

## ‘The Concept of Faith and Grades of Faith in the Gospels and Its parallels in Hindu-Buddhistic Scriptures’

### Introduction:

Faith is the basic quality of any religion or in any school of disciples. Whether it is a theistic religion or an atheistic religion, the adherents are expected to believe. If it is a theistic religion, the follower is asked to have faith with its credo. If it is an atheistic religion, the disciple is asked to believe in the main philosophical thoughts of the system.

Faith is also a basic quality of an ordinary person in his/her daily activities. We go to bed thinking that we will wake up on the following day; the sun sets and we believe it will rise again; we sow the seeds and believe that there will be growth; the fishermen go to the sea thinking that they will have a catch; mothers put paddy into pot and think it will become a tasty rice and it happen.

There have been thousands of famous quotations, irrespective religions, but they are very inspiring as well. *'Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.'* says the famous pastor and champion of human rights, Martin Luther King, Jr; *'Faith is the bird that feels the light when the dawn is still dark'* says the famous Indian-Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore; *'Doubt is a pain too lonely to know that faith is his twin brother.'* says American and Lebanese writer Khalil Gibran; and *'when your faith becomes stronger than your fears then your dreams can become a reality,'* says a Buddhistic meditation.

Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism are different but unique in their concept of faith, and their exploration on this basic human quest is very interesting. Christianity and Hinduism are theistic religions where faith in God or in gods becomes an uncompromising necessity, whereas Buddhism is a gnostic school where faith is a serious discipline.

In this is paper I would like to draw your attention to some important texts of the Gospels where kinds of faith are dealt with and also to a few examples regarding the concept of faith in Shree Bagavath Geetha.

### 1. The Concept of Faith in Gospel Passages

Faith in the Biblical understanding:

The Hebrew term *'mn* (מֵן) and the Greek term *pistis* (πίστις) are widely used in the Sacred Scriptures to denote the action of faith. Both Testaments of the Bible give priority to the idea of faith. Biblical theology usually roots NT faith in the OT, and some speak of a Judeo-Christian concept, even of a ‘fundamentally identical’ OT and NT notion. Actually, Hebrew lacks a word for ‘faith’ (*'ēmûnâ* (אֱמוּנָה) is rare and equals ‘fidelity’).

The Christian use of *pistis* πίστις comes in terms of acceptance of the *kérygma κήρυγμα* or apostolic proclamation about the crucified and risen Lord Jesus. The Greek word *pistis* πίστις becomes a technical term for the reaction to gospel preaching: it is an act of faith with regard to the story about Jesus coupled with the promise of future salvation (Acts 4:4; This future hope was part of the *kerygma κήρυγμα*. It is also should be noted that Christians were first known as ‘believers’ (Acts 2:44)<sup>1</sup>

Apostle Paul is a champion of this concept. For him, the personal faith that comes from hearing the word and confessing Jesus’ lordship includes ‘the obedience of faith’ (Rom 1:5). Thus, faith for him relates to ethics, in close relationship to its expression toward the future as ‘hope’ *ἐλπίς* and toward others as love *ἀγάπη* (1 Thess 1 :3; Rom 13:8-10).

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<sup>1</sup> πάντες δὲ οἱ πιστεύοντες ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινὰ- *All who believed were together and had all things in common;*).

## The concept of Faith in the Gospels:

The Gospels are very vivid in portraying some grades of faith in Jesus. Every grade of faith has a background, purpose and message. There are three kinds of faith found in the Gospels: faithlessness (*ἀπιστία apistia*), little faith (*ὀλιγόπιστος oligopistos*), and great faith (*μεγάλη πίστη megalê pistê*).

### 1. Faithlessness (*ἀπιστία apistia*)

A. Rejection of Jesus in Nazareth in Matthew 13:58: *καὶ οὐκ ἐποίησεν ἐκεῖ δυνάμεις πολλὰς διὰ τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν*. [And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief.] This is an incident in Nazareth, the hometown of the Lord Jesus. Chapter 13 is multiplied here with many parables and teachings: the parable of the Sower, the purpose of the parable and its explanations vv.1-23; the parable of the Weeds among the Wheat vv. 24-30, the parable of the Mustard Seed vv.31-32, the parable of the Yeast v 33, the use of the parables and its explanation vv. 34-43, the three parables vv. 44-50, the treasures New and Old vv. 51-53, and the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth vv.53-58.

