

Chapter 17: Faith as the Essence of Invitation of the Prophets (Part 2)

[The Truth of Faith](#)

In the previous session, by citing Qur'anic verses, we arrived at the conclusion that faith is the essence of the prophets' invitation a fact that can with utmost clarity and explicitness be deduced from the Holy Qur'an. In the end, we raised questions which must be answered in order to make clearer the discussion.

One of the important subjects which are tackled in this issue and also the subject of many discussions nowadays in the academic circles inside and outside the country is "the truth behind faith." All of us know that once a person has faith in something, a kind of confirmation of its existence exists in his self whether it is faith in a person or the existence of an attribute in a person or faith in a thing. In both cases, faith is accompanied by confirmation. Now, the question is: What kind of confirmation is this?

In a bid to better clarify the question, we have to say that it is sometimes a logical confirmation while at other times, psychological. Sometimes, confirmation is such that we consider the relationship between two elements of a case (subject and predicate, or antecedent and consequence) and we can observe that the relationship between them is logically positive. We then confirm the case and its authenticity. The status of confirmation to the existence of this logical relationship is either because it is among the obvious things such as the case of "The whole is bigger than the part", or because it is among the analytical cases, for example, or some other existing ways. This is a logical confirmation; that is, once the intellect considers both sides of the cases, a positive relationship between them will logically become clear.

The point here is that logical confirmation is not always accompanied by and linked with psychological confirmation. For example, while a certain relationship is logically present between the subject and the predicate of a case, since it is a theoretical case and the concerned person is not aware of the proofs

and evidence substantiating it, the existence of such a relationship may be doubted. It is like the case of a schoolchild to whom a particular geometrical case is not yet proved, and the teacher has not taught it to him. Here, the relationship logically exists and is correct and established, but since it is not yet proved to him, he is psychologically doubtful and he cannot confirm it. The opposite of this case is possible; that is, sometimes a person psychologically believes and confirms the existence of a thing while such a relationship does not actually exist.

Is to Confirm the Truth Behind Faith?

Now, the question is: Once we say that in faith to confirm the proof of a thing or to confirm the proof of an attribute is necessary for a subject, which confirmation is referred to? Is it logical confirmation, psychological confirmation, or both? The more important question is: If a proof is shown to us and we confirm the existence of a thing, accepting it as such, believing it and have conviction in it,¹ is this enough for us to say that we have faith in that thing? Notwithstanding the demonstration of proof and the confirmation of the existence of relationship, and the presence of both logical and psychological confirmations for the person, is it possible that there is still no faith and it needs an additional element?

Many of those who have talked about the truth behind faith have regarded it as the same confirmation. According to them, the fact that firstly, the proof exists and secondly, the person is informed of the proof and his mind accepts it shows the presence of faith. Accordingly, it is not possible for a person to know something without having faith in it because the definition of faith is nothing but confirmation. Once both logical and psychological confirmations exist, faith will be present. In other words, faith is the same confirmation, and knowledge and faith are the same. Its only condition is that knowledge is consistent with the reality and not imagination and illusion.

It must be noted, however, that the above theory cannot be approved by referring to the verses of the Qur'an. In many instances, the Qur'an points out that there are those who have knowledge of things but do not have faith in them and in fact they have negated and denied them. From these expressions of the Qur'an, it becomes clear that knowledge and faith are different from each other, and that faith requires another element apart from knowledge and something which is more than knowing. One of the differences between faith and knowledge mentioned in the Qur'an is that once the proof of a thing is established, the human intellect has no alternative but to yield and confirm. But faith is an optional matter which cannot be materialized by compulsion.

Once the lamp is lit and you can see its brightness since your eyes are not defective, wittingly or unwittingly, you will acquire knowledge of the lamp being lit. According to this explanation, in this assumption faith will be acquired. According to the explanation of the Qur'an, however, notwithstanding the existence of knowledge, faith on the lamp being lit may not exist in yourself. One of the proofs in the Qur'an substantiating this fact is in the account of the Pharaoh and his people vis-à-vis Musa (Moses) ('a).

