

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



*The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought*

## *The 2nd Muslim – Catholic Forum*

*The Baptism Site, Jordan*

*21 – 23 November 2011*

*The Concept of Faith in Islam*

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## In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Praise be to God, as the believers praise Him; and may He send blessings and peace upon our master Muhammad, and upon all of his forefathers, his brethren of prophets and messengers, his family, and his companions.

### The Concept of Faith in Islam

God Almighty says: ﴿O you who have faith! Respond to God and the Messenger when He calls you unto that which gives you life; and know that God comes in between a man and his heart, and that to Him you shall be mustered﴾ (al-Anfāl, 8:24), and says: ﴿Those who have faith, and have not confounded their faith with evildoing – to them belongs the true security; they are rightly guided﴾ (al-An‘ām, 6:82). And He says: ﴿But whosoever turns away from My remembrance, his shall be a life of narrowness, and on the Resurrection Day We shall raise him blind.’ He shall say, ‘O my Lord, why have you raised me blind, and I was wont to see?’ God shall say, ‘Even so it is. Our signs came unto you, and you forgot them; and so today you are forgotten’﴾ (TāHā, 20:124-126), and says: ﴿By the soul, and Him who shaped it, inspiring it with its lewdness and its God-consciousness. Prosperous is he who purifies it, and a failure is he who stunts it﴾ (al-Shams, 91:7-10).

We will consider the topic of the concept of faith by means of the following points:

First: faith (*īmān*) in its lexical and technical meanings.

Second: the meaning of faith, and its articles.

Third: the levels of surrender (*islām*), faith (*īmān*) and excellence (*ihsān*).

Fourth: the relationship between excellence and surrender and faith.

Fifth: the increase and decrease of faith.

Sixth: The ways in which faith affects action and is affected by it

Seventh: an explanation of the six articles of faith.

Eighth: the branches of faith.

## First: Faith (*īmān*) in its lexical and technical meanings.

The author of *Maqāyīs al-Lughā* says:

The root letters 'm-n have two closely-related root meanings: the first is the faithfulness (*amāna*) that is the opposite of treachery, meaning the heart's assurance; and the other is belief. The two meanings are close. Al-Khalīl says that *al-amana* (security) comes from *amn* (safety), and that *amān* means to give safety, whilst *amāna* means the opposite of treachery.<sup>(1)</sup>

*Lisān al-'Arab* says:

*Amina*: *al-amān* and *al-amāna* mean the same. The verb is *amina*, the active participle *āmin*. *Āmana* means to give *amn* and *amān* to someone else. *Amn* is the opposite of fear; *amāna* is the opposite of treachery; *īmān* is the opposite of unbelief. *Īmān* also means to believe; its opposite is to belie. It is said, 'Some people believed (*āmana*) in him, and others belied him.' To have faith is something means to believe in it, and to be sure (*amina*) that the one telling it is not lying. *Īmān* also means to show acquiescence and acceptance to the Sacred Law, and to all that the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) brought, and to accept it and believe in with the heart. The one who does all this is a believer (*mu'min*) and a Muslim, having neither misgivings nor doubts; and he is the one who sees that completing the obligations [of the religion] is incumbent upon him, and has no doubt about this. The Glorious Revelation says: 'You are not a *mu'min* in us', meaning 'you do not believe us'; *īmān* means belief.

...As for *īmān*, it is the gerund of the verb *āmana/yu'minu/īmān*, active participle *mu'min*. The scholars, linguists are otherwise, are agreed that *īmān* means 'belief.' Al-Azharī said: 'The basis of *īmān* is to enter into a state of belief in the trust (*amāna*) that God Almighty has given one.'<sup>(2)</sup>

The technical meaning of faith is firm belief in something real, based on evidence. Experts in this subject have defined faith as being 'to believe with the heart and proclaim with the tongue'; some have added 'to act with the body.' Or, in the words of

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<sup>(1)</sup> Aḥmad ibn Fāris al-Rāzī, *Mu'jam Maqāyīs al-Lughā*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn (Beirut, Dar al-Fikr 1979), entry for *amn*, 1/133.

<sup>(2)</sup> Ibn Manẓūr al-Afrīqī, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Beirut, Dar Sadir, 1414AH), entry for *amn*, 13/23.

Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Salām: 'Faith is to have sincere devotion to God with the heart, to testify this with the tongue, and to act on it with the body.'<sup>(3)</sup>

## **Second: the meaning of faith, and its articles.**

The meaning of faith (*īmān*) and its qualities and articles, and its position between surrender (*islām*) and spiritual excellence (*iḥsān*), were given in the very famous hadith of our master Gabriel (peace be upon him) in the two *Ṣaḥīḥ* collections. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: 'We were with the Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) one day, when there came to us a man wearing dazzling white clothes, with jet black hair; there were no marks of travel on him, and yet not one of us knew him. He sat by the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace), knee to knee, placed his hands on his thighs, and said: "O Muhammad, tell me about surrender (*islām*). The Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) said: "Surrender is to testify that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God's Messenger (God bless him and grant him peace), to perform the prayer, bestow the alms, fast Ramadan and make, if you can, the pilgrimage to the Holy House." He said: "You have spoken truly", and we were amazed that having questioned him he should corroborate him. He then said: "Tell me about faith (*īmān*)." He said: "To believe in God and His angels and His books and His messengers and the Last Day, and to believe in Providence, the good of it and the bad of it." "You have spoken truly," he said, and then: "Tell me about excellence (*iḥsān*)." He said: "To worship God as if you saw Him; for if you see Him not, He assuredly sees you." He said: "Tell me about the Hour." He said: "The one questioned knows no more about it than the questioner." He said: "Then tell me of its portents." He said: "That the slave-girl shall give birth to her mistress; and that those who were but barefoot naked needy herdsmen shall build buildings ever higher and higher." Then the stranger went away, and I tarried a while. He then said to me: "O 'Umar, do you know who the questioner was?" I said: "God and His Messenger know best." He said: "It was Gabriel. He came unto you to teach you your religion."<sup>(4)</sup>

The articles of faith, then, as the leading scholars of hadith have clarified in the introductory sections of the works they have authored on the science of the holy prophetic hadith, are faith in God Almighty, the angels, the revealed scriptures, the messengers and prophets, the

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<sup>(3)</sup> Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Salām, *Kitāb al-Īmān* (Beirut, Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 2000), p. 10.

<sup>(4)</sup> Narrated by Imam Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb Ma'rifat al-Īmān wal-Islām wal-Qadar wa 'Alāmat al-Sā'a*, 1/36, no. 8; and by Imam Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb Su'āl Jibrīl al-Nabī Salla Allāhu'alayhi wa Sallam'an al-Īmān wal-Islām wal-Iḥsān wa 'Ilm al-Sā'a*, 1/19, no. 50; the wording here is that of Muslim.

resurrection and the Last Day, and Providence, the good of it and the bad of it. The Muslim scholars have authored lengthy works of commentary and reflection on the aforementioned hadith, concerning the meaning and implications of the articles of faith, and the difference between surrender and faith; they have even called this hadith the ‘Mother of the Sunna’, just as sūrat al-Fātiḥa is called the ‘Mother of the Book.’<sup>(5)</sup>

### **Third: the levels of surrender, faith and excellence.**

Imam Nawawī says, in his commentary on Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, in the beginning of *Kitāb al-Īmān*:

Al-Zuhrī said: ‘Surrender is the word, and faith is the deed.’ He cites as evidence for this the Almighty’s words: ﴿The Bedouins say: ‘We have attained to faith.’ Say: You have not attained to faith, but say, ‘We have surrendered’; for faith has not yet entered your hearts’﴾ (al-Ḥujurāt, 49:14). Others say that surrender and faith are the same thing, citing as evidence for this God’s words: ﴿Then we brought forth such of the faithful (*mu’minīn*) as were there; yet We found there but one house of those who surrendered (*muslimīn*)﴾ (al-Dhāriyāt, 51-35-36).

Al-Khaṭṭābī said: ‘The correct way to approach this is to speak in specific and not general terms; for one who surrenders (*muslim*) might be faithful in some circumstances but not in others, whilst one who is faithful (*mu’min*) is in a state of surrender in all circumstances. Every *mu’min* is a *muslim*, but not every *muslim* is a *mu’min*. If you take the matter in this way, you will be able to interpret all the verses and speak about them equally without changing your position from one to the other. The basis of faith is belief, and the basis of surrender is submission and acquiescence; a man might surrender on the outside whilst not acquiescing on the

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<sup>(5)</sup> Ibn Ḥajr al-‘Asqalānī says in *Fatḥ al-Bārī*: ‘Al-Qurṭubī said that this hadith could rightly be called the ‘Mother of the Sunna’ because of how it constitutes such a wealth of information about the Sunna; and al-Ṭayyibī said that this is the reason why al-Baghawī began his two books *al-Maṣābīḥ* and *Sharḥ al-Sunna* with it, just as the Qur’ān begins with al-Fātiḥa because of how it comprises a summary of all the knowledge conveyed in the Qur’ān. Al-Qāḍi ‘Iyād said: “This hadith contains all the duties of worship, both the outward and the inward, including the covenants of faith (at the first, the present, and the last), the acts of the body, the sincerity of the inner heart, as well as the way to protect oneself from those things which spoil one’s actions. Indeed, all the sciences of the Sacred Law come back to it, and sprout forth from it.” This is why I have said so much about it; and all that I have mentioned, although it seems a lot, is really only a little when compared to all that this hadith contains.’ Aḥmad ibn Ḥajr al-‘Asqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut, Dar al-Marifa, 1379 AH), vol. 1, p. 125.

