a permanent part of me. What little faith I had had wavered, but in January 1983 a feature article in Daily Word stated: 'God Will Turn This To Good.' That was the nourishing food I needed at a critical moment in my life. I began to affirm "God will turn this to good" over and over until it became a part of me . . . and it still is.

From that moment until this, 'God will turn this to good' has become my mantra, and I can review every step in my life's journey from then to now and say with confidence, 'God HAS turned it all to good.' What began as a hesitant belief grew into a strong expectation, a solid foundation for my faith.

Jesus referenced the tiny mustard seed several times saying it is the tiniest of seeds, but which grows into a great bush and then a tree. He refers to it again in Matt:17:20, giving it a greater understanding when he says: "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall
say to this mountain 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. Like the mustard seed, whatever faith we have must be nourished and fed because the stronger our faith the greater the challenges we can overcome.

What the world is going through now threatens everyone's faith to one extent or another. Getting all the sludge out in the global 'rinse cycle' is going to take a much greater reliance on our faith than the attention we are tempted to give to our fears. As is always the case, the best way to overcome fear is with love. Hatred only fuels the fires of fear, but love washes all that away.

Bad news is always bad news, and it is very easy to let the bad news drive our fears, our angers and our feelings for retribution or retaliation. The best example of love conquering fear and anger came last year from the families of the church members in Charleston who were murdered in a Bible study class. Love allowed them to put forgiveness above retaliation and smothered the smoldering fires of racial hatred and divide. That response helped put faith first and let the justice system resolve the crime.

What a powerful lesson for us all.

Then there is the amazing story of Charles Blondin, a famous French tightrope walker, which is a wonderful illustration of true faith.

On September 14, 1860, Blondin became the first person to cross the mighty Niagara Falls on a tightrope stretched 11,000 feet (over a quarter of a mile) across the Falls. Canadians and Americans packed the scene to watch his great feat.

He walked across, 160 feet above the falls, several times . . . each time with a different daring feat - once in a sack, on stilts, on a bicycle, in the dark, and blindfolded. One time he even carried a stove and cooked an omelet in the middle of the span of rope!

Larger crowds gathered with every fete. They “Oohed and Aahed!” as Blondin carefully walked across - one dangerous step after another - pushing a wheelbarrow holding a sack of potatoes.
Upon reaching the other side, the crowd's applause was louder than the roar of the falls! Then he asked for the participation of a volunteer. Addressing his audience he said: "Do you believe I can carry a person across in this wheelbarrow?"

The crowd enthusiastically yelled, "Yes! You are the greatest tightrope walker in the world. We believe!"

"Okay," said Blondin, "Who wants to get into the wheelbarrow."

As the Blondin story goes, no one was willing to volunteer!

This unique story* illustrates a real life picture of what faith actually is. The crowd watched these daring feats. They said they believed. But . . . their actions proved they did not have the kind of faith that would let them truly believe.

It is one thing for us to say we believe in God. However, it's only true faith when we can put our faith and trust together and believe with a knowing that contains not even an ounce of doubt.

Which brings us back again to ask the question: "What is the level of your faith?"

Can you accept the idea that we are going through a global transformation for good even as it appears we are drowning in deep murky waters? Can you look and find good in all things? Can you look and find GOD in all things? Remember, Jesus said: "... lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matt. 28:20.

Perhaps we should all adopt the mantra, "God Will Turn This To Good" and let that affirmation begin to strengthen our faith. The fundamental goodness of humankind actually thrives. We just need to have the faith that allows us to believe it.

And so IT is!

Love and blessings,

Art & Dottie Holt

* Footnote: (Note: In August of 1859, Blondin's manager, Harry Colcord, did ride on Blondin's back across the Falls.) Story source: Inspire21.com, Author unknown.
FAITH -

What I believe may seem impossible because it is simply beyond the knowledge of my experience. But my faith is where I can put my trust, because whatever I seek is simply God telling me that it already is. My faith is the deep inner knowing that that which is sought is already mine. And so I simply say: “Thank You, God.”