The Qur'an says, "We gave nine signs (miracles) to Musa and sent him with the nine signs to Pharaoh and his people. He showed the signs one after another to the people, the first of which was the same famous episode of his staff's transformation into a snake. Similarly, "the white (shining) palm" was one of his miracles. The reaction of Pharaoh to Musa (‘a) and his miracles was that he said to his people:

الْمَلَأُ مَا عَلِمْتُ لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرِي

I do not know of any god that you may have other than me. (28:38)

The verb in the sentence "I do not know" [*ma ‘alimtu*] is derived from the root "ilm" [knowledge]; that is, "I do not know of any god that you may have other than me." Through the tongue of Prophet Musa (‘a), the Qur'an rejects this point, saying:

قَالَ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَا أَنْزَلَ هَؤُلَاءِ إِلَّا رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ بِصَائِرٍ وَإِنِّي لَأَظُنُّكَ يَا فِرْعَوْنُ مَثْبُورًا

"You certainly know that no one has sent these [signs] except the Lord of the heavens and the earth. (17:102)"

From the Arabic literary perspective, there are two emphases in this verse; one is the *lam maftuh* (the letter *lam* "ل" marked with the *fathah* "فتحة" vowel–point) and the word "قَدْ" in "*laqad ‘alimta*" at the beginning. That is, "O Pharaoh! You most certainly know and you have knowledge [*ilm*] that no one has sent down these miracles except the Lord of the heavens and the earth."

Therefore, according to the text of the Qur'an, Pharaoh had knowledge of God and even knew that He had sent down these miracles. Yet, he was an unbeliever, and his disbelief continued up to the last moment and only at the time of drowning and ascertaining that there is no way out that he had faith with the aim of escaping death and saving himself, which of course was not accepted. Thus, based on an explicit verse of the Qur'an, in spite of recognizing God and knowing that those were His miracles and that Musa (‘a) was His messenger, Pharaoh remained an unbeliever. He had knowledge of both monotheism and apostleship, yet he had no faith in them.

Another proof is again related to the people of Pharaoh. The Qur'an states,

وَجَحَدُوا بِهَا وَاسْتَيْقَنَتْهَا أَنفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَعُلُوًّا ۖ فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

They impugned them though they were convinced in their hearts. (27:14)

The people of Pharaoh were certain that these were divine miracles, signs and symbols and that Musa (‘a) was a prophet of God, and their minds and intellects confirmed these facts, yet their hearts had no

faith and belief in them.

Therefore, by referring to the Holy Qur'an, it is perfectly evident that knowledge and faith are not identical and each is not correlative to the other such that wherever there is knowledge, faith must also be there.

Is Faith Correlative to Doubt and Ignorance?

Some people assume the stance opposite of those who regard knowledge and faith as the same, and they say that faith is talked about where there is no knowledge at all. Wherever man has knowledge of a thing, there must be faith. Faith is where man, while not certain and sure of a matter and doubtful and skeptical of it, accepts and confirms it. This statement, at this present time, has proponents in our own country, and if you read some national scientific magazines, you will observe pertinent subjects. The first explanation holds that whoever *knows* has faith as well. The second explanation is that faith is indeed related to where man does *not know*.

If we want to know the root of and reason behind the designing of this theory by some local intellectuals and so-called intellectuals, we have to cite two main causes. One cause is related to the imitation of the Western culture. For many centuries, faith has been defined in Europe in such a way that its background is ignorance and unawareness. The famous statement uttered by many ecclesiastical authorities is: "Believe first and then understand." You have to have faith first so as to acquire knowledge and gnosis later!

This stance of the Church originates when it advances issues which are not only lacking rational proof but there is also a proof against it. For example, one of the fundamental teachings of the Church is the doctrine of the Trinity; that is, God has three persons the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. According to this doctrine of the Church, God, while having three persons, is One, and while being One has three persons! This is a matter which the intellect cannot accept. How can God, while the Father, be the Son and the Holy Spirit at the same time?! In order to solve this problem, the Church says that you have to have faith in Christianity first so as to understand the Trinity later.

As such, according to this way of thinking, the place of faith is in cases which the intellect cannot understand, rather even denies. The intellect dictates that "three" cannot be "one." The intellect dictates that God who is the creator of everything is such Being Who has no place and cannot be in the form of a fetus inside the womb of Maryam (Saint Mary), to be borne by her and then crucified so as to save the entire human race! The Church observes that this affair, apart from lacking any rational explanation, is irrational. As such, it promulgates: "Have faith so as to understand!"

