

Is a “leap of faith” necessary?

A leap of faith

in its most commonly used meaning, is the act of believing in or accepting something not on the basis of reason.

The lack of applying reason might be because the thing being believed or accepted lies outside the boundaries of reason.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leap_of_faith (Sourced 25 April 2023)

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Material• Real• Objective (can be sensed)• Experience and Reason• Science• Birth and Death• God does not exist, or is hidden.	GAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spiritual• Imaginary• Subjective (invisible to others).• Faith• Religion• “Born again”• God exists and can be known.
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The image and the descriptions portray a gap that some perceive between the material world we all experience and an unprovable spiritual world.

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Some current perspectives:

- Materialist– there is no God.
- Religions – history proves there is a God.
- Philosophical believers– history cannot prove God, but we can know God subjectively
- A Christian response.

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Don't Leap – There is no God. (A materialist view):

"Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.^[1]"

"Faith, being belief that isn't based on evidence, is the principal vice of any religion.^[2]"

Richard Dawkins https://religions.wiki/index.php/Richard_Dawkins
(sourced 25 April 2023)

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History bridges the gap (A Christian view):

...the gospels are not only trustworthy documents in general, but as we look at some of the most important aspects of Jesus in the gospels, like his radical personal claims, his miracles, his trial and crucifixion, and his resurrection, their historical veracity shines through. God has acted in history, and we can know it.

William Lane Craig

<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/scholarly-writings/historical-jesus/rediscovering-the-historical-jesus-the-evidence-for-jesus>

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Belief without relying on historical documents (Theological and Philosophical Writers):

Limitations of history?

- knowledge of the past has come down through one or more human minds, has been 'processed' by them.

E.H. Carr, “What is History”

Alternatives to history:

- “accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason.” “That, then, is the ugly, broad ditch which I cannot get across...”

Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781)

- Kant concluded that between these two categories [the empirical data of history and the reality of transcendent truths] exists “a mighty chasm”

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

- “Truth is Subjectivity.”

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

- The man who really has faith knows the truth...that it is impossible for him by his own efforts to have faith.

Karl Barth (1886 – 1968)

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Critique of the above alternatives

- “Such leap of faith positions fail to provide the Christian faith with an adequate biblical, theological, philosophical or apologetic foundation”

Gary R. Habermas, “An Appraisal of the Leap of Faith”

https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1403&context=Its_fac_pubs

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The Objective/Subjective distinction

Up to this point we have seen attempts to deal with the gap (between reason and faith) by either 1) rejecting religion, or 2) relying on **objective** evidence about God’s actions in the world, or 3) by starting with a **subjective** experience of some kind.

God’s actions in the world, known through history or other people’s experiences, should be studied for their value as a kind of evidence of a spiritual reality.

However we can have a stronger evidence of a spiritual reality if we experience it directly.

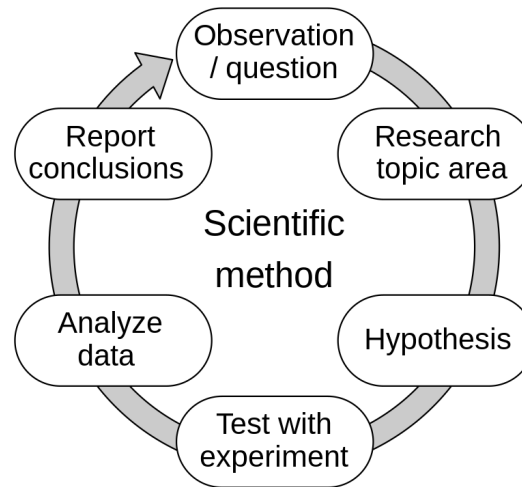
Spiritual experiences such as knowing and loving God, and perceiving God’s qualities in other people, are experiences that we can test for ourselves, using a scientific method.

Put all your beliefs into harmony with science; there can be no opposition, for truth is one.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá,

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Steps of the Scientific Method



The **scientific method** is an empirical [i.e. based on what is observable] method for acquiring knowledge.