JOHN 20:29 - “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”
Audrey Peterman, author, speaker, advocate for reconnecting people to nature, recently wrote the following:

"The reassuring words of George Washington Carver came soothingly to me this morning as I greeted the day. I walked up on deck and took a picture of the rising Sun.

"Posting a picture of the sunrise over the river where I live is part of my daily ritual and my reminder to take nothing for granted. This morning I also needed to reassure myself that the Earth is still in its right orbit relative to the sun.

I like to think of nature as a giant broadcasting station through which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only listen," George Washington Carver whispered as I walked through his “Secret Garden” at his birthplace National Monument in Missouri a few weeks ago. “Our creator is the same and never changes despite the names given Him by people here and in all parts of the world. Even if we gave Him no name at all, He would still be there, within us, waiting to give us good on this earth.”

"Oh Dr. Carver! I’ll take your word for it! Because how else might a man born into enslavement, an orphan, black as berry juice, with a lisp and a high falsetto voice come to save American agriculture? How else could you become a world renowned scientist, educator and mentor? A member of the British Royal Society of Arts?

“All my life I have risen regularly at four o’clock and have gone into the woods and talked with God,” Dr. Carver said.

"That experience reinforces my belief that humans have access to supernatural power if we will invest the time, energy and effort to connect with it."

#

God is with us wherever we go, but easier to recognize when immersed in nature.
“Charles Fillmore, the co-founder of Unity, said, "Man is not the limited creation that he thinks he is, but he is the focus of an infinite idea." A powerful statement indeed. We are talking about faith. We may often talk about having faith, but Jesus said, "Have faith in God." There is quite a difference between having faith and having faith in God.

“We've had faith many times in our life. In fact, we've had faith all the way through our life. And very often we've had faith in limitation. So we have experienced that limitation in our life. We've had faith in fear, and that fear has come upon us many times. We've had faith in lack, we've had faith in poverty, we've had faith in physical deterioration, and all of those things have been made manifest for us.

“We've had faith many times. We know how to have faith. We know how to practice faith. We do it automatically all the time. So all we have to do now is to reverse our focus. As Charles Fillmore said, instead of focusing on the apparent lack of things, upon the seeming limitation, we need to focus our attention on our ‘faith in God.’

“We are always adequate to meet whatever comes to us in our lives. More than adequate, because we have the very presence and power of God available to us.

“We are like a tree planted by the water and we shall not be moved by any circumstance out there, but we will be totally receptive and responsive to the slightest breath of Spirit within us.

“It is our faith in God that will see us through.”

Rev. Alan Rowbotham, is a retired Unity minister from St. Petersburg, Florida.
Before going to that quiet place to sit and relax in deep meditation, let’s take a brief walk through a beautiful garden - whether literally or in the memory of our imagination. Look all around you, noticing the abundance of everything from blossoms to tree leaves and even the reflections off the water features around water lilies and gold fish. A beautiful garden is a lush landscape with something to delight your eye no matter where you look.

As your eyes attempt to capture every detail in every image, you are invited to begin breathing in and out, slowly and rhythmically. Notice that the more beauty you seek the more beauty your eyes begin to perceive. You are surrounded and even enfolded by nature’s visual gifts.

Your observations are making visible a spiritual metaphor, that which you seek is already there. It is just a matter of becoming aware, opening your thoughts and awareness at the same time.

This exercise has taken you into the Spiritual Flow, awakening you to the realization that that which you seek has been seeking you. . . It is already there. Rest in this awareness for a few moments. Take as long as you like. Just breathe and relax.

Whatever we seek is actually seeking us because it already exists and merely awaits our ability to sense its presence. It is like awakening in the morning to a darkened room. As soon as we rise and open the window shade, we are engulfed in the bright sunshine of a new day. The light
has been there for us, waiting patiently for us to lift the shade.