This way of thinking which for many centuries has been rampant in Europe particularly after the Renaissance has gradually spread in other cultures, and through the translation of books, has slowly found its way into other countries. Those who are more or less self-defeated by the Western culture and

imagine that whatever comes from the West is the gospel truth believe that faith is indeed where knowledge, intellect and rational proof are not at work. We believe because we cannot understand!

Then, through this way, they wanted to solve the contradictions and irrational subjects in the Torah and the Evangel. Wherever we say, “This subject is not harmonious with knowledge and intellect,” they say, “Yes, this subject is ‘religious’; it is not scientific and rational.” That is, although we do not know and cannot understand, or the intellect even dictates that it is not correct, we have to have faith in and accept it.

According to them, in principle the realm of religion is such that if a subject is raised therein, the intellect does not accept while knowledge denies it. But if you want to be “religious”, you have to accept it! This is the way Christianity and the West have chosen for centuries for the famous issue of “knowledge and intellect’s conflict with religion”, and wherever there is no reply, it frees itself by means of this technique and says, “This issue is not in the realm of knowledge at all and the subject on the scientific and rational proof of this issue is basically wrong. This issue is a religious one and religion means to have faith unknowingly and to accept blindly!”

The Qur’an and the Alleged Contradiction between Knowledge and Faith

When this subject reached our xenomaniacs,² they imagined that faith which is mentioned in Islam and the Qur’an is the same. In a bid to substantiate their claim, they have cited the fact that the Qur’an does not regard “knowledge” as not the same with “faith.” They quote the Qur’anic verse:

وَجَحَدُوا بِهَا وَاسْتَيْقَنَتْهَا أَنفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَعُلُوًّا

‘They impugned them though they were convinced in their hearts. (27:14)’

That is, once you have knowledge, you have no faith! It is thus clear that knowledge and faith are two different things which cannot be contained in a single container. Naturally, once there is no knowledge, there is doubt and ignorance. Once the Qur’an points to a case where there is knowledge and no faith, it will become evident that the place of faith is something other than that of knowledge, and no-knowledge is nothing but ignorance, doubt and unawareness. If it is knowledge, the way of acceptance is the same knowledge and there is no need for faith. Once we have doubt and ignorance, the way of acceptance is faith.

In elucidating further their view, the Muslim “intellectuals” who have accepted this interpretation of faith say: “By referring to the Qur’an, it becomes clear that faith is a voluntary affair:

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ ۚ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ

And say, [This is] the truth from your Lord: let anyone who wishes believe it, and let anyone who wishes disbelieve it'. (18:29)

On the other hand, freewill cannot be combined with knowledge because if a person knows something, he has no option but to accept it. Once a person knows a thing, there is no more room for denial. If he has knowledge, he has no more than one option and that is to accept and the line “*let anyone who wishes disbelieve it*” has no more meaning. Therefore, if faith is a voluntary affair, it must be raised in a case other than knowledge where there is the possibility of choosing either of two ways acceptance and denial. Where is it that both ways of acceptance and denial are open? It is where we have doubt. Once I have a doubt, I can either accept or refuse a thing. In this situation, once I accept it, it is said that I have faith in it.”

I have mentioned are subjects written and published in the existing periodicals in the Islamic Republic, and unfortunately, some of those who advanced these issues have Islamic seminary credentials. Anyway, without considering their personalities and their motives, let us see to what extent this contention is correct.

One question is this: Wherever a person has knowledge, will he definitely have faith, too? By referring to the Qur’an, we will find out that the answer to this question is negative. The people of Pharaoh, according to the text of the Qur’an, had knowledge but had no faith.

Another question is: Wherever we are totally ignorant, or more serious than this, where we are indeed certain to nonexistence and it negates the definite or scientific proof of a thing, in which thing can faith ever exist? For example, although we can see that this lamp is lit, do we have faith that its light is put out? Or, although we are certain that two times two is equal to four, do we have faith that two times two is equal to five? Is such a thing possible? Is it possible for us to have faith in something which we know and have real certainty that it is not true?

In order to answer the second question, we have to return to the additional element which is necessary in faith. At examining the answer to the first question, we pointed it out that an additional element apart from knowledge is required for faith to come into existence, and mere knowledge is not enough. If mere knowledge had been enough, Pharaoh would have believed. The Qur’an said that he was certain and he knew that the miracles were signs from the Lord of the heavens and the earth and that Musa (‘a) was indeed a prophet of God; nevertheless, he did not believe. Let us now introduce the auxiliary element which must accompany knowledge in order for faith to be realized.

