

ETHICS OF A SHARED FAITH

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Introduction

Taking into consideration the lives of human beings, what is the *raison d'être* of faith? Can faith or religion ever be a cloistered phenomenon? If not, what are its social characteristics and interfaith implications? Does it have any essential linkage with ethics and if yes, what are the ethical imperatives of a shared faith?

In fact, the root meanings of the words 'faith and religion' suggest a perception of life that is necessarily dynamic and relational. They are loaded with a wide range of in-depth implications. They aren't merely pious ideas that may or may not have any bearing on one's life. They are in effect ethical directives that are oriented to motivate and empower believers, in favour of scaling higher and larger degrees and dimensions of life.

The above ethical framework affirms that faith has to evolve towards interfaith or shared faith with obligatory ethical implications. The logic of faith can be justified only when it is oriented to ethical living, which advocates a value-based way of conducting oneself in life. An honest critique of faith and religion raises concerns about the gracelessness of the modern times that is massively afflicted with a flimsy fibre of ethics.

The ethics of a shared faith, without doubt, is capable of refreshing and brightening the future of the humanity afresh. This paper explores the varied nuances and arenas of ethical living, in terms of faith, interfaith and shared faith, along with related perceptions, implications and perspectives.

1. NOTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

1.1. Faith

The term 'faith' evolves from the old French terms 'feid'¹ and 'foi'² and the Latin 'fides'³ and 'fidere'⁴, which mean 'faith, belief, trust, confidence, assurance, loyalty, reliance and pledge'. Its etymological connotations point towards the central and all-inclusive dynamics of human life. It entertains an open-ended concept, as well.

Faith refers to more of a perspective and conviction. It is an experience and an approach to life. It is very much a subtle and inclusive phenomenon in life. The open-ended and wide-ranging character of faith is geared towards a more qualitative, richer and meaningful life for the humans. In this sense, faith is greatly capable of paving the way for a more harmonious and peaceful society.

1.2. Religion

The word 'religion' derives from the Latin root, 'religare'⁵, meaning 'being fastened, bound/held together and re-connected'. It refers to a system of remaining networked with the natural, the human and the divine arenas. Religion is devised for providing the humans with a meaning in life. It also signifies a 'sense of sacred' and joins the humans not only with the world of the divine above but the divine in other human beings and in nature.

In the technical sense, religion refers to a large system⁶ of devotions and rituals, myths and stories, doctrines and dogmas, ideals, principles and values, stipulations, rules, spiritual processes and pursuits. There are bindings that apply to individuals and to the community. While imposing regulations on one side, religion gives a sense of belonging to those affiliated to it.

1.3. Religion and faith – comparative notions

Religion and faith, more often than not, are considered synonyms⁷ to each other. This popular notion can be justified to a certain extent, when both religion and faith are treated in the general sense. The basic meanings of either of them as 'getting united, trust, conviction, and the like, affirm their core connections. Faith and religion are very much close to each other when their core elements as well as their utility in relation to life, too.

In the specific sense, they are different⁸ from each other. Religion pertains to a system of doctrine, myth, beliefs, creed and cult. It is like the body of the spirit, whereas faith is like the spirit of the body. The former belongs more to the external forum, while the latter belongs to the inner. Belonging to a religion is clearly defined and external signs accompany it, whereas being affiliated to a faith or having one is mostly a matter of personal choice or internal affair.

In special, faith, as a free style phenomenon, has a much larger scope with its subtle, open-ended and wide-ranging character. For that matter, faith has a tremendous potential, much more than religion, for making a shared world for the humans. The larger range of faith⁹ lays a substantial premise for an all-inclusive approach to human society. Faith-based approach to life has a greater potential in making a more qualitative, richer, harmonious and peaceful society, as well.

1.4. Ethics

The term 'ethics' derives from the ancient Greek words 'ethikos'¹⁰ and 'ethos'¹¹, which mean 'habit, custom', etc. Ethics investigates 'the best way for people to live' and 'the actions that are right or wrong in particular circumstances'. Ethics resolves the questions of good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice, justice and crime, and the like. Obviously, it deals with principles of human behavior and its various dimensions.