inside; and he might believe on the inside whilst not acquiescing on the outside.”<sup>(6)</sup>

Al-Khaṭṭābī also said, about the Prophet’s (God bless him and grant him peace) words ‘Faith is seventy-something branches’:<sup>(7)</sup>

This hadith makes it clear that faith, according to the Sacred Law, is a name for a concept which has many branches, and lower and higher levels; and the name can be applied to any individual part just as it can be applied to the whole; and the reality of it comprises all its branches, and includes all its parts. It is like canonical prayer, which has branches and parts: the name can be applied to its parts, yet the reality comprises and includes all of its parts. This is supported by his (God bless him and grant him peace) words: ‘Shyness is a branch of faith.’<sup>(8)</sup> This affirms that there is a hierarchy in faith, and that the faithful are distinguished from one another by its degrees.

Imam Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas‘ūd al-Baghawī says:

The Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) made ‘surrender’ a name for outward actions, and ‘faith’ a name for inward beliefs. This is not because actions are not part of faith, or that belief of the heart is not part of surrender; rather, it is a detailed explanation of a totality which is in fact one single thing, the sum of which is called ‘religion.’ Therefore he (God bless him and grant him peace) said: ‘It was Gabriel; he came to you to teach you your religion.’ Belief and action are both included in the names of faith and surrender together; this is supported by the fact that the Almighty says ﴿Verily, before God, religion is surrender﴾ (Āl’Imrān, 3:19), and ﴿It has been My good pleasure to choose surrender for you as your religion﴾ (al-Mā’ida, 5:3). The Almighty is saying here that the religion which He has gladly chosen, and which He accepts from His servants, is surrender; and religion could not be acceptable or pleasing unless it included belief alongside action.<sup>(9)</sup>

Some see that if surrender and faith are mentioned together, they take on different meanings, whilst if they are mentioned separately, they mean the same thing: if they are mentioned in the same place, surrender comes to mean outward action, and faith comes to mean inward action; and if either one of them is mentioned on its own, it is taken to mean both, in which case there is no difference between them.

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<sup>(6)</sup> Op. cit., vol. 1, p. 145.

<sup>(7)</sup> Narrated by Imam Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb Shu‘ab al-Īmān*, 1/63, no. 35.

<sup>(8)</sup> Part of the aforementioned hadith.

<sup>(9)</sup> Imam Nawawī, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 145.

The Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) explained *īmān* as being the faith and submission of the heart, meaning faith in God, His angels, His books, His messengers, and so on; and he explained *islām* as being a particular surrender, namely that of the Five Pillars. The same is the case for the rest of what he (God bless him and grant him peace) said: he explained faith in that way, and surrender in this; and that way is the higher one. Therefore the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) said: ‘Surrender is public, and faith is in the heart.’<sup>(10)</sup> Outward actions can be seen by others, whilst the belief, knowledge, love, fear and hope of the heart are hidden, although they do have effects which might indicate them – although effects do not indicate anything unless their cause is certain.

Both ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr and Abū Hurayra reported that the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) said: ‘The *muslim* is the one from whose tongue and hands the Muslims are safe; and the *mu’min* is the one whom the people trust with their lives and their possessions.’<sup>(11)</sup> So he explained the *muslim* with an outward matter, namely the people’s safety from him, and explained the *mu’min* with an inward matter, namely that the people trust him with their lives and their possessions. The latter quality is higher than the former, since if a person is trusted, the people are safe from him, whilst not everyone who they are safe from can be trusted, since someone might refrain from harming them, yet nevertheless they might not trust him in fear that he might only have refrained from harming them out of desire or fear, and not because of any faith in his heart.<sup>(12)</sup>

Imam Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī says in his *Tafsīr*:

There is a difference between the general and the specific. Faith can only be attained by the heart, though it might be spoken with the tongue. Surrender is more general than that; but when the general is presented in the form of the specific, it unites with it, and is not something apart from it. For example, the word ‘animal’ is more general than the word ‘man’; but when a man is called an animal, this does not constitute something that can be separated from the man, and it cannot be said that this ‘animal’ is only an animal and not a man. The general and the specific are different in

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<sup>(10)</sup> Anas said: ‘The Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) said: “Surrender is public, and faith is in the heart.” He then signalled with his hand to his chest three times, and then said: “God-consciousness is here, God-consciousness is here.”’ Narrated by Imam Aḥmad in his *Musnad*, 3/134, no. 12408.