The Correct Theory on the Truth of Faith

First of all, we have to take note that many subjects are discernible but not explainable; that is, we can understand it and be totally aware of it, but in explanation and elucidation, we cannot depict to others its nature and at most what we can do is to show its effects. We all know what fear is, but once we want to explain it, instead of pointing out its nature, we embark on mentioning its effects and signs. For example, we say, "Fear is a condition once it is experienced by a person, his hands and feet will shake, he will turn pale and his heart will beat faster."

In the same vein, if we are asked, "What is love?" we cannot explain what love means; we can only mention its effects and signs. Concepts similar to these are not limited in number. Faith belongs to this sort of concepts; it is an inner state which is discernible through demonstrative knowledge, and in explaining it, we can only describe its effects and signs. Faith is an emotional and psychological state which requires that man should be bound to its requisites; that is, in action, he is supposed to be committed to fulfilling its requisites. There are so many things which are known to many people but they in practice are not willing to observe its requisites.

So many people know that smoking has many destructive effects which may bring about numerous problems, but they are not willing to put this knowledge into practice. They act as if they do not know. Here, there is knowledge and no faith. Why? It is because the decision is not accompanied by putting it into practice and fulfilling its requisites. If a person knows of a thing and then decides to be committed to this knowledge in practice, it means that he has faith in it. And if in spite of the knowledge he has, he makes no decision to act upon it accordingly or decides not to do it at all, he is then a denier [*kafir*] of it though he has knowledge of it.

Given this explanation, the meaning of Pharaoh's denial [*kufr*] becomes clear; he knew that there is God; Musa is a prophet of God; and his miracles are divine signs, but he was not inclined to put this knowledge into practice; therefore, he was a *kafir*. The people of Pharaoh had the same case concerning knowledge: "*They were convinced in their hearts*" but "*they impugned them.*" They were not inclined to follow it in action.

Meanwhile, as to how man can, in spite of knowing a thing and having definite knowledge of it but being not inclined to follow it in practice is another story which is presently not connected to our discussion. If we want to give a brief to this question, we have to say that this matter is related to the enjoyments that man will experience in indulging in or abandoning it. In general, whims and caprice and emotional attachments hinder man from having faith. The story of the Prophet's imprecation with the Christians of Najran which has been mentioned in the Qur'an is a good testimony to this fact.

The Christian priests and learned men of Najran (a city in the outskirts of Yemen) came to Medina and wanted to arrange an academic debate with the Prophet (S). Of course, they were prominent and learned men and they imagined that they could condemn the Prophet (S) in the academic dispute and

defeat him. It was agreed upon that they would embrace Islam if they would be defeated in the debate. A large crowd gathered in the Mosque to witness the debate. The Prophet (S) engaged in a debate with them.

Finally, in this debate, the Christian scholars were condemned and defeated in the discussion. The Prophet (S) asked them to embrace Islam according to the promise they had given, but they refused to do so with the pretext that they were not yet convinced. A verse was revealed in which the Prophet (S) is asked to say to the effect: “Since you will not be convinced in a discussion, do a certain thing and be ready for an imprecation. The following day, the two parties were supposed to meet at a place outside Medina and curse each other so that God would send down His chastisement on the false group and annihilate them. The Qur’an thus says in this regard:

فَمَنْ حَاجَّكَ فِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ فَقُلْ تَعَالَوْا نَدْعُ أَبْنَاءَنَا وَأَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَنِسَاءَنَا وَنِسَاءَكُمْ وَأَنْفُسَنَا وَأَنْفُسَكُمْ ثُمَّ نَبْتَهِلْ فَنَجْعَلْ لَعْنَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَى الْكَاذِبِينَ

Should anyone argue with you concerning him, after the knowledge that has come to you, say, ‘Come! Let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, our souls and your souls, then let us pray earnestly and call down Allah’s curse upon the liars’. (3:61)

The Prophet along with Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn (who were then children), Lady Fatimah az-Zahra’ and Imam ‘Ali (‘a) were present for the imprecation. Once the Christians of Najran cast their eyes upon these five holy personages, they were frightened and they said to themselves, “If he had only had an iota of doubt, he would not have brought with him the best of his nearest ones and in sum, he would have been present for the imprecation! We will not accept Islam anyway, but we are willing to pay the *Jizyah* tax.” Once the Holy Prophet (S) was asked about the reason behind this decision, he said, “They discerned and had ascertained that I am the Messenger of Allah and on the true side while they are on the false side, but because of their habit and interest in eating pork and drinking wine, which are both unlawful in Islam, we were not able to dispense with the enjoyment of eating pork and drinking wine, and thus, they did not yield to the truth.”

