

Shraddhaa

“I’ve been told that Shraddhaa is not actually faith but rather ‘Willingness to surrender to dharma.’ I’m put off by the idea of ‘blind faith.’”

Dictionaries agree that Shraddhaa is defined as faith. This faith is not actually blind but that which is in line with our confidence and of course it must be in line with dharma. Confidence in our practice, teacher, method and ultimately ourselves and dharma is one of Patanjali’s requirements for obtaining samprajnaata samaadhi. (The other option is through birth or death which is not of interest in this discussion.) Shraddhaa can also be belief but not an unsupported belief. As we live and grow beliefs can be substantiated or falsified. Falsified beliefs can’t originate from shraddhaa. Therefore blind faith can’t be shraddhaa. In order for faith to be shraddhaa it must have substantiation. It must be grounded in reality. Perhaps we may not understand that reality and that’s where we *require* faith to transport us over the gap between our understanding and actual reality.

So shraddhaa is trust. Trusting in that what we do, will bring the results we desire. Shraddhaa is a welcoming of those results with all our desire for them in place. So shraddhaa is even the burning desire to have those results transpire forth in our life with all their benefit. Shraddhaa is a clear and unobstructed knowingness in the desirable results that will come from our action. It is never based on dogma and cannot be.

In the ‘Mahaa Bhaarata’ ‘Shraddhaa’ is found as the wife of ‘Dharma’ so certainly ‘Shraddhaa’ is surrendering to ‘Dharma’ but then we must capitalize her name. Here we must make a distinction in our understanding of what is surrendering to ‘Dharma.’ It is ‘Shraddhaa’ itself that surrenders to ‘Dharma’ in the ‘Mahaa Bhaarata’ but not the person who has shraddhaa. You would not call the person’s surrender shraddhaa although surrender requires shraddhaa. You cannot surrender to someone without shraddhaa and if you do try to surrender without shraddhaa then it is a mistake and you will pay for it. An example would be to bow down at someone’s feet because a bunch of people told you to do it but you didn’t feel right about it.

In the ‘Maarkendeya Puraana’ ‘Shraddhaa’ is found as the ‘mother of Desire.’ Then we can come to understand that even what we wish for has its roots in shraddhaa.

Shraddhaa is also the longing in a pregnant woman, so if we can imagine or experience what that might be than we can more closely understand this mysterious shraddhaa. May that open an eye for discussion with your wife or anyone’s mother.

Now faith can be based on testimony and testimony is one of the three aspects of correct perception laid out by Patanjali. Eventually, according to his model of correct perception, this testimony (aagamaa) must be thought out (anumaana) and eventually seen (pratyaksa). But don’t jump and say we must have pratyaksa in order to have correct perception. It is considered valid, for some time, to accept testimony as correct perception.

If your partner called you and told you that the house caught on fire and the children are ok, you would have to decide on how much faith you have in their words to decide if you can truly visualize the actuality of your house burning down and your children unmarked. If you decide that you won't believe it until you see it than you have little faith in your partner. That may be with all justification and it's a personal matter between you and them but it is because there is no shraddhaa. However, if they stated this and you immediately took it as fact without having to see, well that's faith, and if you call that blind faith well may I suggest then that you certainly don't know your partner as well as you should? You would actually never have to go and see for yourself, you could simply go on get the insurance etc and move on in life without ever going to the site of your old home. There would be no doubt in your mind.

That certainty of knowing that your house is already burnt is shraddhaa. If you now go to see your house it should be of no surprise at all to find it leveled to the ground in embers. To the level that you are surprised would show lack of shraddhaa in your partner's words (shraddhaarahita) and if when you see the house fully intact with no fire damage whatsoever, then your belief in your partner's words was not shraddhaa, but rather blind faith and falsified belief.

Willingness to surrender to dharma seems to fit better with 'Ishvarapranidhaana.'

Paul JJ Alix
YOGA for ALL



YOGA for ALL

Paul JJ Alix, Founder and Director of YOGA for ALL: Any Body. Any Condition. At Any Age. Paul teaches in the tradition of Krishnamacharya and Desikachar and is a yoga educator recommended highly by Gary Kraftsow of Viniyoga America. He is available throughout the country for Teacher Training Programs and student workshops on various principles of practice, including Vedic Chanting, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, Sanskrit for Chanting, Therapeutic Posture Adaptation, and Breath-influenced Aasana Principles.

212 472 9642

<http://YOGAforALL.org>