Faith Is the Source of Authentic Action
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From the Vedas

Faith Is the Source of Authentic Action

From the core of man comes faith, and from that, meaningful existence

The subject of faith appears throughout the Vedas, often connected to the core concept of ritual sacrifice to the sacred fire. The following translations and commentary are excerpted from a chapter on faith in The Vedic Experience by Raimundo Panikkar.

By faith is fire kindled. By faith is offered sacrifice. Sing we now Faith, the pinnacle of joy.

Bless Faith, the one who gives. Bless him who wills, but has not. Bless him who gives his worship unstinting. Bless this song I sing.

As the Gods evoked Faith from the mighty Asuras, so may my prayer for the generous worshiper be accepted!

The Gods, led by the Spirit, honor Faith in their worship. Faith is composed of the heart's intention. Light comes through faith.

Through faith men come to prayer, faith in the morning, faith at noon and at the setting of the Sun. O Faith, give us faith!

Rig Veda Samhita, X.151.1-5

He emitted life, and from life came faith, then space, wind, light water, earth, the senses, and the mind.

Atharva Veda, Prashna Upanishad, IV.4

And on what are the offerings to the priests based? On faith, for when a man has faith, he gives offerings to the priests. Therefore it is on faith that the offerings to the priests are based. On what is faith based? On the heart, for through the heart one knows faith. In fact, on the heart alone is faith based.

Shukla Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, III.9.21

Vedic faith is not primarily an intellectual assent, for if it were, it would be subservient to the "thing" to which assent is made with the mind. Nor is it a kind of blind trust in certain superhuman beings. Vedic faith is, furthermore, not a result or a product of the will; thus there is no stress on the moral responsibility of the believer. It is rather a quality of the full human being; it is something given to or rather grafted into his being. Man is endowed with faith as he is endowed with other human qualities. For this reason, there are ultimately as many types of faith as there are human beings.

The concrete manifestation of faith, according to our first hymn, consists in a belief in the meaningfulness and efficacy of the sacrificial action. Indeed, such belief is essential for the man performing the sacrifice, for without it there would be only a mechanical and thus a fruitless action.

You act with faith when you act from such a depth that hesitation is not possible, when you are sure that what you are doing is what you are doing, that is, when you perform an action that springs up from your inmost self and not from a whispered external influence.

Faith is not made up of those beliefs about which you can entertain intellectual doubt; faith is made of those convictions that are rooted so deeply in your own being that you are not conscious of them; faith is the first emanation of life; faith is the hidden root of man out of which real human growth proceeds; faith is rooted in the heart and is composed of the heart's intention, the heart being the symbol for the core of man. This faith is expressed in beliefs and actions which, when they come directly from that inner source, can be called authentic; otherwise they are make-believe, pseudo actions which shoot wide of their mark. Faith is authentic human existence.

Raimundo Panikkar, 90, holds doctorates in science, philosophy and theology. His anthology, The Vedic Experience, is the result of ten years in Varanasi translating with the help of Vedic scholars.

The Vedas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, shruti, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1200 bce), Bible New Testament (100 ce), Koran (630 ce) or Zend Avesta (600 bce). Four in number--Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva--the Vedas include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6500 bce.