

## **Faith**

What does the word “faith” (as in the name of our Network) signify for you? In the 2007 survey of Sea of Faith members respondents were offered a 1-5 continuum on which 1 represented trust/life attitude and 5 represented belief/commitment. Just over 40% of the respondents classified themselves as 1 with the remaining 60% in decreasing numbers in groups 2-5.

This was followed by “Do you want to elaborate on the meaning of ‘faith’ for you?”

Ninety seven (40% of total respondents) people responded to this invitation, and introduced a wide range of ideas as to what the word “faith” conveyed for them.

Responses suggested that amongst Sea of Faith members there are some who do not wish to use the word and a greater number for whom the word has some meaning.

### **THOSE WHO DO NOT WISH TO USE THE WORD**

Approximately 10% percent of those who elaborated, stated that for them the word was difficult, ambiguous or meaningless. This group made comments such as:

The word faith is meaningless and needs to be defined.

A humpty dumpty word – not useful.

The word today is so ambiguous that it is a liability.

In the title of the Sea of Faith it has religious overtones that are not desirable.

Difficult for me to elaborate on “faith” on a personal level because I don’t really comprehend it, for me it is more intellectual/rational /philosophical than a belief to commit myself to

Or gave reasons as to why they do not use the word:

It should mean “trust” but the problem with the word is that to most people it means “belief” – acceptance of propositions about religious matters.

In so many of the context it is used it seems to me to mean “believe or else” even if your rational mind can’t swallow it.

Faith is the word used for prejudices we want to retain or other thoughts and actions we don’t want to take intellectual responsibility for.

### **THOSE FOR WHOM THE WORD FAITH HAS SOME SIGNIFICANCE**

Those who defined or explained the word fell into three main groups:

There were those who:

Described a relationship between faith and belief, or proof.

Defined faith as trust, and introduced the object of their trust as life, self, others or “Other” or

Accepted faith as directive of a way of life

### **FAITH AS RELATED TO BELIEF OR PROOF**

While some people (7) defined faith as belief, or identified a relationship between faith and proof (11) what was to be believed or proven varied. For example:

It is also a future hope of an eternity with God. To me it means “of the faith” i.e. adherence to a religious belief, a follower of a belief system

Faith is a belief in what is known and realistically possible.

I associate faith with the phrase “leap of faith” something one has to accept without proof, often against our knowledge of processes of nature and society.

The capacity to accept an idea that we feel is right but cannot be proven in scientific terms. In the Sea of Faith I am stimulated by the ideas and discussions which challenge “Faith”

Hoping that most of what I take to be reliable information is correct.

When one has not enough facts, information or truth and one has to rely on what comes from the mind or sub conscious. I have no faith in the traditional understanding.

Certain knowledge of Absolute truth. For me this is in flashes rather than constant, but if I pause a while it is my constant.

My hope is that someday we will put our faith in facts and make evolutionary leaps to a sound system of belief i.e. religion. A philosophy that uses the claim to gain wisdom from knowledge

## **FAITH AS TRUST**

By far the greatest number of respondents (41) allied faith to trust, hope or confidence, and agreed with the idea which was introduced that year in discussion at Conference. While some made general statements:

Faith is about trust. If I have faith in something or someone, I trust them.

Like Abraham going out not knowing what will happen but trusting.

Faith involves the attitude of trust, but it also implies some commitment of belief that life has some depth and spiritual challenge for our lives

The majority introduced the object of their trust. Again the objects of that trust varied and included Life, Truth, Aspects of Self, Other People or an “Other”. In more detail:

Trust in Life - either personal or universal

The largest group of respondents stated that they put their trust (or confidence) in “life” or the value of life (13)

Faith is affirming and trusting life in spite of the worst it throws at you.

The optimistic trust that life is worthwhile - is to be lived to the full and enjoyed.

Intuitive confidence in the “Universe” in humanity nature and life

## **Faith in life – faith in the goodness, and in the fragility of humanity**

Faith denotes for me a positive trusting attitude – once I would have said “in God” now I would say “towards life and its possibilities”

Faith to me is believing in the fact that life is mysterious but still there does seem to be a point to it no matter how occluded.

Faith for me is the understanding of being and belonging to this world and trusting in the process of life beyond

## **Trust in Truth**

I am not comfortable with the word faith but I suppose I do have faith in the truth (if there is such a thing) coming to the fore eventually

I trust truth/fidelity

## **Trust in Oneself**

Others referred to personal characteristics, values or action as a basis of faith and wrote

Faith is equal to fidelity – for me I have faith in myself – my own integrity morals etc (2)

A confidence that my deepest feelings about who I am and where I stand are real and have meaning and value for me.

