# Faith in a World of Magic and Miracles

One of the things in D&D that never quite made sense to me was the concept of *faith* in a world where clerics channeled the holy power of their gods directly into the world. How does one have *faith* when there is *proof*? The Forgotten Realms has a few ways of dealing with this, but they can be confusing or impractical. So here’s my take on it. There’s a few foundational things to get out of the way first though.

## Portfolios

Every deity has at least one portfolio, a concept that they embody. For instance, Mystra’s portfolio is the Weave itself, and she is its caretaker and source. Auril’s portfolio is winter, with all that entails. Portfolios are important to the gods because their core purpose is to champion them and foster them throughout the realms.

Portfolios can be stolen by other gods, but it is incredibly difficult. The portfolios of slain deities are often claimed by their killers, but in some cases they are not due to conflicts with other portfolios. For instance, if Tempus killed Eldath, it would be quite impossible for him to take on the duties of both the god of war and the god of peace. The manifestations of portfolios are, to the gods at least, physical things. Such unclaimed portfolios can be taken by other deities if they are found, but sometimes they remain hidden and unattended, waiting for a new deity to find them and take up their mantle.

## The Edict of Ao

This is my biggest canon deviation. The overgod Ao, displeased with the machinations of a number of gods who had once been mortal, cast all the gods out of the planes into mortal forms on Faerûn. This had predictably terrible consequences for mortals. The resolution of this event, which became known as the Time of Troubles, was that the gods were only as powerful as the reverence for which their portfolio was held by the mortal souls of the world. (The book canon is that gods were only as powerful as the collective belief of their worshippers, but that doesn’t really account for some evil powers being greater gods.) Vast concepts such as Murder and Wild Nature don’t require direct worship, but they do gain their power from the collective acknowledgement of the mortal population. Magic, Agriculture, Death, and Knowledge are all incredibly powerful concepts, and therefore draw the most reverence and attention. Ao’s edict in this game is, therefore, not measuring the number of worshippers, but the collective unconscious belief and attention of each deity’s portfolio, and therefore they must champion and promote those concepts in order to remain deities. This does not prevent their machinations, but it does serve to keep them focused more on how they fit into the mantles they bear. The Balance is thus served.

## God Tiers

As some portfolios are much more powerful than others, so too are deities different in power. The portfolios involving concepts that have the most influence on the lives of mortals imbue their holders with near-infinite power, whereas less wide-ranging portfolios confer less. Gods are typically arranged as Greater Powers, Intermediate Powers, Lesser Powers, and Demigods. Greater Powers are few in number, and most other deities serve one of them either directly or indirectly as their portfolios align.

## Pantheons

The overall pantheon of Toril is massive, with perhaps thousands upon thousands of deities. Deities are known by different names in different parts of the world, and some deities are regional, tied to the belief of one area or people. Sometimes, these localized deities will form a pantheon, like the Morndinsamman of the dwarves or the Seldarine of the elves. Gathering together like this allows many deities to benefit from collective worship. The Seldarine, for instance, are lead by Correllon Larethian, but even minor deities like Araleth Letheranil, the deity of starlight, benefit from the reverence of the elves. Pantheons, in this way, can become the equivalent of Greater Powers, and while the heads of such pantheons may only be Intermediate or Lesser Powers, they are accorded the same respect as Greater Powers due to their collective might.

## Aspects

Some deities are so powerful that they have separate identities which are worshiped separately, for instance, Lathander/Amaunator. Some deities are so omnipotent and infinite that such a division is not simply a different name, but can be an altogether different personality with slightly different portfolios. Aspects can spill over into smaller pantheons, such as Hanali Celanil, who is an aspect of Sune. Some deities even share aspects, such as Sehanine Moonbow, Hanali Celanil, and Aerdrie Faenya, who are sometimes worshiped collectively as Angharradh.

## Faith

So, with all of these various deities and their portfolios, what does it mean to have faith in the Forgotten Realms? Most mortals will never commune directly with the gods. Most will never even see anything resembling a major miracle. The healing touch of a cleric is attributed to their faith, the power invested in them by an infinite and unknowable thing, and this in itself drives the faith of the common person. Their names are known, and they are called to for succor or to ward them away. With just enough proof, there is a general knowledge that deities provide an afterlife for their faithful. Many mortals worship whatever deity is prevalent in their area, regardless of portfolio. In warlike places, Tempus is revered by the locals. In metropolitan cities like Waterdeep where temples abound, people may find deities that appeal to them. Either way, almost all mortals hold one deity above the rest, even among peoples who worship a localized pantheon. The punishments for a lack of any faith are widely believed to be a slow death of the soul, whereas the penalty for betraying one’s faith is eternal servitude in the City of the Dead. Those who held some faith are taken by their chosen deity upon death, and given such reward or service in that deity’s home plane.