After Jesus had thought and explained to the residents who were his own countrymen, he could have expected a positive outcome such as belief in him. When Jesus enters into his own hometown synagogue, perhaps it would have been his childhood and adulthood synagogue where he learned the Scriptures and the Law and was nurtured in his Jewish spirituality, his countrymen rather than appreciating and believing in him, were astounded at him. Evangelist Matthew uses the word *ἐκπλήσσω (ekplêssô)*, which is more dubious than believing. Not only were they astounded at him, they dared to find out his background in order to offend him. This made Jesus quote the famous statement 'A prophet is not without honor except in his own country,' This could have been a famous statement among his contemporaries. Finally, even Lord Jesus meets his inability to do mighty works due to people's unbelief (*δυνάμεις πολλὰς διὰ τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν*). This is a clear example that unbelief could even control the uncontrollable God himself.

This particular narrative is also a text in other Gospels as, in Mark 6:1-6a, Luke 4:16-30; and this narrative might have slight parallels in John 4:44; 6:42; 7:15; 10:39.

B. Curing of the boy with a demon Matthew 17:17: *ὦ γενεὰ ἄπιστος καὶ διεστραμμένη, ἕως πότε μεθ' ὑμῶν ἔσομαι*; [*You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you?*].

This is another incident where a certain father approached Jesus and pleads with him to heal his son who is believed to be an epileptic and suffering gravely. He also suffers as he falls into the fire and into water. Then he narrates that Jesus's disciples are unable to heal him. He could have expected praise from the Lord, thinking that Jesus will take the opportunity for his glory but Jesus rebukes him with strong words. "*You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you?*" v.17.

Jesus is the first one here to find out that this particular boy is possessed with a demon, and at his rebuke the boy was cured instantly. Finally, Jesus explains the reason why the disciples could not cure the boy, that is by the reason of their little faith.

Very alarmingly, faithlessness seems to be the character of very important people. Unlike the second instance mentioned above, it is the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, Doctors of the Law, Local Government authorities and mostly the influential people of the society who have faithlessness (*ἀπιστία*) and they miss Jesus and they never experienced him at all. Their intelligence and ability of the Sacred Scripture could not help them in believing their own Messiah. This is a clear sign that it not proficiency but faith that matters. They are very unfortunate people.

## 2. Little Faith (*ὀλιγόπιστος oligopistos*):

The second grade of faith is ‘Little Faith.’ This kind of faith, although very often rebuked by the Lord Jesus, is not fully negative. People who possessed this faith were disciples and apostles who were very much loved by Jesus and who always remained with Jesus. Mostly they were Jews, and some were his kith and kin. The Little Faith has 6 hits in the Gospels, Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; and Luke 12:28.

A. Anxieties about Earthly Things Lk 12:28: *εἰ δὲ ἐν ἀγρῷ τὸν χόρτον ὄντα σήμερον καὶ αὔριον εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον ὁ θεὸς οὕτως ἀμφιέζει, πόσῳ μᾶλλον ὑμᾶς, ὀλιγόπιστοι .[But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith!]*

Luke’s chapter 12 is filled with warnings and exhortations. In this chapter the Lord encourages the disciples in a very big crowd (vv. 1-7), he demands that the people should have fearless confession of Christ (vv. 8-12), and then he exhorts them in the Parable of the Rich Fool (vv.13-21), and finally he encourages the crowd and his disciples not to worry (vv. 22-34).

This chapter has some more topics as: watchful slaves (vv. 35-40), the Faithful and Unfaithful Slaves (vv. 41-48), Jesus the Cause of Division (vv.49-53), Interpreting the Times (vv.54-56), and the settling with the Opponent (vv.57-59).

In our area of question, the Lord exhorts on the meaningless anxieties. Human lives are wasting time with meaningless anxieties regarding life, food, body and clothing. Human beings are asked by the Lord to look at the little birds of the sky, and how they are fed and protected. Also, the little green plants and their flowers are taken as examples to meditate on the beauty and values. Solomon, supposed to be the wisest and most diplomatic king of Israel, was a rich and embellished king. His glory was widely known in the Middle Eastern countries. Even this most famous king could not defeat the beauty of the field lilies (*λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ,οὐδὲ Σολομὼν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ περιεβάλετο ὡς ἐν τούτων*). So, if God can clothe this daily passing little flower so much, how is it not possible that he will not look after human beings who are his image and likeness. And here, at this juncture, he utters his famous statement ‘*you of little faith!*’ (*ὕμᾶς ὀλιγόπιστοι*).

*ὀλιγόπιστος* is a state in faith life that means little faith or trusting too little, but it is not a negative state as *ἀπιστία*-faithlessness. In many cases in the Gospels, people who possessed little faith are either his disciples or his apostles. Very interestingly Peter, the prime Apostle, is connected with little faith. When Jesus rebuked the winds at the storming sea, Peter was in the scene (Matt 8:26), where he challenged their little faith. It was Peter who asked the Lord to allow him to walk over the sea as the Lord himself walked, and while trying to walk, Peter was about to sink into the sea. Once again, the Lord holds him and blames him as man of little faith (Matt 14:31). On another occasion, when the Lord was warning them about the Yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, the disciples are worried about not bringing any bread. Here too, Jesus rebukes the disciples for having little faith.