Trust that accepting responsibility for my life and action is moral and meaningful.

A probably unrealistic belief that things will turn out “for the best” in the end. An attitude of hope for me and for the world.

Faith is not so much a firm belief in a set of parameters as it is a learning towards a personal assessment of things spiritual and beyond concrete definition.

## **Trust in Community or an “Other/God”**

Trust or faith was also placed in other people, the world or the universe as a whole:

Faith has a strong element of trust, loyalty and commitment to others.

A total response of trust towards the world in general, towards people and towards the future.

Faith for me means that I am not alone in the universe, that the universe has meaning, and that I as well as the community of others who share that universe are part of that meaning, even if we don’t understand it fully.

## **Confidence that there is “other” and that it is good.**

Faith/trust in God, given as a gift, responded to, growing deeper fuller over years.

A trust in that “other” in my life (I don’t name it God) as I’ve aged I’ve pondered that much comes from “within” and I’ve been committed to Jesus journey since my late teens always pursuing justice and peace

## **FAITH OR TRUST AS DIRECTIVE OF A WAY OF LIFE**

For many (18) the word “faith” signified a commitment to, or a particular way of life or values. For these people faith meant:

Values or beliefs from which one’s actions and ethics are derived.

Faith is choosing to “be” and to act a life in a certain way not dependent on a certainty of outcome..

A world view in which the individual relates in a caring way to other living creatures in the environment.

To try to keep an optimistic life attitude and help others when I can. I keep an open mind and do not have blind ‘faith’ in any teaching.

That by attitude and example my life can be useful towards making our world a better place for those (our grandchildren) to inherit.

Faith as an essential life/ attitude/ commitment to essential moral standards/ customs/ traditions/legal systems/memberships (4)

Trust that loving kindness and compassion, working for justice, honest endeavor and truth seeking are always worthwhile whether they achieve their outward goals or not. They need no other justification.

A trust and commitment to the ultimate goodness of human beings as in the example of Jesus Christ, as the ultimate model for our lives.

Faith is confidently living life in the belief that it is good, accepting fulfilling to the belief that we all contribute to a harmonious society of mutual support and participation.

Faith is the acceptance of a way of life as being the best for giving life meaning. I have chosen Jesus teaching, I can envisage in a different time/setting if I had been alive choosing Zarathustra or Buddha. It is about the best good wisdom of the age

Faith - closely linked to hope – living as closely as I can to the values I have committed to, these have come to me through the Christian tradition.

Unthinking obedience

Faith denotes a reaching out for the highest aspirations possible for us to reach.

### **And in this group I have included three who allied faith with courage**

For me faith is virtually a synonym for “courage” – the courage to explore what has been to easily assumed or accepted

I have Tillich’s articulation of faith as courage to be, We all have some convictions or values we do not acquiesce in reality as it is, but have a conviction of what ought to be.

No doubt there are many other expressions of what faith signifies . I have included two quotes from previous Conferences, and it would be interesting to read others.

At the 1988 Conference Patti Whaley an English music therapist concluded her paper (“Exploring Reality and meaning in Absolute music”) with these words

“The difference between verbal and symbolic language, between words and music, echoes the difference between belief and faith. "Belief", as Alan Watts said, "... is the insistence that the truth is what one would 'lie' or wish it to be ... Faith ... is an unreserved opening of the mind to the truth, whatever it may turn out to be. Faith has no preconceptions; it is a plunge into the unknown. Belief clings, but faith lets go."

The previous year Lloyd Geering had presented a paper titled “Faith and Doubt On The Margins” in which he wrote:

“Faith is something altogether different (from belief). There were people of faith in the Middle Ages. There are people of faith today. But the body of beliefs held by people at different times and from within which they attempt to express that faith in words may differ very considerably. To recover the full significance of faith it is essential that we divorce it from any notion of commitment to particular beliefs.

This may be illustrated by now showing how faith is related to doubt. The experience of doubt has too often been misunderstood and undervalued in Christian circles. Perhaps this owed something to the story of Doubting Thomas and later to John Bunyan. In his famous allegory about life, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he described Giant Despair dwelling in Doubting Castle. Now it is true that the absence of faith can be described as despair. But the absence of doubt is not faith but credulity—a very different thing indeed.”

**Natali Allen**