In spite of being certain about a thing, a person may not yield to it; rather, he may deny it because of whims and caprice, enjoyment, arrogance, etc. For example, if Pharaoh believed in God, his people would no longer acknowledge him as God and he would be forced to abandon all his power, wealth, outward splendor, elegance, and pomp, and would live like a common man.

Faith’s Relationship with Knowledge and Freewill

Thus, in faith, in addition to knowledge and awareness, there is another needed element; a mental and psychological element through which man should create in himself a state of submission, acceptance and obedience to the Truth and “to be bound by its requisites.” Faith means “knowledge in addition to

the state of inner obedience in accepting the requisites of knowledge.” From here the issue of faith’s voluntary nature becomes clear, because to have or not to have this state of obedience is a voluntary affair. He who is addicted to smoking is still not willing to abandon this habit in spite of knowing its many destructive effects. He is not forced to smoke. In fact, like thousands of other people who decided to quit it and succeeded, he can also make a definite decision and quit smoking. This state of submission which is the resolution to be bound by the requisites of his knowledge is a totally voluntary affair.

As such, “to know” and “to be voluntary” have no contradiction. This is contrary to the claim that if a person acquires knowledge, he has no option but to accept and submit to it, and as such, faith cannot be reconciled with knowledge. Our reply is: knowledge is one thing, while the resolution to be bound by the requisites of the knowledge is another thing. As we have explained, the latter is an affair totally at the discretion of the person himself. Even knowledge and knowing themselves, from the perspective of their preliminaries, are voluntary. In order to pass the university entrance examination, a person studies and works hard, passes the exam and goes to the university. Is this going to the university voluntary or involuntary for him?

Obviously, it is voluntary. Thus, a person who has gone to the university and studied hard has become a teacher and expert because he himself wanted to do so and has indeed done it. If he had willed, he would not have studied and passed the examination, or after admission to the university, he might not have studied so to be expelled. It is true that if a teacher in a geometry class proves a theorem through a proof, the schoolchild will acquire knowledge and have no way for denial, but attending the class, sitting down there, and listening attentively to the teacher (which is required in acquiring knowledge) are voluntary affairs.

Even if we assume that acquisition of knowledge is not voluntary, faith is not mere knowledge and “obedience” is also a requisite; and obedience is completely a voluntary affair. To decide to be bound by the requisites of knowledge or not is at the discretion of man himself. So, it is not ironic to say that faith is a voluntary affair which is occasionally accompanied by knowledge whose acquisition is not voluntary. The secret behind this matter is that once there is a voluntary element in a set, this is enough for us to regard the set as voluntary.

Citing another example can help make the issue clear. Let us assume that I am now busy talking. Is speaking a voluntary or involuntary affair? Obvious, it is voluntary. But for me to talk and speak has hundreds of necessary prerequisites none of which is under my control. I should have lungs, voice, healthy vocal chords in the larynx, mouth and nose to emit air from my lungs, and many other prerequisites. Are they under my control? Is it under my will and control for me to have lungs, or not? Clearly, God has given me the lungs, but it might not be that I preferred to have lungs.

Is it my choice that there is air? God has created the air, and it is not that since I desired and preferred to have air, there is air. Now, the question is: Although none of these prerequisites is volitional and has formed out of our will, why do we still say that speaking is a voluntary action? The reply is that because

a part of it is voluntary. For me to decide to use a certain word and voice to create certain words and expressions is under my control. So, the existence of a voluntary part in a set whose tens of parts are involuntary is enough to prove the voluntary nature of the set.

Faith is voluntary in this sense, although its requisite is knowledge which is sometimes acquired by man involuntarily. Knowledge may be acquired by me involuntarily but the decision to act upon the requisites of knowledge is under my control. This is enough to prove the voluntary nature of faith.

Now, you judge how wrong the one who introduces himself as a philosopher and says that even if it is voluntary, faith cannot be reconciled with freewill is. Is for me to merely know that smoking is harmful enough to make me avoid smoking? In addition, should we decide not to smoke? Since I have knowledge (of the harm of smoking), am I compelled not to smoke? Does being voluntary necessarily mean being associated with ignorance and unawareness?