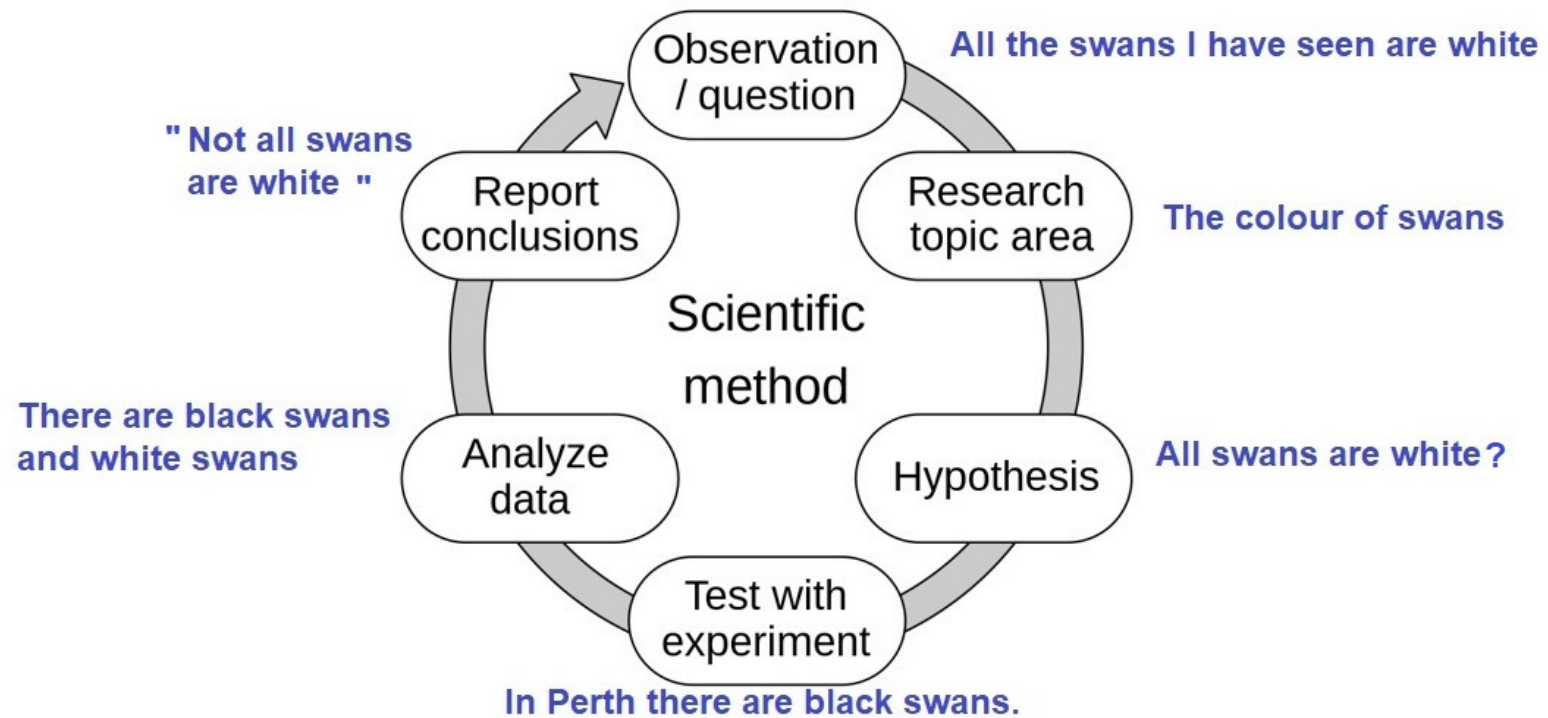
It involves:

- careful observation,
- rigorous scepticism about what is observed
- formulating hypotheses, via induction, based on such observations;
- the testability of hypotheses, experimental
- deductions drawn from the hypotheses;

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_method (sourced 25 April 2023 and abbreviated above)