What are you seeking? Is it health or happiness or a loving relationship or the feeling of fulfilling your life’s purpose? What ever we are seeking requires that we lift the shade, let the light in and get in the spiritual flow.

When we seek improved health, we must get into the Spirit of Health, focusing on the image of perfect health and the ‘healers’ presence, not the problem. For the ‘healer,’ the spiritual presence of perfect health is right there, with us now and always. Thinking about the problem keeps us from seeing the healing presence.

The same procedure is true for anything we are seeking. It, or the Spirit of it, is already there. It is a gift from Spirit freely given and ours for the taking.

When we want good in our life, we look for good in all things. Acknowledge that good already exists and we simply have to align with it. Focusing on the problem only amplifies it and does nothing to overcome it.

Knowing that whatever good we seek is already here is the full exercise of our faith in goodness itself. When we remember that good and God are one and the same, we will remember that God is always here, awaiting our enlightened awareness.

As we take another deep breath, we look around our beautiful garden once more. The Spirit of God’s Presence is here before us as abounding beauty. And all we need to say is ‘Thank You, God.’
Our thoughts and words are very important. Words impact our lives in meaningful ways. This time our word(s) is:

**For & Against**

I received another anger laced political email intended to be sent on endlessly to ignite fear and frustration in its trail. They are rarely accurate or truthful so I don’t respond to those kind of emails. Fact checking reveals, false accusations, half truths, and opinions instead of facts. They are also used to build active email lists for the hackers who originated them.

But most of all I don’t respond because I have learned that the goodness of life is achieved by giving our attention to that which is good. I have found that being *for* good helps to create good. Being *against* anything gives energy to that thing, which actually feeds it. And like the wolf in the native American story, we should give our energy to only those things we want to grow and endure. Fear and anger need to be starved, not fed.

I am *for* whatever is good. I am *against* nothing. I confess it is a challenging lesson. It is hard not to join a fight until we remember that love does conquer fear and anger, because love is the energy of light. Fear and anger exist in darkness where there is no energy.

Shine the light of your love on whatever is good and let the darkness consume all forms of negativity.
Three Blessings

1. For several years I have contemplated adding a four page section to each issue of Upward Bound bringing it up to 16 pages in all. I resisted to two reasons; the extra pages brings the weight above one ounce and therefore requires two stamps, and second I wasn’t sure what I wanted to put in the space.

Then came the 28 page special, issue #83, with 10 two-page spreads for affirmations and visualizations. At last I knew what I wanted to add; a two-page center spread affirmation and appropriate image, to enhance a single contemplation idea.

With this issue focused on Faith, the time and subject were right, and so the change has been added and the feature will continue in each future issue.

2. Also new is an Upward Bound BOGO (buy one - get one); an offer for you to give a gift subscription to anyone you want with your donation support for our Upward Bound Journal Ministry. For any tax deductible donation of $25 or more you can add a gift subscription to the person of your choice. For those who have already made a UBJ donation this year, your additional $25 donation can be used to give two subscriptions. A special revised donation/subscription form is enclosed. To send a gift copy to someone in need, there is no requirement for a donation. We will happily add their name to our UBJ mailing list.

3. Lastly, an invitation to you. If you have a topic that you would like to have addressed in the Affirmation/Visualization center spread, just send your request via email to: UpwardBoundRev@aol.com.

The idea for the two-page contemplation is to serve you in finding the loving presence within that will make your life experience more joyful, rewarding, successful, happy, healthy and prosperous. Our purpose is clear; to ‘empower you to enrich and transform your life.’

Richest blessings,
Art & Dottie Holt
Thanks again to each of you, the many readers of Upward Bound Journal who answered our annual request for financial support for our publishing ministry. Your generosity makes it possible for us to keep on our publishing path ‘writing and presenting spiritual, inspirational, and metaphysical principles which will empower people to enrich and transform their lives.’ Thank You!

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