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FAITH VERSUS FEAR

DEAR FRIENDS:



WE LIKE TO ASSUME that children coming into the world inherit certain characteristics from their parents and are further molded by their environment, especially the home. There are many exceptions, however, to this concept. It may well happen that of three sons or daughters, two are reasonably well adjusted, and the third is a problem from the beginning. The heredity is the same and the environment is the same, but the children are distinctly different. Each brings into mortal life an inherent endowment of faith or fear, and this factor largely determines both character and disposition. In many instances astrology indicates basic temperament, but it would be a mistake to assume that planetary positions are responsible for the human personality. There is no fatal necessity in the stars, and in each embodiment the individual brings his karma with him. If he makes no effort to improve his nature, he must live with his undisciplined potentials for happiness or unhappiness.

The child in whom the faith factor predominates usually has a kindly and gentle disposition, and will accept discipline from those it loves and respects. The mind is optimistic the emotions are strongly sympathetic, and the body is responsive to the more gracious impulses of the soul. This type is innately religious and gradually transfers its loyalty to parents to veneration for God. In the process of education there is a predisposition to search for good, to emphasize the constructive achievements of mankind, and accept with confidence and hope the vicissitudes of living. Although such persons may be disappointed when they find that their faith is exploited, they can seldom be disillusioned. Those strong in faith are less ambitious and mercenary than many of their associates, and often choose careers in fields of public service, religion, or the education of children. They are not self-centered; therefore, less likely to become neurotic or embittered. In emergencies they are strengthened and sustained by their own internal resources.

When fear predominates the child is critical, defensive, and resentful. Because the ego reveals a willful tendency, disobedience must be expected, and this is seldom improved by punishment. Deceitfulness arises from the instinct to avoid correction and justify self at the expense of truth. There is considerable emphasis toward avoiding responsibility, and these young people usually leave home early and frequently get into serious difficulty. Religion has little or no

influence on their lives. They may hold a nominal membership in some church, but are deficient in idealism and personal humility. They are natural materialists, preferring to believe in nothing rather than admit that there are powers in nature against which no mortal can rebel successfully. By rejecting the Divine Plan, they must depend entirely upon themselves for salvation, and this attitude always ends in fear. Suspicious of their associates, resentful of authority, and prone to avoid all responsibilities, such persons are potential neurotics. They resist the pressures of environment and then insist that outside factors are persecuting them. As fears deepen, hopes fade away, but the egotist considers himself the victim of accidents and injuries for which he is not to blame, and which justify revengefulness and isolation.

We must also realize that both faith and fear are present in varying degrees in most people. Religion clearly indicates this difficulty. God may be loved or feared according to the quality of inner conviction. Faith can be damaged if a crisis arises which is beyond understanding. Here a conflict between the soul and the mind is obvious. Faith is essentially an emotion of the heart, whereas rationalization is a process of the intellect. Constructive believing is sustained through intuitional experiences and quiet acceptance of the benevolence of providence. The analytical faculties derive their strength principally from physical confusion. This is especially true in modern society where obvious facts are likely to obscure the workings of the Divine Plan. Like the fabled phoenix, however, faith rises triumphant from the ashes of its own dead. This story is clearly told by John Bunyan who wrote PILGRIM'S PROGRESS while in a debtor's prison.

One of the tragedies of fear is its enervating effect upon both the heart and mind. The frightened individual frustrates the very ends which he seeks to accomplish. By substituting ambition for aspiration he contributes to the corruptions which most plague him, and transfers his allegiances to material pursuits. In a vain quest for happiness through wealth, fame and physical security, he discovers too late that the path to worldly success must end in the grave.

Where faith is strong the individual is most likely to be optimistic, but if fear has the greater authority pessimism is almost inevitable. Some consider optimists to be impractical and superficial, whereas conversely, the pessimist is more keenly aware of the facts. Human history bears witness, however, to the labors of faith which has inspired the noblest works of mankind. An elderly missionary once told me that he had brought more converts to his doctrines through hope of salvation than fear of damnation. He also recommended that education should include the wise and loving cultivation of hope. It is hope that has given us the utopian dream of future good. Faith helps to build a solid foundation under hope. One of the saddest testimonies against fear is its lack of vision. One vital aspect of hope is belief in immortality, for every living thing must face the termination of physical existence. Those dominated by fear have so abused their opportunities that even if they suspect that the consciousness within them survives the grave, they are ill prepared to face what lies beyond. All morality that is fundamentally correct is sustained by the conviction of immortality. Modern science, with a far broader and deeper understanding of the universe in which we live, should lead the way to the recognition of a conscious universe in the overcoming of what Milton describes as the last great adversary--death.

Fears at the moment seem well justified. There is fear of nuclear warfare, threatening the survival of all living things upon this earth. There is fear of air pollution and the exhaustion of natural resources, of crime, revolution, civil war, and widespread disillusionment. For these imminent disasters, fear has no solution. It can only bargain to perpetuate the status in quo. Anxiety can originate from a bad conscience. When a person realizes that he has broken the rules necessary to regulate the conduct of human affairs, he is likely to expect the worst. Furthermore, if the guilty one knows in his heart that he has broken the laws of God, he has committed sins for which he is spiritually and morally responsible. Fear is included in the compound of human nature as a warning against wrongdoing. In the Divine Plan fear ultimately becomes unendurable; tragedies accumulate until the only release from misery is self improvement.

Among the wise sayings of the Greek Sophists is one that modern leaders might do well to remember: "His subjects do not fear a wise and benevolent ruler. Their only anxiety is that he may be taken from them." To a degree, at least, this truism is applicable to the members of a family, or in the structure of an economic institution. Respect and regard must be earned by each individual, and these constructive emotions make the pathway of life happier and more secure. In the course of time those in whom faith is strong also gain a wisdom beyond the reach of the selfish and self-centered. Mysticism has always advocated quietude as the path to inner understanding. Faith alone can bring this inner peacefulness. When doubts fade away, enlightenment is experienced in the soul. Physicians know that faith is a healing power. A patient seldom does well unless he has faith in his physician. Miracles of faith are recorded in all the religions of the world and still occur. There is no evidence that suspicions, doubts and grievances have accomplished any lasting good. Psychosomatically they deplete vitality, thus further depressing the mind and emotions. One way to overcome fear is to face an emergency the moment it arises. St. Paul suggests that we should agree with our adversary immediately. This does not mean that we should accept guilt for something we have not done, but should arbitrate differences without condemnation. If you are afraid of a dark closet, go in and close the door part way and after a time you can close it completely without anxiety. If you are afraid of flying, take a few trips and in a short time your nervousness will subside. If you are afraid of being wrong, present your attitudes modestly and moderately. Keep a censorship over areas of activity which you have found to be especially difficult or uncomfortable. Make the adjustments internally beforehand, so you will not be forced to defend a mistake. In planning your life keep your ambitions within reason--if you demand the impossible it will end in frustration.

When you keep faith with life, life will keep faith with you. Living is never easy, but many experience joy and contentment because they have found their fulfillment in simple and natural ways. If one is born with the capacity to do this he is fortunate indeed, but if he lacks this endowment, he cannot afford to take the attitude that others must endure an uncontrolled temper or a gloom-ridden disposition. While he is alive, he can change. If he has faith in God and life and the good in others, he can enrich and ennoble his own experience. Love transforms and transmutes the human personality, and as the Apostle Paul has said, "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Gratefully and sincerely yours,

Mandy R. Hull

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