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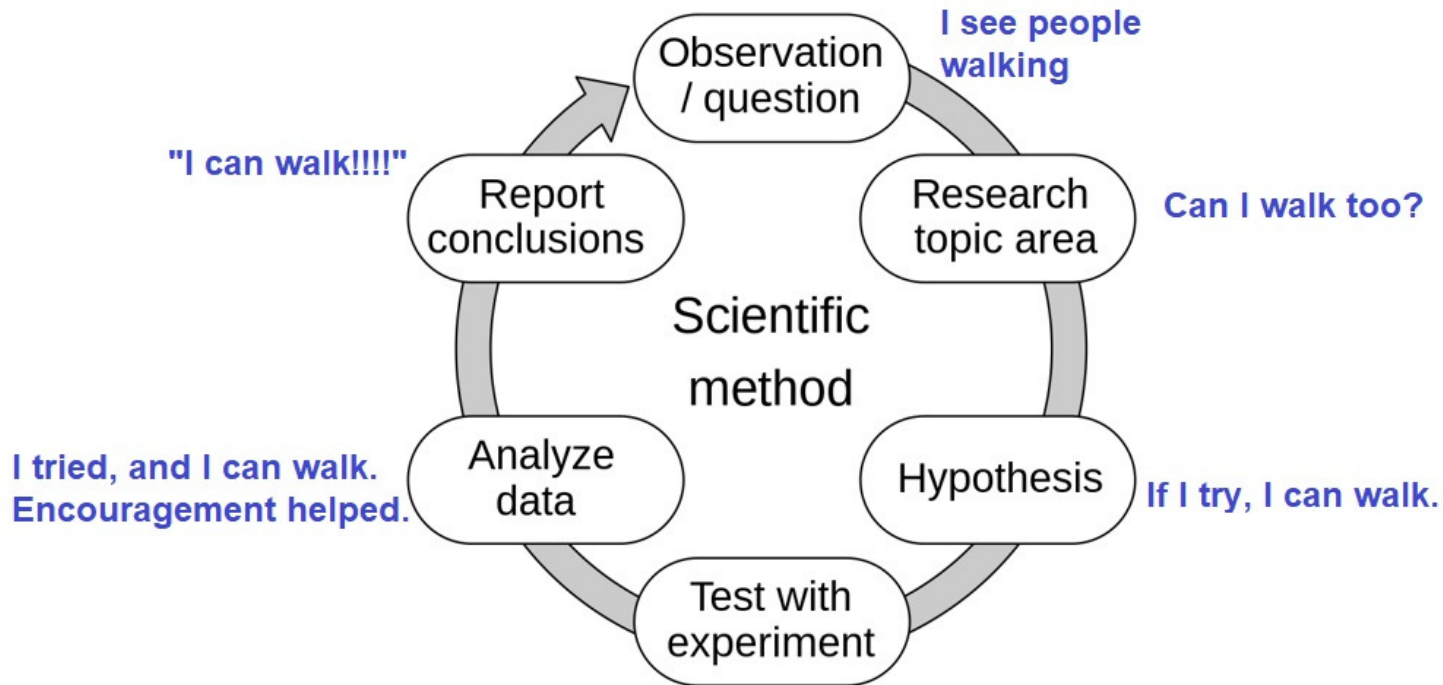
Steps of the Scientific Method **A Scientist explores material reality**



The **scientific method** is an empirical [i.e. based on what is observable] method for acquiring knowledge.

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Steps of the Scientific Method **A child explores material reality**



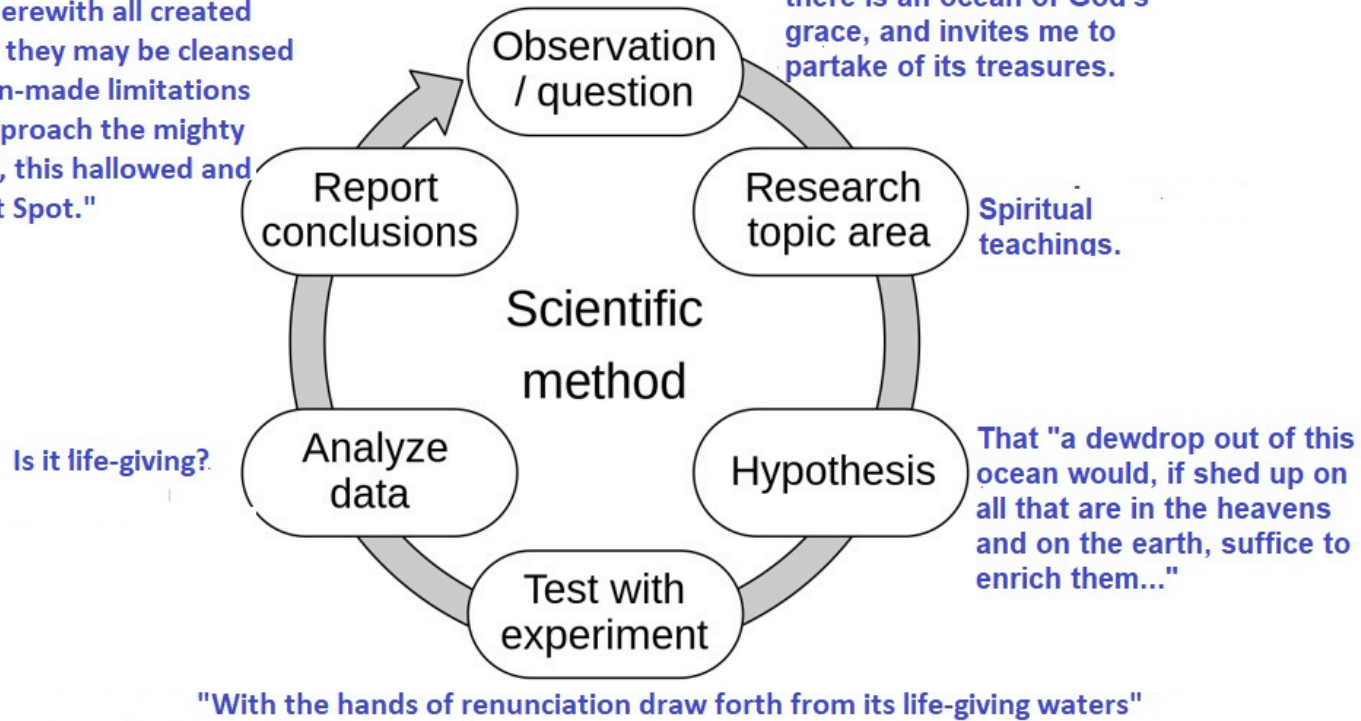
The **scientific method** is an empirical [i.e. based on what is observable] method for acquiring knowledge.

