

Essence of Faith

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Abstract:

After reminding and submission to the known God, the faithful man will be approved by God and will be endowed by the essence of faith. The man's faith is his own deed and the essence of faith is God's deed. The essence of faith will be taken away from man's heart when he commits sins and it has different levels and in each level, man is warranted against the sins of that level. The level of faith does not remain constant and can change with things like our actions and deeds.

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Introduction

In the previous articles we talked about three different levels of religious theology “introduction, reminding and submission”. In this article, we will discuss the result of submission which is the “essence of faith”. As this article is the last article of this series, at the end of it an explanation regarding the place of using the verses and traditions in the topics of theology will be offered.

Outcome of Submission

The last stage in guidance is submission before the All-Compassionate God. By taking this step, man follows the right way and achieves the divine general guidance. Perceiving the “*Ruh-e-Iman*” (essence of faith) from the All-Compassionate God is the gift of this stage.

Like “*Ma’refat fitri*” (innate gnosis), the “*Ruh-e-Iman*” (spirit of faith) too is God’s gift and favor with this difference that the basis of innate gnosis is universal whereas the “spirit of faith” is confined to the believers who submit themselves before God. We shall clarify the above matter while describing the qualities of faith.

In the divine works, faith and everything related to faith has been discussed from various angles. Here, we shall at first, describe the various meanings of faith and then look into divine faith and mention some of its specialties from two angles: “*Iman-e-Mu’min*” (the believer’s faith) which is the act of man and “*Ruh-e-Iman*” (spirit of faith) which is God’s creation.

1. The meanings of Faith (*Iman*)

In the holy Quran and noble traditions, the word “*Iman*” (faith) has been applied in various senses. Among them, we may mention such meanings as:

“confession by tongue”¹, “confirmation by heart”², “divine obligations”³, “acting upon the duties and abstaining from cardinal sins”⁴, “fulfillment of obligatory acts and absolute abstinence from sins”⁵ “fulfillment of obligatory and recommendable acts and abstinence from forbidden, abominable and even ‘mubah’ (impunible) acts”⁶.

However, the real meaning which is most emphasized is *“belief by heart together with confession by tongue and action*

¹ For example: “O those who have confessed to the truthfulness of the divine religion, acknowledge it by your heart too.”(the holy Quran, 4:136)

The first faith refers to confession and the second faith refers to confirmation by heart. Similarly, refer to Bihar al-Anwar Vol.68, p.273 where other verses too have come down in this regard.

² Same reference

³ After alteration in the ‘*Qibla*’ (direction of prayers), the Muslims inquired from the Prophet whether their prayers in the direction of Bayt al-Muqaddas is rendered null and void! In reply, the verse 143 from second chapter of holy Quran was revealed. Refer to Bihar al-Anwar Vol.68, p.274 and Vol.69, p.77 & 78.

⁴ For example, refer to Bihar al-Anwar Vol.68, p.262, last line; p. 270, tradition 26; p. 277 & 299, tradition 2 and Vol. 69, p.73.

⁵ For example, refer to Bihar al-Anwar vol.68, p.256, 259, 296; Vol. 69, p.63, tradition 7 and p. 73, tradition 28.

⁶ 4. Refer to the traditions which have come down about qualities of believers particularly, Bihar al-Anwar vol.68,p.149, chapter concerning “Qualities of a Shiite”.

by limbs". It is this very meaning used in contrast to 'Islam' (meaning apparent submission).¹

This meaning has been propounded by the Infallible Imams as against two common views at that time.

The *Murji'ites* reckoned apparent confession by 'people of Qibla' to be sufficient for Islam and faith while the *Kharijites* reckoned 'observance of obligatory acts and abstinence from cardinal sins' as a necessity for Islam and faith. In this regard, the inheritors of divine gnosis and true interpreters of the Quran have proved, by virtue of the holy verses and Prophet's sunnah that for *Islam*, apparent confession is enough but, for having faith (*Iman*), this apparent confession should be supported with belief by heart and divine deeds.

