

## Running Requires Faith

When most people hear the word faith they automatically associate it with the institution of religion. Even though the word and the concept behind the word are most closely related to religion itself, faith can influence any person's life regardless of whether or not they prescribe to a specific religion.

Some of the most notable running personalities who are known to be devout in their religion are Ryan Hall, Mebrahtom Keflezighi, Leo Manzano, and Alberto Salazar, just to name a few. What does their religion have to do with their running? The answer is simple: runners of their caliber have utilized their religion, their belief in a higher power, to strengthen their belief in themselves. Their courage to dream big and chase those dreams until they came true came from their ability to act without the requirement of tangible evidence. They needed to believe it was possible. Being religious provided them with the foundation to develop a faith so deep that they became fearless in their attempts to become legendary in the sport of running.

Running is a sport that requires a tremendous amount of faith. The simple act of running has proven to be a sport no one can do without first believing in themselves. Most new runners were once non-runners who believed they couldn't run a 5k let alone 1-mile without literally facing the possibility death. Being able to run any distance seemed as impossible to these new runners as winning the lottery. To go from believing it can't be done to summoning up the courage to give it a try requires a lot faith. It's as simple as that. Every runner has to believe they will finish what they've started before they take their first step.

Reflecting back upon the beginning of my running career I can recall the discovery of faith within myself at the onset. As a child I was fascinated by the idea of God and I pursued this fascination by attending churches of nearly every religion that exists. I wanted to meet this existential being called God and to understand what he or she was all about. What I discovered as I got older is that God was not just some existential being, but that He or She was this a source of strength within all people, religious or not, that needed to be exercised in order to live life to its' highest potential. I think of this strength to act as faith.

Throughout my running career I have continued to narrow down religion and believing in a higher power to the concept of faith. After every race, when I made the cross, from my head to my chest and from shoulder to shoulder, I did so as a symbolic gesture of gratitude to the act of faith I just performed. And when others witnessed this act they would tell me with a lot of joy how much it inspired them, most confessing to have no religious preference or affiliation. The act was almost always received as expression of appreciation for something greater than the victory itself. If anything, it seemed to provide many with a visible designation of the origin from where my courage to run to win resided.

The fastest runners in the world all share the common ability to run without fear of failure, driven more by their desire to discover what they're capable of than the idea of simply being successful. My discovery of the following words by Gandhi, many years ago, has really

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helped me understand how some of the world's best runners exercise faith to perfection. Gandhi said that one, "...should strive on without fear of failure and hope of success." The point of his message is simple: it's vital to focus on the endeavor, not on the concern of what may or may not happen once the endeavor has been completed. To think of anything other than what must be done will likely distract a person from doing their very best.

I often refer to the sport of running as my religion because of how much faith I have acquired in myself ever since I started running. It has helped me to believe in my ability to do anything. And it has helped me develop the courage to try new things instead of constantly being deterred by fear. Over the years I have become more effort focused rather than outcome focused. I focus less on the outcome and more on the effort whenever I take on a new task, goal or dream. Doing this helps me to always give my best effort without any hesitation.

I realize now more than ever how much courage it took for me to believe in the dream of becoming an Olympic distance runner before I even took my first step as a runner. I had to believe in something I couldn't see or prove. I had to act purely on the belief that it would happen someday. And I had to be willing to do it without by the fear of how painful it would be if it didn't. I had to be willing to accept the possibility of failure just as much I was eager to have success. A wise friend once told me, "Nothing beats a failure except a try." In other words, as long as an attempt is made to find out what's truly possible, the result of any honest effort will never be unrewarding.