1.5. Morals

The term 'morals' originates from the Latin word 'moralis',¹² which comes from 'mos or mor', meaning 'custom and mores' (in plural). Merriam Webster Dictionary describes the word as 'beliefs about what is right behavior and what is wrong behavior'¹³, 'the degree to which something is right and good' and 'the moral goodness or badness of something'. The word signifies also 'the quality of being in accord with standards of right or good conduct'. While it refers to standards of behavior on the one side, it pertains to the lesson that derives from a story or experience on the other.

1.6. Ethics and morals – comparative notions

Both ethics and morals are often used interchangeably¹⁴ as both of them deal with standards of behaviour in life. Both of them relate to the conduct of 'right and wrong' or do's or don'ts. Both deal with the system of regulating life. Since they take care of two aspects of the same system, like two sides of the same coin, they are complementary elements of keeping life within the parameters of discipline.

Ethics and morals stand different¹⁵ from several angles. Ethics are standards of behavior founded upon learned conduct, while morals are standards of behavior grounded in beliefs, including religion. Ethical perspective of right or wrong is legal or illegal, whereas morality examines whether something is good (righteous) and evil. Ethics are rules provided by an external source, like codes of conduct in workplaces or principles in religions and morals refer to an individual's own principles regarding right and wrong.

Above and beyond, ethics and morals possess certain paradoxical¹⁶ or out of the ordinary nuances. One could strictly follow ethical principles and not have any morals at all. Similarly, one could even violate ethical principles within a given system of rules in order to maintain one's moral integrity.

1.7. Inter

The Latin prefix 'inter'¹⁷ means 'between', 'among', 'in the midst of', 'mutually', 'reciprocally', 'together', 'during', and the like. Evidently, it refers to linking persons or things with each other. It explores clearly the space

between or among human beings, as well. It implies all sorts of human clusters, like family, community, nation and society. It stands for all offshoots of human bonding like friendship, fellowship and harmony as well as collective processes, like, collaboration and integration.

1.8. Interfaith

The term 'interfaith'¹⁸ signifies engaging with different faiths or persons of different affiliations of faith. It presupposes plurality of religious systems as equally valid paths to the divine. It avows the capacity of believers of diverse perspectives to scale a greater sense of spiritual perfection as well as human quality, while in the very process of mutual interaction. It envisages a pooling of combined values in view of bettering the social fibre of the human society. It foresees for the humankind a wide range of elevated benefits, which are left to the world that is even beyond simple imagination.

1.9. Interaction

The term 'interaction' comes from the Latin 'inter'¹⁹, meaning 'between', and 'ago'²⁰, meaning 'to do or to act'. It is 'action between' or reciprocal action. It is a way of affecting or influencing one another. It is an occasion when two or more people or things communicate with or react to each other. Engaging with each other may involve looking, talking, sharing, and the like. Interaction includes dealings of various sorts between two persons. Interface, communication, relations, etc are synonyms of interaction.

1.10. Dialogue

The word 'dialogue' derives from ancient roots 'dialoge'²¹ (Old French), 'dialogus'²² (Latin), 'dialogos'²³ and 'dialegethai'²⁴ (Greek), meaning 'converse with' and 'speak through/between'²⁵. It is a conversation, discussion or exchange of ideas between or among two or more people. As a philosophical or didactic device or narrative, it is linked with Socratic dialogue²⁶ as developed by Plato, who used the term first.

Since the word dialogue has a general meaning and is used in diverse sectors of the society with different connotations, it needs to be specified according to contexts. When applied to faith or religion, it highlights the deeper implications of the engagement between people of diverse faiths. In this context, dialogue is an alternative word for interfaith interaction.

1.11. Sharing

The word 'share' means 'having a portion of something with another or others'²⁷ or 'giving a portion of something to another or others'²⁸. Split, divide, go halves in/with are synonyms for the former and portion out, divide up, allocate, ration out, give out, distribute, dispense, hand out, dish out, deal out, dole out, parcel out, measure out, etc are synonyms for the latter. Use, occupy or enjoy (something) jointly with another or others is the basic sense of the word.

The Cambridge English Dictionary elaborates the implications of the word further. Accordingly, 'to have or use something at the same time as someone else, to divide and give part of it to someone else, two or more people share an activity, they each do some of it, two or more people or things share a feeling, quality or experience, they both or all have the same feeling, quality or experience and to tell someone else about your thoughts, feelings, ideas, etc'²⁹.