Thus, faith used in the above sense is synonymous with submission (at heart) and its tools i.e., verbal and practical submission.

In Islamic sources, *Iman* (faith) in the above sense has been linked with another matter i.e., *Ruh-e-Iman* (spirit of faith) with this meaning that God bestows His favor and illuminates a believer's heart with light, certainty, tranquility and piety in proportion to the believer's faith. He makes the

¹ Refer to Bihar al-Anwar vol.68, p.225, chapter concerning "Difference between *"Iman"* and *"Islam"*". In this chapter, aside from verses of Quran, fifty-six traditions have been narrated. Also, refer to chapter vol.69, p.18, chapter concerning "Deeds are part of *"Iman"* (faith)". Aside from verses, thirty traditions have been narrated. Most of these traditions bear witness to the afore-mentioned meaning.

believer enjoy a lustrous and spiritual reality called “*Ruh-e-Iman*”.

In this part of our discussion, we shall lay stress, more than anything else, on these two matters: i.e., the believer’s faith and the spirit of faith. One is the act of man and the other God’s make. One takes shape on the basis of man’s spiritual state and free-will and the other is augmented by God.

2. The Specialties of “*Ruh-e-Iman*” (essence of faith)

“Ruh-e-Iman” is God’s creation:

I inquired from Imam al-Sadiq (p.b.u.h.) about the verse: “These are they into whose hearts He has impressed faith”¹ as such: ‘Have the believers had any role in impression of faith? Imam replied: ‘No’.²

“Ruh-e-Iman” is God’s favor to His believing slaves:

“These are they into whose hearts He has impressed faith, and whom He has strengthened with an inspiration from Him”.³

“Ruh-e-Iman” is peace and tranquility which God bestows upon the hearts of believers:

¹ The holy Quran 58:22

² Al-Kafi vol.2, p.15

³ The holy Quran 58:22. Refer to Al-Kafi vol.2, p.15, tradition 1 & 5; Bihar al-Anwar vol.69, p.190, tradition 5; 69/194 & 200 and Vol. 68, p.274.

“He it is Who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the believers that they might have more of faith added to their faith”.¹

“Ruh-e-Iman” is the very divine piety, inseparable from the believers:

“But Allah sent down His tranquility on His Messenger and the believers and fastened to them the reality of “Taqwa”²

In instances where a believer turns back from the foundation of faith (submission), he will be deprived of “Ruh-e-Iman”:

“When a person commits adultery, God takes away the “Ruh-e-Iman” (spirit of faith) from him”.³

Just as “*Ruh al-Qudus*” distinguishes an immaculate person from a non-immaculate person⁴ in the same manner, “*Ruh-e-Iman*” distinguishes a believer from an unbeliever.⁵

¹ The holy Quran 48:4. Refer to Al-Kafi vol.2, p.15, tradition 1 & 3-5.

² The holy Quran 48:26. Refer to Bihar al-Anwar vol.69, p.200, tradition 21.

³ Bihar al-Anwar vol.69, p.178. Similarly, refer to p. 19, tradition 4 & 5; p. 198, tradition 16; Al-Kafi vol.2, p.280 & 281.

⁴ The holy Quran 58:22, 2:253; Bihar al-Anwar vol.69, p.179, tradition 3 and p. 191.

⁵ The philosophers and materialistic psychologists have, in their study on human sciences come to this view that man is an advancing complicated animal. Of course, they cannot be considered at fault as materialistic belief fails to distinguish and depict the realities and the lofty gnosis. As a matter of fact, in such a definition, they are describing their own being. However, they too should consider us right for believing that man is a spiritual being since a believer is assisted (by God) and he proceeds towards Him. Basically, from the divine viewpoint, one cannot set a fixed definition for all the human-beings because man is always swaying and fluctuating between the two limits: “*most deviated than an animal*” and “*most excellent than an angel*”.

