

## 54. Article of Faith

With faith you can accomplish anything, without it nothing. This is neither a religious sermon nor a secularization of mysteries. But faith is something as essential to life as pure H<sub>2</sub>O. Consult a dictionary. This word has serious interpersonal implications: confidence despite suspicion, dependability, sincerity, steadfast loyalty, and trust. Viscous faith is what makes every lasting relationship stick. Friendships, marriages, paychecks, or the prospects of future sales can't persist without it. All else is acrimony, confrontation and recriminations. After all he'd revealed about evil miscreants soaking everyone, you were supposed to have faith in your fellow man? Easier to believe in all powerful, invisible, otherworldly beings swimming about in clouds. Despair gets you nowhere. Lacking trust leads directly to death and destruction. Unless you can survive secluded on an island, you'd better get some.

Don't think faith is easily attained. People only believe when you earn their trust. You must convince them beforehand you're acting in their best interest, then prove it by your actions. You must communicate your intentions: Say what you're going to do, then do what you said you would. In today's parlance that's called "walking the walk", tracking a dry path through quagmire of cynicism. But who's out there working for it? Slick hustlers claim to; few actually prove to be. Diplomacy is only for those who want to dip into your pocket. Al didn't want anything. Had absolutely no interest in seeking control. Therefore, wasn't obliged to be bubbly and diplomatic. It's very freeing. People only act out a role; everyone expects to be sold something. Cowardice and suspicion are the norm. Respect must be earned, not assumed or decreed. Can't sit by and watch ambitious grasp it without a contest. This just leads to conflict. Since it's clear mistrust doesn't serve anyone's interests, why wallow in it yourself? You must inspire action, take initiative, unfold your faith. That's what leading by example is all about: imagining better alternatives, soaking up responsibilities, sweating them out, then *sharing* with others.

Sure, phlegmatic people prefer easy answers. They don't want to be cornered into decisions that might cost money or rob time. Like it or not, everyone constantly makes decisions. You're doing it right now by reading this. Existentialists say that individuals are defined by every decision they make down to the smallest gesture,

failure to act, or silence that conveys tacit consent. Everyone fears reprisal: a foggy moment's lapse could bring disaster. Loose lips really can sink ships. Only the truly ignorant think they're smart enough to blindly commit. Fools dive in where angels fear to wade, it's said.

Meanwhile, cautious experts churn out foot-thick dissertations drenching everyone in *analysis paralysis*. Society drizzles *doubt* as if it were holy water from font of enlightenment. Yahoos pee on your parade. Those who actually think about choices stagger drunkenly among them, but aren't these really just excuses to do less or nothing? Opportunities have a way of distilling into a moment where you must act or lose out forever. Proust reflected, "All our final decisions are made in a state of mind that is not going to last." Too often you act out of over-eagerness, exasperation, insecurity or jealousy, feelings that pass as circumstances change. It's a matter of discipline and timing, being able to bottle up your passions when appropriate. People drowning in negative emotions seldom make wise decisions.

This is where faith enters. Faith doesn't mean closing your eyes for plunging into unfathomed depths. It isn't just acting as Pollyanna, embracing positive thinking, or sticking your head in sand. That's denial. Faith picks up after you've weighed all available facts and will make an well considered decision. It strengthens your resolve to avoid pettiness, or let frustrations dampen your spirit. Faith parts the sea between being swept away and finding a rainbow's gold. Faith is a pearl in an oyster, bestowed rarely but so beautifully those times it is.

Progress is a river whose source is a choice made, that trickles into a tiny victory, which gathers tributaries of new decisions then cascades into a mighty reservoir of supremacy. Each success infuses winners with a self-confidence which ripples among everyone around them. Because you believe not only in yourself but in those to whom you've given a chance to prove themselves, others do, too, tide turns, and your entire team quenches its thirst for achievement. Reservoirs of good will power megawatt turbines of consensus, the only force that works wave upon wave of people.