What a senseless claim for us to say that the requisite of faith being voluntary is that there should be no knowledge as there are ignorance and doubt! Yes, this statement may be appropriate for the Church authorities who have been entangled with false and baseless doctrines. As we have pointed out, in order to escape the responsibility of the doctrines and teachings which are inconsistent with the intellect, they chose this way, i.e. to say that the domain of knowledge and intellect is different from that of religion, and these are religious teachings which have nothing to do with neither knowledge nor the intellect.

Yes, faith which Islam wants is not blind at all and it is not arisen from ignorance and lack of understanding; rather, we have to understand and be aware first, and then have faith. Blind and ignorant faith has no value. First, knowledge must be acquired and then one has to decide to be bound by it.

Which is the Premise of Faith, Logical Certainty or Conventional Certainty?

It is necessary to point out that knowledge, which is the premise of faith and whose existence is indispensable for the emergence of faith, is customary. Let us elaborate: One term for knowledge used in logic is that man is certain of *a priori* reality; that is, he has such total conviction that it is impossible to be the contrary. There is no probability, not even one in a million, of being the contrary. Many theorems in mathematics are like this. For example, "To combine two opposites is impossible" belongs to this group of theorems, and there are many others. This terminology is specific for knowledge and what we mean by knowledge which is the premise of faith is this one.

The knowledge which is indispensable in faith is that which is technically called certainty. It is an inner and psychological state in which man has no more inner and psychological worry and anxiety in relation to a matter, and he has peace of mind as far as it is concerned. A hundred percent rational evidence for it has not been established, and there is rational and philosophical probability to be the contrary, but this probability is so insignificant that people usually do not pay attention to it, and in spite of it, they are

convinced that the matter is as they believe it to be. This certainty is not philosophical; rather, customary. That is, the same treatment of the philosophers toward the philosophical certainty is what the common people do to certainty. Rationally and philosophically, certainty is a very strong presumption with a very small probability of error. In other words, some subjects in our minds still have the status of uneasiness and agitation, and we do not feel certain peace of mind and tranquility of the heart in relation to them. Some other subjects are not like so, and the minds accept them easily.

We shall cite an example in order to better clarify the subject. Let us assume that you went out of your home in the morning and to your office or another place. After a few hours, you want to return home. At this moment, if you are asked, “Are you certain that your house is in order to which you want to return?” you cannot prove that it is in order through rational and mathematical evidence. Maybe, God forbid, something bad has happened and your house is totally destroyed. Such a probability cannot rationally be negated. But everyday, without entertaining such a probability, you return home with confidence. In essence, many activities in the custom of the wise and in the midst of people and society are performed on the basis of this very conviction and customary certainty. In spite of having no philosophical and absolute certainty, the wise follow the dictate of their knowledge and certainty without paying attention to the probability of error.

Now, concerning faith, we say that the knowledge which is the premise of faith is the same customary knowledge and certainty, and there is no need to have definite philosophical certainty whose probability of error is absolutely impossible. For example, we are certain that two times two is impossible to be other than four. Philosophical certainty regarding faith is possible for the saints of God and those who are like the Commander of the Faithful (‘a). This certainty is very rare, but different levels, lower and similar to it, are possible for other people. It is here that the discussion on the levels of faith is raised.

Two Contributory Factors in the Enhancement and Strengthening of Faith

The first level of faith is attainable with the same presumption and certainty mentioned earlier. Once a person’s mind becomes free from agitation, uneasiness and disturbance with respect to a subject and attains tranquility and serenity, if he is asked, “Do you know it?” he will say, “Yes, I know it.” That state is enough for attaining faith. After acquiring faith and deciding to act upon the requisites of this certainty and actually doing so, this thought will be strengthened gradually through further proofs and pieces of evidence and the resolution of man to undertake them will equally become stronger. In this state, faith will be enhanced and its level elevated. The Qur’an thus says:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَّتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ

The faithful are only those whose hearts tremble [with awe] when Allah is mentioned, and when

His signs are recited to them, they (Allah's signs) increase their faith. (8:2)

If a person has a proof for a subject and then acquires another proof, he will become more certain of it. This is one of the ways of strengthening and increasing faith.