Thus, the disciples and apostles who had only little faith developed into a deep faith. Almost all of them became martyrs in the days after the resurrection of the Lord. Their little faith never remained little.

## 3. Great Faith (*μέγας πιστός megas pistos*):

This is the third and ultimate kind of faith that is shining among the Gospels. Very interestingly, this kind of faith is very often identified with foreigners or people of lesser status in the society of the historical Jesus. Their great faith even made the Lord to be amazed and

appreciate them. These people become models of faith and they encourage others in their own struggle in their faith journey. The instances of great faith are: the Faith of the Centurion (Matt 8:5-13), the Faith of the people who brought the paralytic to the Lord (Matt 9:2-8), the faith of a woman who suffered with a hemorrhage (Matt 9:20-22), the faith of the blind man (Matt 9:27-31), and the faith of the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:21-28).

A. The great faith of the Canaanite Woman (15:21-28): *ὦ γύναι ,μεγάλη σου ἡ πίστις· (ô guano, megalê sou hê pistis)* ["Woman, great is your faith!].

This is an incident that happened in the district of Tyre and Sidon. Jesus moves into this Gentile region and was confronted by a Gentile woman with a demon-possessed daughter. The dialogue which resulted focused on the question of how far a Gentile might expect any benefit from the Jewish Messiah. The story is very similar to that of the centurion's servant, not only in that faith was rewarded by a healing word spoken from a distance, but also in the racial tension which put that faith to the test. By describing the woman as a *Canaanite*, Matthew sharpens the issue. The Canaanites were the traditional enemies of Israel in the OT. Some believe that the Canaanites were nicknamed dogs, perhaps a big number of Jews did not like dogs.

Jesus' discouraging silence was followed by an even more daunting statement of the Jewish focus of his mission. His words seem to have left no room for hope, but the woman persisted with a simple appeal for help, only to be confronted by a yet more wounding saying, comparing Gentiles with *dogs*. The language seems incredibly offensive, especially when spoken by the gentle Jesus who had earlier welcomed the faith of the Gentile centurion as a pointer to Gentiles sharing in future in the blessings of Israel and Abraham. At any rate, he was confronting her with the sort of language a Gentile could expect to hear from a Jew, and her faith rose to the test. Some interpreters think that the harsh words of Jesus are actually to point out the wrong thinking of the male Jewish thought about the Gentiles; v.26 - "*It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.*" (*οὐκ ἔστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ βαλεῖν τοῖς κυναρίοις*).

He is not bothered about the certain Jewish mentality on Gentiles, and she is concentrating on winning the heart of the Lord. Her answer stops the Lord and also make him realise that, whether Gentiles or Jews, these are only terms, but all them are children of God - v. 27 "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." (*ἡ δὲ εἶπεν· ναὶ κύριε ,καὶ γὰρ τὰ κυνάρια ἐσθίει ἀπὸ τῶν ψιγίων τῶν πιπτόντων ἀπὸ τῆς τραπέζης τῶν κυρίων αὐτῶν*). And then the acknowledgment and the appreciation of the Lord, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish," seems to be the desire of the Lord for all who will to believe in Jesus. For the Lord, ethnicity does not matter, but what matters is only faith, and the grade of faith.

Very tellingly, people who possessed great faith are not Jews or experts in Jewish traditions, nor the relatives of the Lord, but foreigners or marginalised ones of the society. Hence it is the faith that gives one an identity as Jesus' disciple, for this identity, ethnicity is not a matter and it does not count.

Hence, we conclude that the concept of faith is a major question and theme in the Gospels, since the Gospels' major reason and motive were to strengthen the falling faith of the first Christian communities, which were hunted and persecuted both by the Jewish and Roman authorities. The grades of faith in the Gospels are: *no-faith, little faith and great faith* as measuring sticks to the then Christians. They were encouraged to grow in their faith, and they were assured that Faith is sufficient, and Faith will save them. Ref. 7:50: *εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε πορεύου εἰς εἰρήνην* - And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace.