3. Faith and the Heart

The divine faith (believer's faith and Ruh-e-Iman) is an affair related to the heart.

In the divine writings, a believer's faith (*Iman*) is remembered by such expressions as "*something in heart*"¹ "*submission at heart*"² "*a tie in heart and by heart*"³ "*confirmation by heart*"⁴ "*whatever is established in heart*"⁵ "*whatever is pure in heart*"⁶ "*faith in heart and faith by heart*"⁷ "*white spot in heart*"⁸ while "*Ruh-e-Iman*" is remembered by such titles as "*something that is set in the hearts*"⁹ "*confirmation at heart*"¹⁰ and "*impression in the hearts*"¹¹

These expressions indicate that faith is a heart-related subject and not a verbal affair or mental imagination and affirmation. Besides, if man submits himself before God with heart and soul, God too will assist his heart and soul without any intermediary (i.e., concepts and notions).

¹ Refer to Bihar al-Anwar vol.68, p.282

² Refer to Bihar al-Anwar vol.68, p.265

³ Refer to Bihar al-Anwar vol.68, p.256, 291 and Vol. 69, pp.65 & 69

⁴ Refer to Bihar al-Anwar vol.68, p.273 and vol.69, p.68, tradition 21

⁵ Refer to Bihar al-Anwar vol.68, p.251

⁶ Refer to Bihar al-Anwar vol.69, p.72

⁷ Refer to Bihar al-Anwar vol.68, p.265 and vol.70,p.178 & 180, tradition 49

⁸ Refer to Bihar al-Anwar vol.69, p.196

⁹ Refer to Bihar al-Anwar vol.68, pp.273 & 274

¹⁰ Refer to Bihar al-Anwar vol.68, pp.273 & 274

¹¹ The holy Quran 58:22; Bihar al-Anwar vol.69, p.200, tradition 22

4. Faith and Deeds

After man submits himself before the Almighty God and acknowledges Him by heart, a light proportionate to this faith is augmented which necessarily results in divine conduct and worship of God.

Among the special features of the Shia belief is the view concerning “*Iman*” (faith) and “*Islam*” (submission). As against the *Kharijites* and *Murji’ites*, the *Shias* believe that divine deeds influences faith and reckon deeds to be a condition of faith. On the other hand, they believe that worship and deeds play no role in the apparent *Islam*.

This view (i.e., the *Shia* view) is drawn on the basis of Quran and traditions.¹

Numerous traditions lay stress that a believer does not commit sins and if ever a believer happens to indulge in sins, it implies that at that time and even before that, God takes away the “*Ruh-e-Iman*” from him, and repentance is the only means by which the past radiance and purity is returned.

Belief at heart and consequently *Ruh-e-Iman* followed by a conduct commensurate with faith is the outcome of the stage of divine theology. That is to say, there exists a productive and necessary relation between faith and worship. Despite this, the matter of free-will does not give away its authority in any of

¹ For example, refer to the holy Quran 49:14, 4:136 and Bihar al-Anwar vol.68, pp.225-309, chapter concerning “Difference between faith (*Iman*) and submission (*Islam*)”; vol. 69, pp.18-149 “Deeds are part of faith and verily, faith is spread all over the organs.”

the stages. The secret of this lies hidden in the rudiments of faith.

Inasmuch as after submission, man acquires *Ruh-e-Iman*, the same submission (which takes shape on the basis of free-will) gets manifested in deeds supported by divine aid.

At the time of disobedience and sin too, man gives away, by his own free-will, the basis of faith which is the same submission. Consequently, he is deprived of divine aid and commits indecent deeds.