1.12. Ethics of a shared faith

Faith, accompanied by religion, is a two-dimensional entity – individual and social. As faith and religion have individual and social aspects within the limits of a particular system of faith or religion, so also the all affiliations of faith and traditions of religion have a larger social implication. That amounts to state that faith or religion is necessarily a collective or a shared reality. Living this socially motivated shared reality requires and has ethical

principles and values attached to it, as any game has a set of principles and rules to regulate it. That is what is meant by the ethics of a shared faith³⁰.

2. COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF FAITH

2.1. Divine and human dimensions of faith

Faith is basically a bilateral phenomenon. This two-sided character evolves from the root meanings of the word. Divine³¹ and human³² dimensions are fundamental to it. Faith in God is reflected in faith in human beings. Faith in human beings is symbolic of faith in God, too. The former is the theoretical part and the latter is the practical part. Either of them cannot exist, cut off from the other. They are like two sides of the same coin. God's image is reflected in the humans and the unknown is inherent in the already known.

Moreover, the divine dimension of faith doesn't stand by itself, since the divine does not require anything from the humans. The humans and the creation require a back up. When human beings and the nature are taken care of, the divine gets what it actually deserves. Devotion to the divine takes the route of the human and the natural. The divine and human dynamics of faith is a triangular dynamics of one's self, the other and the divine.

2.2. Religious and non-religious aspects of faith

Faith is substantially a religious³³ phenomenon. But, it is very much a non-religious³⁴ reality, too. The open-ended meanings of the word shore up its broad scope, too. Faith is not an end in itself and it admits a non-religious path as well as a religious path. The religious way pivots around God, Creator or the Higher Power, whereas the non-religious course focuses on a Cosmic Energy, Great Intelligence, God-particle or Yet-to-be-Known.

Spirit and matter are two components of life. The former is the internal and invisible aspect and the latter, the visible and external aspect. They exist together, are complementary to each other and cannot be exclusively compartmentalized. Both ingredients together create the reality. Faith, conviction or confidence emerges from both religious and non-religious attainments of knowledge and wisdom, with an equal measure of credibility. Life is composed of both paths, as two sides of the same coin.

2.3. Vertical and horizontal directions of faith

Faith is traditionally understood to be oriented towards the vertical³⁵ direction. But, it admits in an equal measure the horizontal³⁶ direction, which makes it a complete reality. The vertical direction leads the believer to the world of the unseen, the vertex of life. The horizontal direction introduces him or her to the visible world around. The former is symbolic of the altitudes of life one is oriented to ascend, while the latter busies itself with the magnitudes of life one is expected to expand oneself towards. Both directions together pave the way for accelerating the process of growing up as a human being.

2.4. Individual and social facets of faith

Faith is often misunderstood as an individual³⁷ affair. But, as a matter of fact, it is equally a social³⁸ characteristic. As individual is born from the society, so is the society composed of individuals. Therefore, as the focal point in human life, faith occurs not only in individuals but also between individuals and in the society. Although faith takes shape in the individual, it becomes visible only when it is expressed in social life. Faith makes sense only in the harmony of these facets.

In a similar way, the many streams of faith, though they start their journey as individual streams, join each other and flow to the same ocean as one single river. Individual traditions of faith require attaining a larger identity. Transcending the faith of a minor to that of a major is an ever-living process of growing up towards a full-fledged social being. Likewise, individual faith traditions are geared towards ascending to fuller divine altitudes and larger human magnitudes in life. Faith, true to its name, has to grow towards a circle of all faiths.

2.5. The experiential and expressional components of faith

Faith is fashioned by experience³⁹ and expression⁴⁰, which are its two vital components. It begins with an experience and has to necessarily proceed to an expression. As spirit and body are invisible and visible constituents of the same life, so are experience and expression in relation to each other. Both have their irreplaceable space and role in making faith a reality. They are like thought and deed. What emerges in the interior world has to overflow towards the external world and what takes place in the outer area has to be rooted in the inner forum, as well.

2.6. The result of faith

On account of the variety of backgrounds, there are various inclinations, perceptions and approaches prevalent in the society in the name of faith. But, from a practical point of view, what really matters is the result⁴¹ faith and its related exercises produce in life. The outcome of faith is the criterion for assessing the worth of faith one holds on to in one's life. It can very easily be perceived that much of the human engagement with faith produces hardly any effect in life, either for oneself or for others. No doubt, a fruitless faith is no faith at all. To say the least, what counts in life is the result of faith and faith is justified by its social effects.