So what's to stop you from guzzling your fill? A few negative drips? Getting people to agree wasn't impossible, it just requires good behavior. He created a mnemonic to remember how to behave: SIMILE. Focus on (S)ituations, not behaviors or personalities of (I)ndividuals; (M)aintain both constructive relationships and self esteem of others; take (I)nitiative; (L)ead by (E)xample. Corporations teach this so coworkers can get along, create roles,

take ownership of processes, and thereby excel. Not surprisingly, it all goes in 1 ear and out the other. People never consider themselves bad actors, only the *other* guy. Yet when he gave these phony tenets a chance to work, they did. Put him in control, not necessarily where he wanted to be. So easy to manipulate. Toyed with concept of militant anti-rudeness: baiting, badgering, intensifying conflict, teaching lessons. For example, he might pass bad drivers then slow in front to annoy. Or assert his position on a bike in automotive travel lanes, almost as much fun as torturing mice in a laboratory. Just how do you get people to stop being crude, juvenile, stupid, thoughtless imbeciles? From WWF Smack Down's steroid lunkheads to presidents who don't honor office, impressionable youth get nothing but wrong signals: Betrayal is better. Deceive to win. Treachery pays. Harming others is fun, or, even worse, letting others fight, take your lumps, transact what you'd want done, because there's an inherent vicarious thrill to mayhem. You don't have to join in directly, but get kicks from maneuvering others into fights you want fought and watching: Sadistic voyeurism. There's no democracy when a president can go to war after barely mustering an elective victory; such decisions should be made by the people.

Father of Existentialism Kierkegaard reasoned, "Faith is the highest passion in a human being. Many in every generation may not come that far, but none comes farther." Faith bestowed lets children grow. Kids must be allowed to make mistakes, yet feel they can confide in benevolent parents who'll calmly correct and support. Too bad kids don't come with an instruction manuals. There are two generations of leaders who've known nothing but absentee parents, self destructive/expressive rock-and-roll, and video violence. "Entertain me!" Kids believed the coolest artists, who made most money, are ones who weren't eager to please, amused themselves first and didn't really care if you were too. Goofed you off. SIMILE doesn't work on them. It's their prerogative to "Live fast, play hard, die young, leave a good looking corpse," that is to say, live shorter intervals but a lot more intensely. They do consume less resources. Doctors speak of allowing seniors to die, becoming ushers into afterlife, rather than letting them clog hospital wards. It's an arrogance more and more doctors adopt; they devalue life after seeing so much death, making your demise their snap decision. He didn't manage to totally avoid the many temptations of drugs, emotions, gambling, liquor, music or women; enjoyed them

all at least once. But people curse you for it. It's *not* how long you live or how many toys you accumulate or how much wealth you amass. It *is* how you positively impact World. If a life lives only a few moments yet changes minds or results in an amazing discovery, what a life! It wasn't in vain. Dancing on knife edge of blasphemy, political incorrectness, treason, total excommunication, he'd go on record that he recanted. After all, he was only voicing questions with brain he was given to think with, not providing answers or trying to influence others to think in any way whatsoever, but just to *think*.

Faith is a 2-way street with a 10-step plan:

- 1) Avoid emotional responses.
- 2) Check track records; notice how competent others have already proven themselves to be.
- 3) Communicate openly.
- 4) Do your homework; make your own decisions.
- 5) Encourage positive actions of others.
- 6) Expect mistrust but don't bow to it.
- 7) Give people chance to prove themselves.
- 8) Have no secrets to conceal.
- 9) Never betray a trust.
- 10) Stay focused on mutually beneficial results.

Why not try these, get facts yourself, take the plunge, trust in your own skills and those around you? Sometimes all that needs to be said to make it come true is, "I have faith in you."