Thus, considering that sins harm the pillar of faith, it can be said that they destroy its very principle too. In this regard, numerous traditions have come down which stress that “*Ruh-e-Iman*” is withdrawn from man at the time he commits sins.¹

5. Levels of Faith

*S*ubmission before the Almighty God is not of the same level. This is because people submit before God at levels, proportionate to their spiritual capacity and free-will. Thus, people’s faiths are of various degrees and they enjoy special levels of *Ruh-e-Iman* and divine assistance. For this reason, the believer’s devoutness and divine conducts are diverse.

¹ For example, refer to Bihar al-Anwar vol.69, pp.19, 178, 198 and Al-Kafi vol. 2, pp.280-284.

On this basis, the traditions which define various meanings for *Iman* (faith) are not only consistent with each other but rather show that there exists diverse levels of faith.

In this regard, it is worthy to mention that an individual's level of faith does not always remain fixed. Rather, it keeps fluctuating at different levels. The reason for this is that the principle of faith and the spirit of piety lies in man's submission based on free-will and genetic authority where, this authority remains in force after submission too. An individual can either turn his back from submitting before God or strengthen his submission and ascend to higher levels of faith:

Imam al-Musa al-Kazim (p.b.u.h.) said:

"We approve (help) the '*Ruh-e-Iman*' through obedience to God and deeds"¹.

Method of Utilizing Verses And Traditions In Innate Theology; And The Truth of Innate Disposition

In the discussions on innate gnosis, reference is made to verses and traditions just as in certain cases, rational questions and answers are set forth too. Thus, this question arises that whether the topic of innate disposition and innate gnosis is a rational or traditional (transmitted) matter and

¹ Al-Kafi vol.2, p.268. Many verses and traditions have come down about levels of faith, its essence and causes. For example, refer to the holy Quran 8:3, 48:5, 9:124 & 125, 58:12, 33:22, 2:261, 3:173, 56:8-10, 74:31 and Bihar al-Anwar vol.69, p.156 chapter concerning "*Levels of faith and realities*" and Vol. 69, p.175, chapter concerning "*Tranquility and ruh-e- iman and its abundance and shortcomings*".

basically, what is the criterion of authenticity and rightfulness of innate gnosis?

Reply: The criterion of authenticity of innate disposition is neither intellect nor tradition (transmission) and innate gnosis is not an intellect or blind recognition.

Rather, this gnosis is a conscientious recognition which is assured through God's help. At the time of such conscientious mood, man recognizes his Creator and perceives His rightfulness by heart and soul. In this manner, the heart-related *Hujjah* (plea) which is the most firm reasoning gets manifested. The Prophets, divine leaders and evangelists too, strive to create a conscientious mood in their addressees through reminding. However, the essence of conscience and manifestation of gnosis is God's creation. Thus, one shouldn't compare this kind of conscience and recognition with any of the human sciences.

Ordinarily¹, the innate gnosis divulges through reminding of others only when the following three factors go hand in hand:

1. The person reminding is himself not heedless of that gnosis.

¹ Since divine gnosis is in God's hand, it's possible that an individual may recognize Him without the aforementioned conditions. For example, in situations of severe hardship, man becomes aware of God without his own desire.

2. Man possesses the desired spiritual and moral state devoid of any ethical hindrances.

3. There exist no mental obstacles.

The roles of the Prophets guarantee the first factor; creation of spiritual elevation is the ultimate goal of morals; and good debate and argumentation eliminates mental obstacles.

Thus, innate gnosis is a conscientious matter at heart which is superior to all human sciences including the rational and non-rational. Its proof lies within itself and one does not require outside logical reasoning for proving its legitimacy. Of course, as said before, it is possible to prove God through rational means but what we wish to emphasize is this that innate disposition (*Fitrat*) does not require rational proof. Rather, it uncovers the reality before man at lofty levels and it is here that the secret of a believer's faith is looked into and perceived.

Nevertheless, man is free to accept or reject this gnosis; and freedom and authority are essential to this ability. Man is given freedom because this world is a place of divine trial and examination.