'Being a good human being' is the real outcome of faith. This is what is meant by Sree Narayan Guru of Kerala, a poet, saint and social reformer, when he exclaims, 'whatever be your religion or faith, it suffices if you are a good human being'⁴². If one is not a good human being, it doesn't matter if one is a theist or a non-theist and pursues this religion or that religion. He advances the argument as he states, 'saar saar ko gahi raho, thothaa de udaai'⁴³, which means 'hold on to the essentials and throw away the non-essentials'. The essential utility of faith is intrinsic to making refined human beings. Faith is supposed to polish the human character as the basic identity of the humans.

2.7. The dynamic reality of faith

Faith is not an abstract notion. It is a dynamic⁴⁴ concept. It does not exist by itself. It is not an isolated or an insulated entity. It keeps evolving. It exists in living persons, who are inevitably active and social in character. As an inter-connected reality, it expresses itself in mutual relations. Faith of an individual or a community necessarily crisscrosses that of the other.

Mystical spiritualist and social reformer Kabeer characteristically compares faith to 'flowing water'⁴⁵. 'Sharing one's faith with'⁴⁶ the other and 'sharing in'⁴⁷ the faith' of the other are complementary core elements. In fact, the true brilliance of faith is contained in the vibrant, inter-related and socially revolving character of faith.

2.8. The collective idea of God

The idea of God is at the core of faith or religion and is essentially a collective⁴⁸ one. Though an individual or a particular tradition can entertain a limited idea of God, a complete idea of God is always a shared and inclusive one. God is like the electric wire⁴⁹ that is laid above the railway line, touching which the train of the engine runs. God is similar to the base note⁵⁰ of music, tuned to which the musical instruments are played. God resembles the one who plays the first fiddle⁵¹ in an orchestra, harmonized to which the human beings play the second fiddle⁵².

Besides, God can be conceived in terms of common notions, like life, energy, light, intelligence and value. 'God is always beyond', observes Kenneth Leech⁵³, a renowned religious thinker. The idea of God keeps evolving eternally and defies all boundaries. Therefore, faith has to be undeniably broad-based, vibrant and ever-evolving, so that the reality of God in its essence can be touched upon.

2.9. Faith an integral whole

Faith is an integral whole⁵⁴. It cannot be divided. It can be understood only from an overall perspective. Diverse traditions of faith are to be viewed at a glance. Faith is one, though it has various aspects. While having specific

qualities, they are grounded in common characteristics. One could be more inclined to one tradition, rightly so. But, one has to be inclusive of other traditions, too. But, one tradition of faith is mine in special and other traditions are mine as well, though may be in a general way. Confining one's self to one's own tradition is a self-defeating tendency. It is also like being a frog in the well. Only a collective sentiment towards all of them does justice to faith.

2.10. Faith a shared heritage

The diverse traditions of faith share a 'common origin, common existence and a common destiny'.⁵⁵ They emerged from the same source, though at different places and at different times. They have the same course of life. More to the point, they are like branches of the same tree. The stem, the roots, the water and the manure that nourishes it and the soil that holds it firm in the ground are the same. Therefore, faith, along with all its aspects, is the gift of the same Creator⁵⁶. It is the shared cultural heritage⁵⁷ of the human society. The follower of a particular faith has no business to monopolize it either. The varied traditions of faith are to be collectively owned.

2.11. Faith a motivating force for life

More often than not, people think of faith as the centre of life. But, this is a disoriented view. As a matter of fact, life is the centre of faith and it can never be otherwise. Faith is at the service of life. It is oriented to making life meaningful and effective. Faith makes real sense only when it is in its right place. Likewise, the most basic identity of human beings is not coming from having faith or being religious, but from being human. When life as a human being is the central reality and faith, its supportive factor, faith makes real sense.

Further, faith in the specific sense and religion in the general sense is the source of inspiration required for life. It is the spring of strength and the motivating force⁵⁸ for life. It nourishes life and supplies meaning to life. It is the sum and substance of what one thinks, feels, speaks and does in life. Faith is reflected in one's perceptions, attitudes, habits, life style, etc. In truth, faith is the sustaining factor in life.

2.12. The complementary dynamism of faith

Faith is not an item in the life of a person. It is a pivotal force that takes the entire style of one's life into its grip. It involves the whole person of the believer. It extends its range to other believers, too. A spirit of complementariness⁵⁹ with all traditions of faith, both religious and non-religious, is the true luster of faith.