Who, if anyone, meets these criteria? Leaders lie outright or they're too inept to comprehend they've changed positions 25 times in 2 weeks. Better to admit a change in position and what you based it on. Individuals and institutions are both incompetent. Religions speak of weathering storms. People are allowed to change their minds. It's sometimes called *growth*. Working toward openness gradually opens new avenues to cooperation, which results in accomplishment, self-confidence, and some grace to believe. "Set down your chains/until only faith remains./ Don't lend your strength to what you wish to be free from," someone spirit sang.

If you believe in a beneficent God who provides everything to His faithful flock, an hour once a week at a service is not enough to celebrate HIS incredible gift of life. You should instead use life you're given, experience it as a prayer, live vitally, make your presence on earth count. Nothing wrong with kneeling and praying unless done as a spectacle en masse to ensure your spirituality is publicly acknowledged. Pity politicians who have to go to lengths

to avoid such spectacles or risk offending one party or another. There's far more spirituality in fighting ills of society than nestling into a congregation. One must *live* one's convictions, if any, not present a facade. Moslem extremists do exactly that, as best they can, and you probably agreed with this paragraph until you read this sentence. People willing to give their greatest gift for shared social justice says 2 things: faith can be so strong that facing certain death can't dilute it, and life without justice is unlivable. Potent potable is faith.

Good diet, moderate physicality, mental wellbeing and relative security brings about rational thinking. Scientists study a material world free of hidden phantasms and mythological portents. When deprived of unalienable rights and faced with unanswerable questions, people of finite wisdom placate unseen deities and think, "At least let's try something; what we've done so far isn't working." Elected elite who want to extract as much as possible from masses and put it into hands of their friends will gladly give you religion as a substitute. Notice it isn't a religion of choice, only those their friends run. They must maintain cold, wet trickle up.

Faith that conservatives use as a condom is a very muddled affair twisted by third person commentators nearly a century after the fact to mean the very opposite of what Christ founded by unwritten example: agape; caring for children and women, equality of the sexes, healing, peacemaking, self righteousness amidst institutionalized seduction, unilateral mercy for those weaker than you. Those who tried to go with the flow of His example, the Gnostics, were routed out and slaughtered by Orthodox doctrinaires whose rigid perspectives suited state motives. To this very day, Catholic churches have bell tower campaniles that are nothing more than phallic assertions of their intolerant patriarchy, carillons a sonic substitute for seminal spray. Laughably, the Tower of Pisa can't stay erect without engineering Viagra. Celibates choose symbols over fluid exchanges. Churches compel celibacy to staunch outflow that a celebrant's family might represent. Like a wedding, many are invited for gifts they're obliged to bring, but only a few are chosen to personally partake or sit on dais, demoted to mere spectators amidst splendor.

The Romantics, whence arose dignity of individuals and downfall of divine rights of kings, were egomaniacal and proud. One can be an existentialist, even an atheist, and still be humble and spiritual. Any lack of faith in metaphysical beings is not an automatic sign of a conceit in one's own mental prowess, one's capacity to reason away any need for god, to dismiss this notion as

a power ploy or superstition. By definition, faith is not a result of reason at all, but a leap beyond what's knowable. Yet faith and reason are not mutually exclusive. Because you reason there's no god given evidence presented doesn't mean you can't believe He is beyond your ability to perceive. Of these 2 propositions, "There is no god," and "Men are extremely dense and illogical," a preponderance of evidence supports the latter and negates the former. "To have conceived of god, yet cannot prove" is less logical than "There is a god, but man is so confoundedly ignorant in his finite understanding as to miss that whole bit of infinite creation, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence." If you don't know what these terms mean and you still doubt god, you're simply a dolt. With faith one can suffer a fool if fool doesn't cause a lot of harm.