Reliance on narrative proofs too has diverse reasons. Among them, we may say that verses and traditions are vital reminders that prepare, in the best possible manner, an individual's heart for receiving the divine gnosis. This itself, is one of the aspects of the miracles of Quran.

About the Quran, Amir al-Momenin says:

“He (i.e., the Almighty God) manifest to them (slaves) throughout His Book”.¹

Another reason for relying on narration is to prove that the afore-mentioned points are all deeply rooted in Islam. It reveals the method of divine theology and the style adopted by the divine prophets in inviting people towards God.

If any discussion (whether rational, traditional (narrative) and conscientious) is to be attributed to religion, it must be supported by divine texts minus the esoteric interpretations.²

Another reason for utilizing verses and traditions in this book is because a few topics like, “*the worlds of pre-existence*” lie within the limits of “*Ghaib*” (Unseen) but outside the purview of intellect and conscience. All discussions that fall within the limits of “*Ghaib*” (Unseen) are purely devotional and the criterion of their authenticity is narration.

In short, reference to narration can be classified as follows:

a) As far as explanation is concerned, the stance and talk of every religion and school of thought must be supported by internal proofs.

b) In the fundamental gnostic knowledge, the verses and traditions usually play the role of reminding notwithstanding whether rational reasoning can be raised here or not.

¹ Nahjul-Balagha; sermon 147, p. 204

² With respect to the metaphorical expressions of the Quran, one should adopt silence and refer to the clear verses for their meanings.

c) In the detailed gnostic knowledge, narration takes the color of blind obedience. Of course, it is within the limits of “*Ghaib*” (Unseen) that narrations can be reckoned to be the only exclusive way (for obedience) otherwise, rational roofs too can be mooted.

There are various reasons for setting forth rational queries and replies as well as argumentation and reasoning concerning innate disposition (*Fitrat*). One reason is that for every question, one should prepare, in the same language, an appropriate reply. It's possible that a matter may not be intrinsically rational but exposed to rational queries so that its impossibility is proved. Here, one should prove the possibility of that matter by rational argumentation and doing away with the mental hindrances. Most of the religious affairs are of this type and the main concern of a religious speaker and scholar is to defend the religious affairs in a rational manner.¹

¹ The task of speakers in defending the religious beliefs can be classified and explained in six stages: “*Inference*”, “*Elucidation*”, “*Arrangement*”, “*Proof*”, “*Disproving the doubts come up in religion*” and “*Disproving the anti-religious beliefs and views*”.

In the first stage i.e., “*Inference*”, the religious doctrine is extracted mostly from two sources: the Quran and traditions. In the stage of “*Elucidation*”, the speaker strives in clarifying concepts such as “*Seeing God*”, “*Unity of God*”, “*Intercession*” and “*Occultation*”. In the next stage, the religious discussions takes shape in such manner that is in vogue in the human sciences. In this as well as the preceding stage, the speaker, out of compulsion, reduces the divine gnostic knowledge and discusses by means of human language and system. In the fourth stage i.e., “*Proof*”, those matters that can be rationally proved are proved so in a rational manner and if they are beyond reasoning and proof, their rationality and harmony with the intellect is demonstrated. This task is normally accomplished through rational “*Disproving doubts*” that have come up in religious beliefs. Similarly, the last stage too i.e., “*Disproving the anti-religious beliefs*” takes place

Likewise, a non-rational matter can sometimes be referred to the intellect and explained in the rational language just as *Ma'refat fitri* (innate gnosis) can be described by **“negating God from two constrictions”** (ta'til and tash'bih).

Verily, this intellectual report is an innate acquisition and not a rational acquisition.

as a base for showing the rationality of religious beliefs or proving such beliefs. It's necessary to mention that in the fourth stage i.e., *“Proof”* the speakers faced two groups of people: The first group comprised of the non-Muslims who were confronted with mainly rational reasoning and the second group consisted of Muslims against whom narrative proofs were employed. It was by virtue of the above that *“rational theology”* and *“narrative theology”* came into existence.