All streams of faith are in some way partial in their perceptions and, therefore, 'one completes the other' is the logic of faith as a complete phenomenon. Faith traditions are like a 'mirror' to each other. Believers, including those in scientific inventions, can check the human-spiritual fitness in the interface of the other. Faith, as an interactive happening, is always an open-ended and inclusive style of life.

3. INTERFAITH ETHICS OF FAITH

3.1. The genius of individual faith

The individual traditions of faith glow with a brilliance⁶⁰ that emerges from their difference from one another. They evolved from the revelation, experience and expression of different prophets and messengers of God, at different cultural contexts of the human history, in terms of time and space. They are like different streams that sprang forth from diverse corners of the earth at different times. Each of them possesses a dignity, distinctiveness and a special set of values. All of them radiate the face of God, though each in its own way.

Therefore, the sacred space they are endowed with cannot in any way be desecrated or taken for granted. The singular luster they possess is not to be violated at any rate. One shouldn't dare to ignore them or sideline them, either. Faith does not admit considerations of great and small, high and low or majority and minority of any sort. One has to extend respect and esteem to each one of them in an equal measure. One has to attempt to learn from them a lesson or two for life, too. This is intended by the ethics of faith.

3.2. The interactive phenomenon of faith

Faith is an interactive⁶¹ phenomenon, without a shred of doubt. But, since it is a conceptual reality and since it does not exist anywhere in a tangible form, faiths cannot interact. Persons having faith interact with each other. Furthermore, interaction explores the other not as a disengaged 'other', but as an extension of one's own being. One believer does not engage with the other as if the other is a passive object.

Further, interaction involves both speaking and listening. It suggests learning from each other. Faith means travelling together as co-pilgrims to the same divine power. It signifies working together to make the given society more qualitative and harmonious. The continuous process of interaction is the genius of faith. This is the principle that guides an interactive faith.

3.3. Interfaith dialogue

'Interfaith dialogue'⁶² refers to interaction between individuals or institutions of different religious, spiritual or humanistic beliefs. The interaction has to be open, positive, constructive and cooperative in spirit. The purpose of this exercise is neither syncretistic nor making an alternative religion. The objective of interfaith dialogue is promoting understanding, acceptance and fellowship between persons or communities of different religions.

The content of the interaction, though may be mainly faith-related matters to begin with, has to be geared towards common concerns and the wellbeing of the society at large. Wider horizons of interaction will keep faith wide-ranging and meaningful. Dialogue among believers of different traditions is an ethical mandate and not just an optional endeavour.

3.4. Interfaith as inclusive thinking

The vital element that keeps the human society as a single unit at the global level is inclusive thinking⁶³. One's thought is the central factor from which proceeds speech and action. To think on the whole or to think of one's self excluding others is an anti-life occurrence. In contrast, to have the other included in one's very process of thinking is the pro-active outlook that is elementary to the social character of life. The former is a negative orientation and the latter, a positive direction.

Such inclusive thinking is all the more appropriate when it is a question of faith. As faith itself is a dynamic phenomenon, interfaith is all the more an all-encompassing reality. A true believer has to be open-ended and welcoming in all aspects, lest his or her faith degenerates into a liability. An honest promoter of interfaith philosophy has to possess a mindset that is comprehensive in its orientation. Thinking inclusively is a moral mandate that is symbolic of an honest and grown up believer.

3.5. Interfaith as diverse faces of the divine

The divine is certainly a multi-faceted⁶⁴ reality. It has many faces, in line with the diverse perceptions of human traditions. Some traditions subscribe to religious or theistic perspectives and other, to non-religious or non-theistic. Some religious traditions conceive the creator as non-dualistic and some, dualistic. Yet again, several religious traditions conceive the supreme power in terms of gender, that too, as male, female, male-female composite or neither male nor female.

Besides, there are also relational and absolute categories prevalent for the divine. Some search for the divine within oneself and others, in the exterior world and nature. The plurality of the faces of the divine⁶⁵ neither can be exhausted nor contested. Interfaith is an all-inclusive approach to the unfathomable mystery of the Creator. The most basic moral duty of human beings is to recognize the diversity of the owner of life and the mysterious ways of the creation.