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Steps of the Scientific Method **A seeker takes a step on the path of search**

"sprinkle therewith all created things, that they may be cleansed from all man-made limitations and may approach the mighty seat of God, this hallowed and resplendent Spot."

Material things do not satisfy me. Baha'u'llah claims that there is an ocean of God's grace, and invites me to partake of its treasures.



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A mid-point look at the “leap of faith”

Now it seems that the “leap of faith” into believing in a spiritual reality is not such a leap after all.

- Sometimes scientists need courage to propose that not all swans are white, or to say that the earth is round, not flat.
- Certainly it took courage for the child to stand up and take a step and to fall and yet try again. But it was a reasonable step.
- It is also a step in a different direction to society, and into the unknown, when we first try to experience the sweetness of prayer.

“There is nothing sweeter in the world of existence than prayer...The most blessed condition is the condition of prayer and supplication.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in Star of the West

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Now let's briefly the materialist view.

Materialist say that the observable world is real, objective, can be experienced and known by reason and tested by science.

I don't question that the world is real, at least in a relative sense, but what do scientists and philosophers say about the world that we think is real?

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The unreality of the material world

Example 1

$$E=mc^2$$

(Albert Einstein, theoretical physicist)

All matter is energy. The world is not as solid as it seems.

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The unreality of the material world

Example 2



Direct experience and observation are ultimately subjective. Our material bodies have 5 senses. I can never be sure that others experience exactly what I do. I might see an orange fruit and enjoy the sweet tangy taste, and others also see it and describe it the same way, but all of those sensations are not actually “out there”, they are created in our brain from the information that reaches our retinas and tastebuds.

There is no colour in the world. The qualities of the world are created by our brain.

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The unreality of the material world

Example 3

“Time passes faster in the mountains than it does at sea level”

(Carlo Rovelli, theoretical physicist)

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The unreality of the material world

Example 4

Belief in “cause and effect” cannot be justified rationally. We never actually perceive that one event causes another but only experience the "constant conjunction" of events.

Paraphrasing David Hume (Philosopher)

Cause and effect has never been seen.

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The unreality of the material world

In summary, science and philosophy demonstrate that all matter is energy, that there is no colour in the world outside our brain, that time is not a constant, and that cause and effect either don't exist or are unproven.

This present life is even as a swelling wave, or a mirage, or drifting shadows. Could ever a distorted image on the desert serve as refreshing waters? No, by the Lord of Lords! Never can reality and the mere semblance of reality be one, and wide is the difference between fancy and fact, between truth and the phantom thereof.

Know thou that the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out. A shadow hath no life of its own; its existence is only a fantasy, and nothing more; it is but images reflected in water, and seeming as pictures to the eye.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá)

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Before I conclude

The story is told of a mystic knower who went on a journey with a learned grammarian for a companion. They came to the shore of the Sea of Grandeur. The knower, putting his trust in God, straightway flung himself into the waves, but the grammarian stood bewildered and lost in thoughts that were as words traced upon the water. The mystic called out to him, “Why dost thou not follow?” The grammarian answered, “O brother, what can I do? As I dare not advance, I must needs go back again.” Then the mystic cried, “Cast aside what thou hast learned from [Famed writers on grammar and rhetoric], and cross the water!” With renunciation, not with grammar’s rules, one must be armed: Be nothing, then, and cross this sea unharmed.

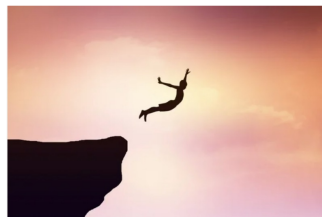
(Baha’u’llah, The Call of the Divine Beloved)

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Conclusion

In summary, going back to the first image, we are not asked to make a leap from the real into the unknown.

Rather we are invited to take a step, from the unreal, into the real world.



O SON OF LOVE!
Thou art but one step away
from the glorious heights above
and from the celestial tree of
love. Take thou one pace and
with the next advance into the
immortal realm and enter the
pavilion of eternity. Give ear
then to that which hath been
revealed by the Pen of Glory.

Baha'u'llah