## 2. The Concept of Faith in Bhagavad Geetha, chapter 17

### Introduction - *Shreemad Bhagavad Gita*:

The Bhagavad Gita (Song of the Lord) is among the most important and ancient religious texts of Hinduism, and easily the best known. It is been quoted by writers, poets, scientists, theologians, and philosophers of all kinds for centuries, and is often the introductory text to Hinduism for a non-Hindu audience. It is normally known as the Gita, and was originally part of one of the great Indian epics, the Mahabharata. Its date of composition, therefore, is closely associated with that of the epic, the 5th-3rd century BC. But not all scholars agree that the work was originally included in the Mahabharata text and so date it later, to c. 2nd century BC. Regarding the date, this is one of the views only.

The Gita is a dialogue between the warrior-prince Arjuna and the lord Krishna who is serving as his charioteer at the Battle of *Kurukshetra* fought between Arjuna's family and allies (*known as the Pandavas*) and those of the prince *Duryodhana* and his family (known as the Kauravas) and their allies. This dialogue is recited by the *Kaurava* counselor *Sanjaya* to his blind king *Dhritarashtra* (both far from the battleground) as Shree Krishna has given *Sanjaya* a mystical sight so that he will be able to see and report the battle to the king.

### Vedas, Upanishads, & the Three Gunas:

Hinduism is known to adherents as *Sanatan Dharma*, (Eternal Order or Eternal Path) and it is informed at its fundamental level by the texts known as the Vedas which also include subtexts known as the Upanishads. The word *Veda* means "knowledge," and *Upanishad* is interpreted as to "sit down closely and listen" as though drawing near for instruction from a master. The *Vedas* convey the essential knowledge of the universe; the *Upanishads* instruct one on how to use that knowledge.

The vision of the Vedas and Upanishads, in its simplest and most concise form, is that there is a single entity –Brahman – who is the creator of existence and the existence itself. Human beings carry a spark of this great Divinity, known as the Atman, within themselves. The purpose of life is to reach the self-actualisation of the Atman which will then bring one into a union with Brahman in life after when one experiences physical death.

Standing in the way of one's self-actualisation are worldly distractions in the form of the three *gunas* – qualities, characteristics, states of mind –inherent in each individual. The *gunas* are:

- . *Sattva* – wisdom, goodness, enlightenment
- . *Rajas* – passion, activity, aggression
- . *Tamas* – darkness, confusion, helplessness

The *gunas* are not a hierarchy one needs to work through from bottom to top, but all three exist, to greater or lesser degrees, in every individual. The *gunas* help to enslave the mind by interpreting the world one sees as the truth –as the way life and the universe truly are –and so trap one in the cycle of rebirth and death (*samsara*), keeping one from self-actualisation by diverting attention from the truth of reality to what one has been taught to accept as reality.

### Chapter 17: Bhagavad Gita:

As in the fourteenth chapter, where Shree Krishna explained that the three modes of material nature hold the movement of human beings, in the 17<sup>th</sup> Chapter Shree Krishna explains

the influences of the Gunas in detail. This is the Chapter that gives prime importance to 'Faith' and the 'Aspects of Faith' in Hinduism. Krishna exhibits that faith is an inseparable and unavoidable factor in human life. Depending upon the nature of the mind, the faith too takes shapes and actions. The mind could be in three categories such as; *sāttvic*, *rajasic*, or *tāmasic*. The nature of their faith determines the quality of their life. People also prefer food according to their mental dispositions. Shree Krishna classifies food into three categories and discusses the impact of each of these upon human being. Further, he discusses the topic of sacrifice (*yajña*) and how, in each of the three modes of nature, sacrifice takes on different forms. Then the chapter moves on to the subject of austerity (*tapah*), and explains austerities of the body, speech, and mind. Each of these kinds of austerity takes on a different form as influenced by the mode of goodness, passion, or ignorance. The topic of charity (*dān*) is then discussed, and its three-fold divisions are described.

Finally, Shree Krishna goes beyond the three *guṇas* and explains the relevance and the importance of the words “*Om Tat Sat*,” which symbolise different aspects of the Absolute Truth.

17,1: अर्जुन उवाच | ये शास्त्रविधिमुत्सृज्य यजन्ते श्रद्धयान्विताः | तेषां निष्ठा तु का कृष्ण सत्त्वमाहो रजस्तमः  
// 1//

*arjuna uvācha, ye śhāstra-vidhim utsrījya yajante śhraddhayānvitāḥ, teṣhām niṣṭhā tu kā kṛṣhṇa sattvam āho rajas tamah*

*Arjun said: O Krishna, where do they stand who disregard the injunctions of the scriptures, but still worship with faith? Is their faith in the mode of goodness, passion, or ignorance?*

In the preceding chapter, Shree Krishna spoke of the differences between the divine and satanic natures to help Arjuna understand the virtues that should be cultivated and personality traits that should be eradicated. At the end of the chapter, he stated that one who disregards the injunctions of the scriptures, and instead foolishly follows the impulses of the body and the whims of the mind, will not achieve perfection, happiness, or freedom from the cycle of life and death. He thus recommended that people follow the guidance of the scriptures and act accordingly. This instruction led to the present question. Arjun desires to know the nature of the faith of those who worship without reference to the Vedic scriptures. In particular, he wishes to understand the answer in terms of the three modes of material nature.