3.6. Interfaith a common pedestal

Interfaith would mean professing a larger and a combined faith. **All traditions of faith are the gifts of the same God to the human race. They are the common cultural heritage of the human society.** Besides, all believers have a common origin, a common plateau of existence and a common destiny. No believer has any business to divide what God has designed as a united whole. Interfaith is a mindset that recognizes this eternal truth and motivates every believer to be deeply and progressively committed to the higher and larger dimensions of faith.

The common pedestal⁶⁶ of faiths can be very well described as a prism that refracts faith into a spectrum of faiths, which are reflected in varieties of human and divine niceties as well as imaginative and scientific approaches. Celebrating the commonalities of life is perhaps the only way to do justice to the immense diversities with which life here on earth is intended to be. Maintaining such a team spirit among believers of all affiliations is the common code of conduct required of faith itself.

3.7. Interfaith as living universal values

Interfaith is a broad-based commitment to universal values⁶⁷ that are inherent in different traditions of faith. Values are at the core of all traditions. Universal values have a standing that is world-wide. All faith-based traditions contain values that are capable of a global reach out, though in a more or less fashion. Similarly, there are secular values that are off the religious traditions, but have a bearing on the global human society.

Interfaith covers a wide range of high-flying values in all religions, such as unity in diversity, world family, non-violence, middle path, anekandvad, peace, love, service, equality, forgiveness, commitment to the disadvantaged, brotherhood, harmony of the opposites, good thoughts, good words and good deeds and law-centred life.

Besides, non-religious values like hard work, truth, transparency, accountability, commitment, and the like, are all-encompassing values. Fostering interfaith relations and fellowship in itself is a comprehensive value of universal and utmost stature. Interfaith dialogue would mean advancing these universal values, in view of making a better society. Owning these universal values is not an optional matter for believers, but is an obligation by virtue of the moral binding that is inbuilt in them.

3.8. Interfaith as 'one body, many parts'

Faith is like 'one body with many parts'⁶⁸. Body is all about a related existence. It exists as one and functions as many parts. Each part has a clearly allotted space and a given specific role. All the organs in the body are equally important and they celebrate a living solidarity that is par excellence. In other words, the parts of the body partner with other parts to make the whole of the body function in the right way. It is an existence in togetherness.

Similarly, believers of diverse traditions vouch to meet, interact and know each other. They appreciate, admire and treasure each other. They learn from each other, in a spirit of mutual purification and enrichment. They are committed not only to share with the other the merits of one's own faith, but to share in the merits of the faith and the worldview of the other. In this process, rights and duties are harmonized. Faith is no longer just a faith but is inter-faith, which is a two-way process that is geared towards a larger, richer and fuller faith. The very idea of one body with many parts is a pulsating example for the ethical imperative that is interfaith.

3.9. Interfaith as a 'rainbow of faiths'

Rainbow is a rare and unique gift of nature. It contains all seven colours and its shades. All colours are different and none of them can be substituted. When all colours are in their respective place, the rainbow radiates a beauty in difference. Manifestly, beauty is a pluralistic notion and is an enriching factor.

In addition, separated from one another, the colours have no existence and the rainbow ceases to exist. But, together, they make the rainbow and it is a living symbol of collective existence or an existence in unison. Interfaith

is a 'rainbow of faiths'⁶⁹ and it celebrates all faiths in a spirit of togetherness in life. Like the colours in the rainbow, faiths become mutually elevating in the wake of an awakening towards a 'we-consciousness' in all believers. The idea of rainbow of faiths radiates a beauty that interfaith is intended to be and that is an ethical ideal in itself.

3.10. Interfaith a partnership of faiths

Interfaith is a way of being parts of the same whole. Life is a question of give and take. Faith cannot be an exception to this rule. It is a massive misunderstanding to think that one's faith is for oneself and the other's faith is for the other. One's faith is for the other as well and vice versa. Faith cannot be owned by any one individual or community, but is to be always owned in a shared manner. In addition, one's faith is instrumental in the purification and enrichment of each other. Faith works as a mirror for the partners.

Furthermore, faith would mean opening up to larger horizons. One cannot open oneself to the divine without being open to other faiths. That is what Pope John Paul II underscored when he stated, 'when you open yourself to one another, you open yourself to God'⁷⁰. Faith functions always in a triangular dynamics. That would amount to state that faith is always a matter of partnership and interfaith, with all its implications, stands for that partnership in a very thought through manner. Partnership of faiths⁷¹ is an ethical command that is designed by the Creator himself.