Another way of enhancing and strengthening faith is through the effect of the same undertaking which a person acquires in practice. Once he becomes certain of the existence of a thing, closer to it and acquainted with it, his desire, interest and acceptance of it will gradually increase. We have definitely had such experiences. No one of us had this degree of faith that we have now during our childhood and early adolescence. Initially, they asked us to pray. Little by little, they said, "Pay attention to what you are reciting in your prayers." They said, "Read the Qur'an and reflect on its meaning."

They said, "Supplicate and recite litanies to God." Gradually and slowly, man will feel the munificence of God and become more acquainted with and closer to Him. Therefore, action and practical undertaking contribute to the enhancement of faith. On the contrary, those who acquire faith in the beginning but fail to fulfill its requirements, their faith will not grow. If they indulge in sins and that which is contrary to its requirements, their initial faith gradually weakens and as the effect of further and repetitive sinning, it may end up in the total effacement of faith:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ رُسُلًا إِلَى قَوْمِهِمْ فَجَاءَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَاذْتَمَنَّا مِنَ الَّذِينَ أَجْرَمُوا ﴿٤﴾ وَكَانَ حَقًّا عَلَيْنَا نَصْرُ
الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Then the fate of those who committed misdeeds was that they denied the signs of Allah and they used to deride them. (30:47)

Thus, faith can be strengthened or weakened. How can it be strengthened? One way is to enhance knowledge, which is among the foundations of faith. In doing so, man can enhance his level of certainty. Not only will that certainty find the main point, but also the negation of its opposite. The second way is through perseverance in fulfilling its requirements. The more he is careful and acts upon his certainty, delight, acceptance and obedience will increase.

Summary of the Discussion

Faith is voluntary knowledge and something more than the knowledge which is the premise of faith, and sometimes it may be acquired involuntarily. This voluntary action means that man experiences a state in his heart to decide to act upon the requirements of knowledge and what he knows. If he has knowledge but decides never to act upon its requirements, this is not faith. He who says, "I am certain that the Prophet of Islam is a divine prophet and has said the truth, but I decide not to obey any of his ordinances," has no faith; what he has is only knowledge. Faith is that state whose requisite is to decide to act.

The condition of faith is not the knowledge of philosophical certainty; rather, the common and customary knowledge which is the same certainty is enough for faith. The mere fact that the mind has no more agitation and uneasiness (with respect to a thing), and although there is the probability of wrong belief, this probability is so insignificant for it to disturb the state of peace and tranquility of the mind and soul and for this reason, it is not given attention.

Faith has levels. Once a person's attention is drawn to the purport of the verses of the Qur'an and he reflects upon them, the attraction of the Qur'an will capture his heart and soul and he will earn motivation to act upon them and to be more acquainted with God: *"When His signs are recited to them, they (Allah's signs) increase their faith."* On the contrary, when a sinful person decides not to be bound by the requirements of his knowledge and to indulge in sin upon sin, his initial faith will weaken and may even reach a point where it is totally wiped out: *"Then the fate of those who committed misdeeds was that they denied the signs of Allah."*

Some claim that the requisite of faith and its voluntary nature is ignorance and doubt. This is false and baseless. If a person knows that something is not true, it is impossible for him to have faith in it. If it is proved to you that "one" is not "three" while "three" is not "one", there is no possibility for you to believe that "one" and "three" are identical! The Christian Trinity is nothing but this: God is one in a trinity! Even a state of dilemma and 50–50 doubt will not end up in faith. One has to acquire preference—a considerable preference—so as to acquire faith. Those who have claimed that faith is a correlative of ignorance have not understood faith, ignorance, or knowledge.

1. The reason behind using these different expressions along with each other is that technically speaking, there are differences more or less among confirmation, belief and conviction, and since here we refer to them all, we have mentioned them all so that those who are familiar with these terms (and their differences) will not confuse one with the other.

2. Xenomaniacs: those infatuated with foreign and especially Western models of culture. This is the translation of a Persian term, gharbzadegan or gharbzadeh-ha, popularized by Jalal Al Ahmad (d. 1969) who was a writer of great influence in his book Gharbzadegi ("Xenomania" or "Occidentosis"). See its English translation, R. Campbell (trans.) and Hamid Algar (ed. and anno.), Occidentosis: A Plague from the West (Berkeley: Al-Mizan Press, 1984). [Trans.]

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