If one can attain everything through sacred scriptures, when what about a man who is wicked in himself but reading the scriptures? Will he be able to attain heaven? This is the reasonable question of a serious human being and Shree Krishna is to answer the question.

17,2: श्रीभगवानुवाच | त्रिविधा भवति श्रद्धा देहिनां सा स्वभावजा | सात्त्विकी राजसी चैव तामसी चेति तां  
शृणु || 2||

*śhrī-bhagavān uvācha, tri-vidhā bhavati śhraddhā dehinām sā svabhāva-jā, sāttvikī rājasī chaiva tāmasī cheti tām śhriṇu*

*The Supreme Divine Personality said: Every human being is born with innate faith, which can be of three kinds—sāttvic, rājasic, or tāmasic. Now hear about this from me.*

Nobody can be without faith, for it is an inseparable aspect of every human personality. Those who do not believe in the scriptures are also with the taste of faith. Their faith is reposed elsewhere. It could be on the logical ability of their intellect, or the perceptions of their senses, or the theories they have decided to believe in. For example, when people say, “I do not believe in God because I cannot see him”, they do not have faith in God but they have faith in their

eyes and in their theories and convictions that there is no God. Hence, they assume that if their eyes cannot see something, it probably does not exist. This is also a kind of faith.

Others say, "I do not believe in the authenticity of the ancient scriptures. Instead, I accept the theories of modern science". This is also a kind of faith, for we have seen in the last few centuries how theories of science keep getting amended and overthrown. It is possible that the present scientific theories we believe to be true may also be proved incorrect in the future. Accepting them as truths is also a leap of faith.

This world cannot escape the presence of faith. Faith doesn't mean that one is to believe in God alone, or in a particular religion alone. Faith could be different according to the taste. Whatever it is, as far as faith is concerned, there must be an area where one cannot expect everything to be explained. Now Shree Krishna explains the reason why different people choose to place their faith in different places.

17,3:

सत्त्वानुरूपा सर्वस्य श्रद्धा भवति भारत | श्रद्धामयोऽयं पुरुषो यो यच्छ्रद्धः स एव सः || 3||

*sattvānurūpā sarvasya śhraddhā bhavati bhārata, śhraddhā-mayo yaṁ puruṣho yo yachchhraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ*

*The faith of all humans conforms to the nature of their mind. All people possess faith, and whatever the nature of their faith, that is verily what they are.*

The nature of our faith shapes and directs the nature of our life. People who think that wealth is the most important thing then spend all their energy and time in accumulating it. Others, who believe that fame is everything, likewise spend all their energy, in attaining fame. Thus, Shree Krishna states that the quality of our faith decides the direction of our life. In turn, the quality of our faith is decided by the nature of our mind. *And so, in response to Arjun's question, Shree Krishna begins expounding on the kinds of faith that exist.*

17,4: यजन्ते सात्त्विका देवान्यक्षरक्षांसि राजसाः | प्रेतान्भूतगणांश्चान्ये यजन्ते तामसा जनाः || 4||

*yajante sāttvikā devān yakṣha-rakṣhānsi rājasāḥ, pretān bhūta-gaṇānśh chānye yajante tāmasā janāḥ*

*Those in the mode of goodness worship the celestial gods; those in the mode of passion worship the yakṣhas and rākṣhasas; those in the mode of ignorance worship ghosts and spirits.*

Goodness multiplies goodness and bad orients towards bad things. The threefold nature of *sraddha* or faith can be determined by a *jivas* or embodied being's mode of worship. Those situated in *sattva guna*, the mode of goodness, worship the Supreme Lord Krishna and His authorised incarnations. Those situated in *raja guna*, the mode of passion, pay homage to demoniac entities for power, wealth, fame and pleasure. Those situated in *tama guna*, the mode of ignorance, pray to abstract gods with vague qualities as well as to ghosts and spirits. Thus, by their actions, their position and quality of faith can be clearly discerned.

This chapter has 28 verses. It develops from the question asked by Arjuna, and from there Shree Krishna has a reason to explain the various grades of faith. Arjuna could represent the human beings asking questions and Shree Krishna could represent divine wisdom answering the human questions. Arjuna asks which *Guna* prevails in men who "worship with

faith" but "reject the scriptures." There are three types of faith, *Krishna* responds. Each corresponds to a person's inner nature, depending upon which *Guna* dominates.