3.11. Interfaith a shared and sublime value

Value refers to what is worth in one's assessment. It is a perception of what is important in life. It is a principle or standard of behavior as regards what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable. It is an ideal that influences one's attitudes and behaviour. A value⁷² is considered a universal value when it is accepted as worth by all people or almost all people. Values cover ethical, spiritual, social, cultural, ethnic and individual arenas. What the large diversity of human cultures hold in common in most places, situations and times becomes almost a rule for all.

Accordingly, interfaith relation is a matter of universal merit because of its exceedingly all-embracing character and functions. It envelopes in itself all the human and spiritual values and so it is legitimately emerging as the most sublime value of universal credit. For that matter, interfaith is capable of ensuring better social prospects for the entire world. Beyond doubt, it deserves and calls for a universal acceptance as the most auspicious and uplifting value for the humans. Obviously, interfaith as the most sublime value⁷³ is an ethical principle, par excellence.

3.12. Interfaith a shared spirituality

Spirit is 'breath', as per the Latin 'spiritus'⁷⁴. Breath is an air, which flows where it wills and no one can take hold of it. It cannot be the monopoly of any one individual or group. It is an energy that strengthens all those who are inclined towards it, irrespective of dissimilar backgrounds. In fact, spirit is one, despite the fact that it has diverse aspects. Spirit is the shared meeting point of people of all leanings. Spirit is the core of all faith-based paths of life, too.

In the same way, spirituality is one and it is the sum and substance of what one thinks, feels and does in one's life. It also sums up one's experiences, attitudes and approaches in life, in its entirety. Interfaith is a high-minded spirit of sharing the best of life with each other and therefore the spirituality that follows is inevitably a shared property of the humans. Manifestly, interfaith, as a shared spirituality,⁷⁵ has in it an innate moral binding on everyone who pursues a spiritual path.

3.13. Interfaith as a shared mission

The diverse streams of faith are the glorious outcome of divine revelation, channelized by exceptional men and women at different places and times. As they were extraordinary divine endowments to the human world, there is absolutely no contradiction in their messages. On the contrary, their messages are corresponding to each other. What is required is interpreting their messages by way of its spirit and not letter. The spirit of the faith traditions, in actual fact, contains the character of interfaith.

As a result, interfaith is truly a shared mission⁷⁶ of believers of all traditions. As they disseminate the best of the values what they hold on to the world outside them, so also they need to learn from values from other traditions of the world. This is a shared mission of walking and working together to make an inter-related, value-based and humane society. It is a joint pilgrimage to the same divine and towards a larger way of living one's life on earth. Interfaith as a shared mission is a brilliant ethical directive by itself.

3.14. Interfaith spirit as the ethics of a shared faith

The meaning, spirit and implications of interfaith elaborated above aren't merely sweet-sounding and cosmetic ideals of life. They have a binding power and that has to be recognized. The above principles and ideals are ethical imperatives for a meaningful human life. Faith, as it is a source of meaning in life, has to uphold the interfaith mandates that are inherent in it. As the most widely accepted motivating force in life, faith has to get transformed into interfaith altitudes and magnitudes of life, so that it makes sense to the human and divine delicacies it claims to offer to the humans. Interfaith implications truly portray the stipulations of the ethics of a shared faith⁷⁷.

CONCLUSION

Faith, as a dynamic and inclusive reality, for all intents and purposes, is an interfaith engagement. In other words, a shared faith is faith in the proper sense of the word. A shared faith with all its implications refers to the nuts and bolts of the ethical code faith and interfaith contain. The social character of faith can be justified only in terms of interfaith or a shared faith. Partnering faith with one and all, sacred or secular, is the life style of the humans. The ethical demands that emerge from such a life style are to be lived in every thought, word and deed in life, as well.

Faith, in the real sense of the word, is interfaith in spirit. It is ever dynamic in its character and is programmed for blossoming towards an ever inter-related phenomenon in life. Interfaith, as a grown up perception of and an elevated approach to life, permeates into persons and groups of all affiliations. It is a vibrant process of 'sharing in the richness of others', while sharing with them the best one holds on to'.

In addition, interfaith is the spirit of a divinely tuned human life as well as a humanly full-blown divine life. Charged with the all-inclusive universal fibre of life, the spirit of interfaith applies to all arenas of social life and leads the society to the sublime altitudes of divine horizons as well as to the magnitudes of human life, two in one. This is in fact the outline of an 'ethics of a shared faith'.

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