

From Doubt to Devotion:
Personal Exploration to Finding and Understanding Faith

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Faith often starts quietly, like a small voice in your heart, a question in your mind, or a little doubt somewhere deep inside. It's a journey that takes you from doubt to devotion, from wondering and questioning things to really believing in them deeply. This change isn't about deciding to believe in certain things, rather it changes the way you see yourself and the world. For me, this journey has been truly profound and personal, all rooted in the exploration and curiosities of the universe. From a young age, my curiosity has always been piqued by existential questions about the origins of the universe and the essence of human existence, always probing the deeper truths of life and the cosmos. My scientific inquiries provided notable insights, however often fell short of answering more profound existential questions regarding the purpose of our existence and the nature of our consciousness. This gap between the scientific and spiritual queries have led me to seek for answers in the realm of religion. Doubt was an integral part of this exploration. It wasn't just skepticism about religious doctrines; it was more of a profound yearning for a reliable understanding of the bridged gaps between empirical science and spiritual truth. There was a deep desire for answers to the 'why' and the 'how' of life. Could there really be a Creator that is interwoven in our daily lives? Or is this existence simply coincidental? These doubts challenged me to dive deeper into various religious teachings, pursuing a faith that echos truth and provided comprehensive answers. I grew up having already been exposed to many spiritual traditions: Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Taoism, to name a few, but having been raised in a household deeply rooted in the teachings of Caodaism - a religion that emphasizes and embraces unity among spiritual traditions, and harmony with the Divine and humanity, ultimately had a big influence in my life, leading me to a deep devotion within Caodaism.

We often hear the saying, 'We must have faith.' Personally, I hear this quite often, from my parents, friends, individuals at a church or a temple, but what does that really mean?

At its core, “faith” is a belief or a decision not based on proof, leaping the boundaries of evidence. Faith can also mean having confidence in or loyalty to someone (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In religious terms, faith is understood as having a belief and trust in a higher power or a Divine Being, without having any form of empirical evidence. It is considered a spiritual insight that allows individuals to accept truths that transcend beyond the traditional understanding of rational thought. This creates a connection between humanity and the Divine, in a way influencing one’s behavior, moral choices, and shaping one’s world perspective, providing a sense of purpose in life. When looking at my journey to finding and understanding faith, it was initiated through the need to understand the larger questions of existence. It was religion that gave me this new understanding of life, giving me a purpose, and planting a feeling of hope in it as well. Caodaism offered a unique perspective, sharing this idea of universality, teaching diverse spiritual traditions, and illuminating this concept of different manifestations of the same truth. Having learned many different faiths as observed through my upbringing, Caodaism presents these unique and diverse interpretations of the cosmos. On top of that, it highlights its inclusive principles which deeply resonated with my pursuit for a comprehensive worldview.

Faith can serve multiple purposes: (1) being a source of comfort in times of adversity, knowing that God is looking over and protecting us, (2) a moral guide in decision-making, or (3) even providing one with hope that despite all the suffering faced in this material world, there is light shining at the end of the tunnel. It provides a framework within one’s existence where life’s most challenging questions can be studied and for all you know be answered. The importance of faith lies in its ability to offer meaning and direction, helping individuals and communities through times of uncertainty.

Recognizing the roles of faith, naturally leads us to think about the more difficult aspects of spiritual life. It’s only human to question ‘Why must we suffer?’ This

contemplation reveals a start to deepening our faith, seeking to understand why ‘God works in His mysterious ways.’ Having now the incentive to read Holy scriptures, I found myself coming across one of the many Caodaist Holy messages. “Just as birds come back to their origin and water goes away, so too are people on this Earth merely travelers. In order to accomplish their mission, they must be able to endure and abide suffering. Endurance will lead them back to their origin (1), and sufferance will expose them to different bad and good experiences of life” (Jade Emperor, 1927, 121). This message offers profound insight into understanding suffering, yet at the same time ties back to the concept of faith. The first phrase uses a metaphor of birds and water to illustrate the short nature of human life. Us humans are merely travelers of this Earth. Essentially, this journey is temporary, but purposeful, suggesting this life isn’t permanent, but has something here for us to fulfill. Diving into the second part of the message, it becomes clear faith isn’t just about trusting in a Divine Being, it’s also about embracing experiences that come along with having faith. Faith is also about trusting in the Divine Plan. The takeaway essentially is that the suffering we face at the end of the day is a test of our faith, used as a tool to help us grow, transform, and to become better versions of ourselves. This message also invites individuals to understand that despite the struggles we face in life, everything is a part of God’s plan. As someone once told me, in the *Karate Kid*, Mr. Miyagi tasked Daniel with waxing his car and completing additional house chores. We all know Daniel just wanted to learn Karate, but he found himself questioning Mr. Miyagi’s methods, not having faith in his sensei and his plans. Little did we know, in time, those skills were key to him learning karate. So, while it may seem that we suffer for nothing, not able to see the things God has in store for us, because of the mysteriousness of the Divine, we must see ultimately there is a light in the end, with God’s gift of eternal salvation.

This transition from having doubt to devotion was a gradual process that of course had its challenges along the way. In my experience, each moment of doubt wasn’t an obstacle,

but rather an invitation to deeper understanding. These periods of doubt were essential, as they pushed me to seek out experiences and teachings that can bridge the gaps I had.

Caodaism, with its emphasis on spiritual unity, suggested that all paths could lead to truth, and because of that, this universal view helped solidify my faith.

My journey from doubt to devotion, overall reflects a wide-range narrative of a spiritual discovery. It underlines the transformative ability faith has in shaping one's personal identity and also providing a compass to help navigate through life's complexities. Through devotion, and embracing Caodaism, exploring its interconnectedness with other spiritual faiths, I was able to find a new purpose in life, understanding human existence. This exploration of finding, understanding, and embracing faith as a guiding light built a firm foundation in my spiritual convictions.

References

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