

On the Nature of Faith

One must believe that problems can be solved through hard work and creative persistence.

By Mike Rainone

Last month, I wrote about keeping faith in the face of uncertainty from a 30,000 ft perspective: worldwide, societal, cultural, whatever. In the meantime, I have been thinking a lot about personal faith. Faith in God, faith in science, faith in my own judgment, faith in self; how we get and keep faith, and the delicate balance between faith and science — what we do in our respective field each day.

When I was much, I had an existential crisis while studying for my master's degree in clinical psychology. I remember wandering around campus in a fog asking friends what they thought happened when we die — as if someone else could solve the problem of my own faith. I was looking for reinforcement. The resolution was fairly simple, but not surprising; I put that question to one of my fellow psychology students, a single mother named Ruth. She looked at me and said, "Honey, I don't know about an afterlife, I'm just worried about how to put food on the table for my kids right now. I'll leave that concern to when I'm really old."

I finally rationalized that when you're 23 old age and the questions of death can be put aside for a while. I know that I'm not at death's door at 62, but the end is more in view and I find myself thinking about the nature of faith.

The first place to go when examining faith is the question of how it is we come to know. (If you've read this column with any regularity you've noticed I think a lot about "knowing" and what it is to "know" — perhaps too often). We come to know things in many different ways. I'm not referring to facts and figures, math equations, baseball statistics, or the detritus of day-to-day existence. I am talking about the fundamental beliefs that govern our life, the core knowledge that drives our values. We come to know some things after reading them in a book such as in the Bible, Koran, Talmud, Book of Mormon, or the Buddhist's Tripitaka — every race and religion has at least one. Or, we can know things by consensus — the stories we tell each other which we assume to be true, the social construction of reality. Most things that we study in school, or learn from others, are part of that social construction. I have never been to China, but I know from the reports of others that China exists. Certainty is driven by faith but it can also be driven by our social constructions.

We can also learn from scientific experimentation, which requires that we do things in a way that can be repeated. We believe that this process produces truth, perhaps an interpreted truth, but truth nonetheless. In some ways everything you know is really about faith.

On a recent CBS News Sunday morning program, the opening segment covered reincarnation. The story began at a convention in New York City where a thousand people had come to be hypnotically regressed into past lives. The Yale psychiatrist that conducted the mass hypnosis posited that his patients made great progress with psychological problems once they understood what had caused problems in past lives. As the participants were hypnotically regressed, the psychiatrist claimed each patient learned that current misery was often caused by some trauma inflicted in a past life.

CBS then interviewed Michael Shermer, editor of the magazine "The Skeptic." Shermer believes that scientific evidence is the only way to truly know something, and since no scientific evidence has proven the existence of an afterlife, a second life, or God, then all faith is nothing but wishful thinking reinforced by a delusional collective social construction — religion.

I get it. No science, no empirical proof, no afterlife, case closed, but let's not forget that the people who find relief with regression have faith that their insights are true.

That brings us to Dr. Jim Tucker, a University of Virginia psychiatrist who's spent a lifetime studying children who exhibit evidence of reincarnation. Tucker claims that children who reported previous life experiences can identify things about their past lives that can then be verified by field studies. Tucker says the children he studied described ancestors and told stories about how they died, which matched historical records. In addition, he says he has examined thousands of children who described memories of a violent death or murder in a past life who also had birthmarks matching the location of the wounds described. While some may argue that this is not experimental science and therefore does not constitute knowing, it is certainly spooky enough to make one wonder.

Moving on to quantum biology, which is a direct descendant of quantum physics (the stuff Einstein called "spooky action at a distance"). Luc Montagnier, the 2008 Nobel Prize


winner in medicine, is reporting that, under certain conditions, DNA can project copies of itself through electro-magnetic waves. He simply placed two test tubes side-by-side, one containing DNA, the other filled with enzymes that could constitute DNA but have no structure. Placing the test tubes in a low-frequency field, he claims the enzymes in the second test tube copied the DNA in the first test tube without physically connecting.

The resulting hoopla in scientific circles made it sound like this was equivalent to claiming to scientifically prove that God exists, or worse. Poor Montagnier is considering withdrawing his submission after being discredited, castigated, and otherwise put to the rack.

If what we know is ephemeral and ever-changing, how can we have faith in anything? This is certainly true of our social constructions, but science now and science in the future could be two vastly different things. How then is science different from any of our other social constructions of reality? Is science, too, simply a matter of faith?

In my world, as a product developer, faith is all-important. One must have faith in his/her ability to solve problems as they are presented — even if he/she doesn't possess an everlasting knowledge of everything. A product developer must have faith that materials and technologies which are not available now will exist in the future. One must believe that through hard work and creative persistence, problems can be solved.

It's our jobs as design engineers to imagine the unimaginable, and to even perform the impossible. The only way you'll be able to do that is to know that you can succeed.

Mike Rainone is the co-founder of PCDworks, a technology development firm specializing in breakthrough product innovation. Contact him at mrain1@pcdworks.com and visit www.pcdworks.com. 



In my world,
as a product
developer, faith
is all-important.