People with *sattvic* natures worship gods, those with *rajasic* natures worship demigods and demons, and those with *tamasic* natures worship dark spirits and ghosts. Krishna also divides food into three categories according to the *gunas*. Sattvic foods are fresh and tender and encourage vitality. *Rajasic* foods are bitter, salty, sour, or pungent and cause discomfort. *Tamasic* foods are bland, stale, overcooked and contaminated. Worship done according to scripture only for the sake of worship is *sattvic*; worship done out of desire is *rajasic*; worship done without faith is *tamasic*. *Sattvic* control of the body, mind, and speech is practiced in faith with no desire for an outcome. *Rajasic* control comes from pride in order to gain respect or admiration. *Tamasic* control is used to harm or gain power over others. Finally, charity also can be divided into three types according to the *gunas*. *Sattvic* charity is given for its own sake; *rajasic* charity is halfhearted and given selfishly; *tamasic* charity is given disrespectfully at the wrong place or time.

Krishna explains the phrase *Om Tat Sat*. The sacred sound *om* is chanted at the beginning of an act of charity, control, or worship. *Tat*, translated from Sanskrit as "the Absolute," is chanted during the performance of right action. *Sat* is chanted to indicate a "praiseworthy action." If worship, control, or charity are done without faith, they are referred to in Sanskrit as *asat*, or "unreal."

Hence, we understand the importance of faith and its grades with its quality in Hinduism. Faith which has no good motivation and not emanating from the divine is not forthcoming. Faith that has good standing is divine and liberating one.

### 3. The Concept of Faith in Buddhistic Texts

#### Introduction: Faith (*saddha*) in Theravada Buddhism:

Unlike Christianity and Hinduism, the Buddhistic understanding of the concept of Faith is not God-centred. 'Faith is a strong belief in the doctrine of a religion based on spiritual conviction rather than proof and a strong belief in the doctrine of a religion based on spiritual conviction rather than proof,' thus says a definition in the Oxford Dictionary. Buddhism is not a God-centred religion which does not speak about a Creator God, and one is not expected to believe in It/Him completely for salvation. The Buddhistic word *Saddha* (Pali) or *Sraddha* (Sanskrit) is normally translated as Faith in English, which is only a minimal translation. *Saddha* could mean *faith, trust, devotion* or *confidence*.

Generally, two types of faith are identified in Buddhistic teaching, they are;

1. Blind, irrational, baseless or rootless faith (*amulika saddha*)
2. Confidence based on reason and experience (*akarawathi saddha*)

The Buddha did not want his disciples to simply follow him, he even encouraged them to not to follow his teaching blindly. He insisted that they implore and investigate his teaching. He thus expected an investigated verification of his teaching. He believed that faith or devotion associated with strong emotions can become an obstacle to the disciple's spiritual development.

It is said that during the lifetime of the Buddha, a Buddhist monk by the name of *Vakkali* had been ordained as a monk for the sole reason of being able to remain close to the Buddha, as he was overwhelmed by the Buddha's noble appearance. Through affection and

immense reverence towards the Buddha, he endeavored to remain close to the Buddha but, in doing so, neglected his religious duties including meditation. The Buddha admonished Vakkali, stating,

*yo dhammam passati so mam passata, yo mam passati so dhammam passati*  
*The sight of my foul body is useless, he who sees Dhamma sees me*

On another occasion, when Buddha was announcing his impending demise from the world, many were coming and paying their last respects. But one particular monk, namely *Dhammarama*, did not pay a visit. When the Buddha was informed of this, He called for *Dhammarama* and questioned him about it. *Dhammarama* informed the Buddha that, as a means of paying his last respects to Him, he wanted to meditate as hard as possible and become an *Arahant* (an enlightened disciple) before the Buddha passed away. The Buddha praised the monk's intention and proclaimed: "He who loves me should follow the example of *Dhammarama*. He who honors me most practices my teaching best."

Unlike faith-based religions, in which faith is a significant factor for salvation, in Buddhism devotion or blind faith alone will not help one to attain liberation. When Buddhist disciples make offerings to the Buddha during religious activities, they do not expect to attain their liberation through the offerings, but rather, hope to pay homage and gratitude to the great teacher and to receive merits for their wholesome actions.

Faith in the Buddha's enlightenment and teachings can act as an essential and powerful motivating factor, particularly during the initial stages of a disciple's spiritual journey towards liberation from suffering.

It is recorded in *Kalama Sutta* of the *Anguttara Nikaya* (a collection of the Buddha's numerous discourses) that Buddha is advising his disciples not to follow any path simply.