Now, whether you can petition Lord to do favors is a totally different department, as is, whether angels can dance on head of a pin, embracing evil is a ticket to Hell, or good acts bring rewards in an afterlife. These details are irrelevant. One can neither disprove nor prove there's a god. But it doesn't matter. All religions allude to a meager banquet spread for those who are faithful, some number of virgins. Sad. God doesn't care if you genuflect, pray or probably even believe. He can't be as judgmental as man's made Him out. If He wanted to, he could make you instantly disappear from existence, memories, records, yet here you are, reading this. Humans can conceive but can't answer such questions. The good you do simply makes your life more livable, as well as lives of everyone around you. Any idea you might be rewarded beyond this bliss should never enter your mind. Enjoy yourself at His banquet. Better, be the caterer.

Continuing arguments made by agnostics and atheists in no way negate religion itself. They'd leave you with nothing to believe in, nothing that motivates good yet satisfying behaviors. That more people congregate and worship together than not unnerves them. Masses worshipping on Sabbath represent power of common men to reach unanimity on at least 1 topic, if not many more. From some religions, this agreement guides daily actions, spills into material world, which can result conflicts between faithful and nonbelievers or, conversely, mutual respect. Truly, removing religion as another reason for hate might seem rationally sensible, but having been tried under communism, it didn't work. An urge to worship persistently resurfaced.

Because mind of an individual is not capable of completely laying to rest fears of the unknown or weight of millennia of thinking on mysteries beyond comprehension, religion will always be around. In its importance, it should never be made a mere substitute for economic, political, or scientific failures, but an incentive to work towards fair distribution of wealth and safety nets for the deprived and hungry. Any administration that doesn't focus on social justice needs to be put aside. But religion they want to force upon you bans their removal. Religion becomes another buttress in wall they create between them and you, yet another opiate. Bishops ought to be above dirty deals that dishonestly support their pet causes of antiabortion, homophobia, and unrestrained population growth, all fringe issues that individual choices forever defy anyway. Churches shouldn't benefit from deprivation, but become outlets for those who succeed to help those who fail. Yet they plow fear, plug in beliefs, and think they've accomplished something. Getting people to agree to behave better is easy. Getting people to actually act Christian, a form of communism, seems impossible. Capitalism is The Anti-Christ. As both Cherbonnier and famous psychiatrist Menninger acknowledged, the common enemy of believers and skeptics alike is those whose hearts are so hard they can only worship money itself and their own helplessness to improve World despite their comfort and success. Apathy and luxury are everyone's enemy.

In late 1860's some congressional blowhard was yakking it up for like 8 hours at Gettysburg. Lincoln waited patiently, took podium, a bit disheveled and ill, and spoke for all of about 3 minutes. Unruly crowd was awed into silence. His address, as badly constructed a piece of writing as was ever penned in English, slapped together then agonized over for weeks before and during bumpy carriage ride there, stands among the most sublime moments in nation's history if not entire history of oratory. Lincoln honored sacrifices for unity in which this administration was totally invested. But taking no credit, Abe rightly honored everyone else. This true leader at the dawn of mass bicycling, freedom machines, pointed toward, "The grand task before us..." to give "birth to freedom," so self rule never perishes. Insight and sincerity of that speaker at that historic juncture couldn't be faked or ignored, and will never be copied. When you truly believe in democracy, you can hold entire World in the palm of your hand for a moment. Having faith in each other which results in peace through

unity is what Kierkegaard must've been thinking. It's a wonderful ideal, mostly real, and exceptions make noise, like steam from a kettle. These days, it's said, they dispense a soma-like spray that instills cooperation and wellbeing; gives political puppets a chance to leave hall before someone notices how phony issues they raised really are.

All it takes is one plus one.  
 Without words that courage teach,  
 Poe would've faltered, distracted.  
 Genre of detective tales  
 all cherish would've not begun,  
 a victim of drugs and madness.  
 Clemens would never have observed  
 a world of ironies quite so keenly,  
 never acquired a newsman's curiosity.  
 Melville wouldn't have sang of whales.  
 The social change Dickens' moral outrage  
 perhaps may have never impacted,  
 amidst merciless, money-grubbing reality,  
 could not thwart desperate sadness.  
 Or wastes where Carson and Muir conserved,  
 not verdant forest that stand serenely.  
 Upon mercy Shakespeare built his stage.  
 Gave groundlings unbound stars to reach.  
 Men find freedom when empowered to dissent.  
 Yet we sit, dumb, our support never sent.  
 Talent goes unnoticed, by all ignored.  
 Seeds fall on concrete, bake and dry.  
 Potential greatness rots, badly stored  
 in persons never encouraged to try.

