

## My life as a member of a faith community

How do we find the sustainable strength to live coherently in a fragmented world? A primary pattern of my life as a Bahá'í has been understanding and embracing this constant and incredible challenge - to live a balanced life that's both principled and practical, spiritual and physical, inspired and grounded, clear hearted and clear minded.

Reflecting on my journey as a member of the Bahá'í Faith, I now more fully realize and appreciate how the Bahá'í Holy Writings were a resource for resilience and encouragement and were integral to helping me strive and thrive despite innumerable setbacks in my own personal sphere and the world at large. In addition, the Bahá'í community provided a layer of social support and accompaniment that made this life-journey more feasible and comfortable.

This being said, I also feel one's genuine desire for spiritual growth, amidst painful confrontations and loss, and one's valiant perseverance in life, amidst obstacles and chaos, is often perhaps more attributed to *faith* itself - rather than association with a particular faith.

I recall as a youth, reading in Bahá'í classes about the virtues of patience, forgiveness, and contentment. These virtues were not immunities from disappointing outcomes or human suffering, however they did provide a vision, which according to my *faith* in God, eventually led to what I believe to be a desire to associate with diverse human beings and serve the greater community. In my experience and understanding, this kind of spiritual maturity is often potentiated and manifested through tests of faith. Spiritual tests can vary from outright denial of one's wishes to witnessing the myriad injustices in our present world. It seems, though, that our faith and confidence is more staunch, more resolute, with each test... holding fast to the belief - the faith - that God has a plan and His plan is better for us than anything we could conceive. A quote from the Bahá'í Writings that has often assisted me is the following:

*As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Scriptures)*

Another important facet of the Bahá'í Faith that has played an important role in my life is the belief in the equality of women and men; specifically how this will help bring about a world order and the realization of world peace. It is my hope that we will elevate this discussion of the emancipation of women to a higher level so that women can change the spiritual climate of the world. We need to work together, women and men, to help make this principle into a reality.

More and more we hear or experience the clash of religions; we also hear of extremism, fanaticism. This tells me that the interfaith community has a big responsibility to help dissipate these man-made conflicts, to actively work in the cause of world peace predicated on world unity, to be a part of the solution by emphasizing the fact that there is only one reality: the oneness of humankind.

The Bahá'í Writings have provided me with a wealth of principles and literature, which are meant to free us from the challenges we experience in our personal lives, as well as to provide us a pathway towards the healing of the world. To sum up, my life as a Bahá'í woman, living in the hustle and bustle of Chicago, has been exhilarated by the energy and excitement flowing all over the city and I hope to collaborate with all the people of goodwill who strive to improve life in its multiple facets with positive and progressive thoughts, and with acts of service, unity, and love.

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