"On mere hearsay, by mere tradition, on account of mere rumours, just because it accords with your scriptures, by mere suppositions, by mere inference, by merely considering the reasons, merely because it agrees with your preconceived notions, because the speaker seems a good person, because the speaker is someone respected by you.

When you know for yourselves, these things are immoral, these things are blameworthy, these things are censured by the wise, these things, when undertaken and performed, conduce to ruin and sorrow, they should be rejected.

When you know for yourselves, these things are moral, these things are blameless, these things are praised by the wise, these things, when undertaken and performed conduce to wellbeing and happiness, then you should live accordingly."

(Ref., *Narada Mahathera 1982, Buddhism in a Nutshell, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.*)

### ***Faith in the Triple Gem***

Objects of faith in Buddhism are on the 'Triple Gem'- the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha—which are also known as the 'Triple Treasures or Triple Jewels.' The Buddha, not as a personality or God but as the enlightened teacher; Dhamma, as that great teacher's teachings to be followed in order to attain liberation from all suffering; and Sangha, as the living community of the Buddha's disciples who have attained the final goal of liberation or have entered its path. Having faith in the Triple Gem in the initial stages of one's spiritual journey can help the disciple manage any doubts that may arise and enable the disciple to work

persistently towards personal realisation of the four Noble Truths –the ultimate goal of a Buddhist disciple.

A Buddhistic disciple will surely be led into being attracted by Buddha. He/she will develop faith or trust in the Triple Gem, not faith in the personalities of the Buddha or of the Buddha's noble disciples but in the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. Among the numerous qualities of the Triple Gem, 24 specific qualities—nine qualities of the Buddha; six qualities of the Dhamma; and nine qualities of the Sangha—have been mentioned in Buddhist teachings. An ardent disciple of Buddha is asked to confess this credo.

a disciple is asked to have faith in these Six Qualities of Dhamma:

1. (swakkhato) - Well-proclaimed by the Enlightened One, excellent in the beginning, middle and end
2. (sanditthiko) - To self-realize by personal effort and experience
3. (akaliko) - Timeless; results can be achieved immediately
4. (ahipassiko) - Anyone can be invited to see and experience the results of practice
5. (opaneyiko) - Suitable to be brought inside oneself and to be experienced
6. (paccattam veditabbo vinnuhi) - To be realized individually, depending on the maturity of one's wisdom

*The Nine Qualities of the Sanga is another credo that a disciple is asked to have faith in:*

1. (*supatipanno*) In practice of the right path (*Middle Path*) to attain liberation
2. (*ujupatipanno*) In practice of the straight path to liberation
3. (*nyayapatipanno*) In practice of the only path (Noble Eightfold Path) to Nibbana
4. (*samicipatipanno*) In practice of the path venerated by others
5. (*ahuneyyo*) Worthy to receive offerings brought from faraway places
6. (*pahuneyyo*) Worthy to receive offerings prepared for rare visitors
7. (*dakkhineyyo*) Worthy to receive offerings given with expectations of future benefits
8. (*anjalikaraneyyo*) Worthy of receiving reverential salutations from others
9. (*anuttaram punnakkhettam lokassa*) Incomparable fertile field to plant seeds of merit

Buddha was the most enlightened super, human being, not the supreme God, for the disciples were not expected to believe in him. He found the path of his personal liberation from all the bonds and now he is able to show the path to all who follow him. But they have to find their own path of liberation. Disciples take refuge in Buddha so that they might revere him and make effort to attain the noble qualities that Buddha himself had found. When a Buddhist disciple takes refuge in the Buddha through initial faith, the disciple does not surrender in any way or form or sacrifice freedom of thought. The knowledge-based confidence placed in the Buddha by his disciples has been compared to that placed in a noted physician by a sick person or, indeed, in a noted teacher by a student.

According to *Abhidhamma*, the collection of higher teachings of the Buddha, faith or *saddha* is a wholesome mental factor, or *cetasika*, which can be described as the forerunner to all types of wholesome mental actions. Faith in this case is the confidence in the Buddha, *Dhamma*, *Sangha* and in the principles of the Buddha's teachings, and is one of the 19 universal beautiful mental factors, or *sobhana sadharana cetasika*.

Among the five spiritual controlling faculties (*pancha indriya*) faith becomes the first, and the rest of the four faculties are: Effort (*viriya*), Mindfulness (*sati*), Concentration (*samadhi*), and Wisdom (*panna*). These five faculties need to be in a state of harmony with each other, particularly within the pair of *faith and wisdom* and within the pair of effort and concentration, while mindfulness remains a beneficial and balancing faculty to the other four faculties. A disciple with strong faith but weak wisdom may remain in blind devotion with poor progress, while a disciple with strong wisdom but weak faith may become too rational and cunning, which would also hinder spiritual progress.

