

A Question of Faith...

Sudha Umashanker



The other day I happened to be talking to a young man about spirituality, prayer and stuff like that. The young man said that he never prayed for anything because he almost never got what he wanted. So instead, he opted to being okay with the cards that life dealt out. I was both surprised and a little shocked. While it was good that he didn't pray with a specific wish list, the sense of disbelief and lack of faith that was the subtext bothered some one like me. Raised with the message that one never doubted or questioned or said 'bad' things about God for fear of divine retribution, a remark like the young man's might have been dubbed sacrilege had I made it when I was his age.

I tried reasoning with him. "If you didn't get what you want probably you didn't pray hard enough or perhaps it wasn't right for you. And God gave you something better."

There was only silence.

Agreed it is hard to remain in faith when one is facing tough times. When one doesn't gain admission into the University or course after one's heart, when finances are tight and one is on a shoestring budget and better jobs are difficult to come by, when a loved one doesn't get well soon enough, when relationships run into problems - in short, when one doesn't get what one wants - to speak the young man's language.

"But you believe in God?" I persisted.

"Yes" he said to my relief.

"Do you believe in miracles?"

He hummed and hawed.

"May be you haven't experienced one in your life. What do you think about night and day and seasons? Do you think that's all man-made and

within the control of mere mortals?"

"I'll have to see..." he said.

"Oh my God...!" I thought.

All this set me thinking on faith - faith that we place in so many people in our everyday lives. When we board a plane we place our trust in the pilot. When we go to a hairdresser or tattoo studio we just believe that the hair stylist or the tattooist is going to do a good job and make us look better. When we buy something we trust the salesman when he tells us the colour won't run or the fabric won't shrink or the shoe will not pinch or that the clay pots are properly baked, or whatever. When we go to a doctor or surgeon we usually don't question their intention to heal us. And we completely buy their "this won't take long and it won't hurt much" preamble.

Then why this utter lack of faith in a supernatural power and His immense capacity to do what is good for us. Is it because we don't see Him face to face?

The young man argued "It's not in the interest of the pilot or the hairdresser or the salesman or the doctor to do a bad job."

That may be true some of the time but what about things beyond one's control or if there was a vendetta involved, like if the pilot encountered some rough weather or

crisis mid air or the aircraft maintenance engineer had overlooked the possibility of a snag or the surgeon opened up the patient for one problem and was confronted with something else more serious. Or if the salesman (who wasn't the owner of the store) was trying to get even with his boss and trying to palm off substandard products only to settle personal scores? And if you are still saved, isn't it about faith?

People recovering miraculously from life threatening conditions, accident victims literally escaping from the jaws of death or events taking a surprise turn after a series of set backs.... How does one explain it all?

Or what about the leap of faith when we send our children off to distant lands and cities for academic and career pursuits where we can't watch over them or when we give our sanction when they choose their own life partners from different communities, faiths or nationalities? Or when they or any of us are given challenging assignments and we are quite clueless about how to handle it, isn't it faith in ourselves and the support of a higher power that enables things to go well?

Don't our scriptures tell us that those who believe have never gone in vain or that if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed ye shall say unto this mountain "Remove hence to



yonder place and it shall remove and nothing shall be impossible to you”?

Perhaps, like Sarvepalli Dr. S. Radhakrishnan former President of India said, “Faith begins where reason ends”. And often it is total unquestioning faith that works things in our favour. No wonder Blaise Pascal said “Faith is a sounder guide than reason. Reason can only go so far but faith has no limits.”

Surfing the net for some reinforcement, I found an interesting sound byte from Dr Francis Collins, Director of the National Genome Research Institute, at National Institute of Health, Bethesda, Maryland who leads a human genome project and has directed a mapping and sequencing of the human DNA and identified genes

responsible for many diseases. Cutting-edge research indeed. And he said “There’s a common assumption that you can’t both be a rigorous, show-me-the-data scientist and a person who believes in a personal God. From my perspective that assumption is incorrect. In fact those two areas are entirely compatible. Science is

a powerful way to study the natural world. It is rather ineffective in making a commentary about the supernatural world. Both worlds for me are real and important and investigated in different ways.”

Faith is something that cannot be explained that easily. It has to be experienced and felt.



I can only live in the faith that this young man’s life will be strewn with miracles that will reinforce his faith.

So I said to him in parting “Keep the faith” - and recalled that email forward which noted - Life has to be lived forwards but can only be understood backwards.