He needed someone to have faith in him. He needed to find a purpose, fulfill it, press onwards. Having dealt with dull, snobbish coworkers and thoughtless bosses his entire career, he felt irrevocably alienated. It wasn't a matter of looking for friends. Who seeks such inconvenience? It was a matter of reasonable decency. To unfold yourself gracefully when required demands an enormous commitment: courage, preparation, readiness, willingness.

As Wittgenstein argued, communication depends upon agreement between those conversing and their mutual acquaintance with phenomena. He might just as well have been speaking Greek, for all you knew of what he spoke. He supposed that it came down to how future generations would remember him, or whether

he'd even be remembered. Certainly, it would *not* be as a philosopher or scientist. Perhaps a failed poet. Readers generally expect poets to be generous, loving and meek. Poets merely deal in emotions, and the strongest emotion is anger. Bitterness and resentment are perfectly suitable as points of departure.

He stewed in a mid-life crisis for 25 years, never over work pressures, as everything he ever did was fluid for him, but from having to witness conspicuous inhumanity. Misanthropy cannot endure without reinforcement. Face it. Everyone has fear, doubt and guilt. The most popular sitcoms are those where characters trade barbs, not show kindness. A cartoon about a dysfunctional family has been airing with great success in prime time because people transfer their own bad behaviors onto those gross stereotypes and feel vindicated for being half as bad. Unsatisfactory.

Every religion contributed to society's current malaise: Catholics their hypocritical heresy inquisitions, Christians their grasping televangelism, Jews their biased exclusivity, Protestants their murderous puritanical doctrines, Muslims their corrupt misogyny, and the lot their controlling fanaticism aimed at solidifying state power in diametric opposition to both the examples and teachings of their founders. Atheists close their eyes, permit these abominations, and wash their hands. Faith is supposedly good, but isn't love better? You don't need a divine edict or formal program to engage another and warmly give of yourself, "To share me". Truth is, many can't even find it within themselves to be nice to family members, less strangers. Bids to bolster connubial bliss sadly lapse into domestic violence. Friends fall out at perceived betrayals. Where there's no faith, you're totally alone, marooned among 7 billion neighbors, all potential friends, some cousins and relations you never knew. Having met Sagan, he knew Carl would have nodded approvingly at all the statistical billions he splashed around somewhat scientifically. Seems a huge World for humans to muck up; takes billions all doing the wrong things at once.

If you need an inducement to share, consider offering a ritualistic warm liquid with carbohydrate accompaniment. Whether swilling down a coffee or tea with a biscuit or cookie or pastry, practically no culture on earth doesn't have a similar custom. Even carbo-conscious dieticians deem this practice okay in moderation. People who'd like to date, but don't want initially to commit a lot of time, meet for coffee and donuts or a drink and pretzels. From English high tea and French biscuits, to mudmen Kava, Italian cappuccino with biscotti, Shinto tea ceremonies, acts of Moslem hospitality, offering a luscious libation and simple snack is probably

the most sublime expression of “What’s mine is yours”, no better way to bridge gaps, no need for words, never lost in translation. It was his favorite interpersonal gesture, an invitation to spend a few moments in pleasant communion, warm moist generosity. Of course, it’s an act that’s usually misconstrued as a bid for dominance or sexual favors. Why must it be so hard to think of it as a simple attempt to reach out and touch another soul in positive way? Bread and wine are sacred, divinely chosen. Instead of squabbling, learn to bake cookies and brew 2 cups.

