



Faith Is A Strange Thing

A personal account

FAITH IS A strange thing. Apparently, according to first hand accounts, history and myth, one is beset by it in an array of varied circumstances. Look what happened to Saint Paul!

I suppose that I must concur that his particular experience was a little extreme. How do the rest of us ordinary folk encounter God and the subsequent belief in His majesty? I suppose my immediate response, based on personal experience, is - slowly.

If I'm honest I am only writing this piece in an attempt to crack the eggshell of my heart wide open so that I can become one of those who is ablaze with fervent faith.

If I examine my state of faith, I am compelled to admit that in comparison with those whose stories adorn books, even those who never reach the state of publication, all those ordinary souls who seem to ooze love and compassion in their desire to serve God, it is as if some brave heart has approached me with their last match which they have carried forever.

This same match has lighted a thousand souls but its flame is near exhausted. The wick of my candle stands aloof, unburned. Is there pride in being untouched? The candle itself has scoured sides; there are imprints of misery, misunderstanding, pain and loss. There are scars of efforts unsustainable. The candle is pitted, is embraced by barbed wire, and is distinct only in its embeddedness in the material world. The wick remains wanting. The lighted match has drawn close, the slick covering of wax has begun to melt, and the wick has begun to smoke a little. How close are we to true ignition?

I am not without faith but I am still waiting for the spark, the inner explosion that will transport me into spiritual dimensions while holding me with a fervent gentleness in this transient world of humanity.

It is as if my soul is trapped in the caverns of my body, not just sheltered by it for the time being.

I am conscious of the absence of Love and Devotion. I pray, all too often selfishly, I pray... because that's what I am meant to do, I pray... while the distractions of life create a colourful parade in my mind ... and I am meant to be focused I read the writings, small pieces usually, it's so difficult to imbibe even a few of these gracious and momentous words... then I look to see what book I can read next, now my duty has been attempted. I try to repeat Alláh-u-Abháj ninety five times... without trying to keep track of how many I've done. I repeat the short obligatory prayer whenever it comes into my head to do so, be it twelve or two or four in the afternoon.

I do not write these things with pride, but with truth and no little shame.

I do these things hopefully, but all too frequently, mechanically, whilst honestly trying to connect with God. I am telling myself that eventually the walls will be breached, that the mere practice and repetition will eventually produce fruit.

I suppose I have a great sadness in relation to this state, particularly as I do believe in the One God. I am not scrabbling around searching for an eternal truth, hence my confusion and feelings of despair. However, it's not all bad! How often do I have golden moments when the colour of the sky dips into my soul and whispers, touching the edges and fraying them, just a little, those seconds of true communion when the oneness of mankind is happening and I am both participant and witness, when unity of body, mind and spirit cradles me as sweetly as did my mother's womb.

Faith is a piece of cake, especially if one is experiencing times of extremity and hardship. But how does one measure these things? We can always assess our lives in relation to others and produce the same answer. Invariably, we are better off than many and not quite so well off as a few. When my life seems crowded with difficulty, but I am not having first hand experience of war, famine, homelessness, addiction or untimely death, what is my problem? Why am I asking God for help, what right have I under the circumstances, surely His most capable hands are full. God looks after those who look after themselves doesn't he, well get on with it then Trudie.

And so it goes on and I wonder if I am the only one that balances on the edge, diving in at times, refusing at others to even wet my finger tips, but, I DO BELIEVE.

So why am I not revelling constantly in this abundant love, wrought upon the world by the dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh – or am I, and I am missing it?

So what is this all about? A hidden quest to be obviously affected and in turn to be effective in my contribution towards humanity? I believe that this plays a large part in my lack of feeling. However, there is a small voice within me that says "Wait, we all have our parts to play, however large or small". Some may pave the way, forge the steel, open hearts with their innate spirituality whilst others pour the tea and wash the dishes. I realise as I write, that this is not about value, not in the sense of one measured beside another. It is far more personal. I want to be afire with His Love: I've got all the ingredients but ... It occurs to me that I have been sacrilegious in voicing my uncertainties. I can only conclude that often, I am missing it and in flashes of inspiration I am experiencing it.

Yes, faith is a strange phenomenon, and I can't help but think that we've all been blessed with varied measures of it. Is my candle wick alight yet? Yes it is, but it is so subject to winsome breezes that it fluctuates in strength. Have I the resolve to lay everything in God's hands? My human reply is Yes and No. Put that same question to the spirit within me and there isn't the slightest hesitation, not the merest glimmer of confusion, just a quiet, Yes.

So, I do have faith, however meagrely I still have that inviolable connection with the Creator. Maybe I have to work at discarding desire "to feel" and offer up prayers just "to be".

Trudie Shannon