The Buddha explains faith or belief as the first condition that will lead to the enlightenment In the *Vyaggapajja sutta* of the *Anguttara Nikaya*. He called it *Sadda Sampada* - Accomplishment of Faith. With *Sadda Sampada*, there are another three conditions; *Sila Sampada* - Accomplishment of Virtue, *Caga Sampada* - Accomplishment of Charity, and *Panna Sampada* - Accomplishment of Wisdom.

The basic faith of a disciple develops into an unshakable faith (*aveccappasada*) in Triple Gem. This Triple Gem is achieved when one reaches the first of the four stages of the Noble path called Stream Entry (*Sotapanna*), with the eradication of the fetter of skeptical doubt (*vicikicca*). There are four factors associated with one who has attained stream entry, they are;

1. Unshakable faith in the *Buddha*
2. Unshakable faith in the *Dhamma*
3. Unshakable faith in the *Sangha*
4. Perfect morality

A disciple, after this long journey, when he or she reaches Nibbana, will become an *Arahant*, that is *Assadda*. Faith in Triple Gem is also considered a way through Samsara or the cycle of birth and death.

In summary, faith or confidence in the belief system of Theravada Buddhism is the most sublime quality, and by which one strongly travels in her/his spiritual journey towards liberation from all bonds or *Nibbana*. The Buddha strongly discouraged blind devotion and, of the two types of faith, namely blind faith (*amulika saddha*) and confidence based on reason and investigation (*akarawathi saddha*), (the latter gives a non-theistic foundation in Theravada Buddhism. Buddhist adherents and disciples are encouraged to doubt, question and investigate even the Buddhistic doctrines, including the qualities of the Buddha Himself, before developing confidence or faith in the Triple Gem.

Initial faith in the Triple Gem can act as an essential motivating factor during the initial stages of a disciple's spiritual journey, eventually taking the form of unshakable faith when one attains the first stage of the Noble path, namely Stream Entry (*Sotapanna*). Upon completion of the spiritual journey and attainment of Nibbana by becoming an *Arahant*, one does not need to depend on faith any longer as it is replaced by wisdom through personal realisation.

### **Conclusion:**

In this exploration on 'Inter-textual Readings of the Bible: The Concept of Faith and Grades of Faith in the Gospels and Its parallels in Hindu-Buddhist Scriptures,' we come to know how beautifully Christian-Hindu-Buddhistic texts deal with the noble quality of Faith. Faith is an unavoidable value of a human being. Faith gives human beings an identity of the

divine. A human being is not simply an animal, or a mere nerve system. Human beings have souls, that is, beyond science and physics.

Christianity and Judaism sees faith as the quality of righteousness before God.

**Gen. 15:6:** וַיִּשְׁכַּח אֱבְרָם בְּיָהוָה וַיִּחְשַׁבֶּה לֵּוֹ צְדָקָה: *And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.*

From Abraham to all the biblical outstanding figures and even to the Catholic-Christian saints, they are so reckoned for the reasons of their faith. Thus states St. Paul in Romans 3:22: *δικαιοσύνη δὲ θεοῦ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας .οὐ γάρ ἐστὶ διαστολή, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe . For there is no distinction.*

Lord Jesus is the epitome of Christian faith - he is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (*τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν Ἰησοῦν*) and wishes that we have unshakable faith that only could save us: *εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε πορεύου εἰς εἰρήνην. And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."* Lk 7:50. To have faith itself a beatitude and a virtue of the Kingdom of God.

Hinduistic thought invites its devotees to believe in *Athman* and in *Brahman* to attain unity with the Supreme Being. This life in the world is an opportunity towards this journey. If this opportunity is missed, the soul will be reborn to perfect the journey. Faith may be very hard to the one who is attracted or controlled by illusions, only the one who realises the divine reality will have ultimate freedom.

Buddhistic philosophy asks the disciples not to have blind faith, but to ask questions and investigate all the matters, so that one will have absolute freedom. Faith in Triple Gem is the one and great opportunity to attain Nibbana.

In this economic and politically shattered nation, we are also infected with unbelief of our future, and all the achievements of human-divine history. Human history has gone through many trials and suffering, death and destruction; evil seems to be overpowering the good, wickedness seems to be gaining victory over blessedness, but let us remember that we could overcome all these diabolical situations by the virtue of faith. Our ancestors believed in God, in Goodness, in Blessings, in humanity, and now it is our turn to believe and to have faith that these dark periods will pass away. Now it is an opportunity to work as one united nation for the betterment of our people, north and south, as one family. God will triumph and Goodness will once again take control of world and us.

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