<sup>(11)</sup> Narrated by Imam Aḥmad in his *Musnad* 2/379, no. 8918, Imam Tirmidhī in his *Sunan: Abwāb al-Īmān, Bāb mā jā’ fī anna al-Muslim man Salima al-Muslimūna min Lisānih wa yadih*, 5/17, no. 2627.

<sup>(12)</sup> Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-‘Abbās ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā* (Medina, King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Quran, 1995), vol. 7, pp. 263-264.

generality, but united in existence. The same is true of the *mu'min* and the *muslim*: the truth is that the word *muslim* is more general than the word *mu'min*, yet there is nothing to prevent the general word being used with the specific intent: if the *mu'min* can be called a *muslim*, this does not imply that they mean exactly the same thing.<sup>(13)</sup>

From this, we can see how the heart is the locus for belief and faith, and the thing that the Almighty Real is interested in, as the Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) said: 'Indeed, in the body there is a morsel which, if sound, the whole body is sound, and if spoiled, the whole body is spoiled. Indeed, it is the heart.'<sup>(14)</sup> Because of this, God Almighty denied the existence of firm faith in the hearts of those Bedouins who claimed to have reached the station of faith when they entered Islam, and affirmed that they were participating in the outward actions of surrender, saying: ﴿The Bedouins say: 'We have attained to faith.' Say: You have not attained to faith, but say, 'We have surrendered'; for faith has not yet entered your hearts﴾ (al-Ḥujurāt, 49:14). So faith is more specific than surrender (*islām*), and excellence (*ihsān*) is more specific, and a higher level, than faith (*īmān*).

The be-all and end-all of spiritual excellence is for the servant to ascend the levels of awareness of God Almighty and to witness Him in all one's actions and one's conduct. This is the third degree, after surrender and faith, and is higher than them both; and it is built upon them, and not extraneous to them. There can be no faith without surrender, and no excellence without faith. It is an excellence which the believer observes in all situations, and in worship in its most comprehensive meaning, which means more than just rites and supererogatory acts of devotion. Indeed, other narrated versions of the hadith have it: 'Excellence is to work for God as though you see Him; for if you see Him not, He assuredly sees you',<sup>(15)</sup> and also: 'Excellence is to fear God as though you see Him; for if you see Him not, He assuredly sees you.'<sup>(16)</sup> This is what makes excellence a constant conduct of the faithful in all their deeds and situations.

#### **Fourth: the relationship between excellence (*ihsān*) and surrender (*islām*) and faith (*īmān*).**

Surrender is a designation attained by all who testify with their tongues that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. It pertains to this worldly life, and to ruling and interactions which have to do with its adherent's connection to

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<sup>(13)</sup> Abū'Abd Allāh Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-ghayb*, or *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut, Dar Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1420 AH, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition), vol. 28, p. 116, 181.

<sup>(14)</sup> Narrated by Imam Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb Faḍl man Istabra'a li-Dīnih* (1/20, no. 52), and by Imam Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Ṭalāq, Bāb Akhdh al-Ḥalāl wa Tark al-Shubuhāt* (3/1219, no. 1599), on the authority of Nu'mān ibn Bashīr (God be pleased with him).

<sup>(15)</sup> Narrated by Imam Aḥmad in his *Musnad*, 1/314, no. 184.

<sup>(16)</sup> Narrated by Imam Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb al-Islām mā huwa wa mā hiya Kḥiṣāluḥ*, 1/30, no. 108.



the rest of the Muslims: he may marry from them, inherit from them, be prayed over and buried in their graveyards, and so on for the rest of the outward laws. It also requires adherence to the other Pillars: prayer, the alms, fasting, and the pilgrimage.

But the reality of this, and its fruits in the heart and in the Hereafter, depend on this adherence to the Pillars being sincerely devoted to God Almighty, without any ostentation, hypocrisy, pretention, self-satisfaction or arrogance. This can only be attained when the Muslim adheres to the Pillars of Islam whilst being in a state of awareness of God Almighty with love, desire, fear and hope. This is the meaning of excellence.

Faith is belief; and this belief might be knowledge, witnessing, or true certainty. Certainty has three degrees and levels: the knowledge of certainty (*'ilm al-yaqīn*), the vision of certainty (*'ayn al-yaqīn*) and the truth of certainty (*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*), as God indicates in the Holy Qur'ān when He says: «Nay! Would that you knew with the knowledge of certainty» (al-Takāthur, 102:5), «You shall surely see it with the eye of certainty» (al-Takāthur, 102:7), «Indeed, this is the truth of certainty» (al-Wāqī'a, 56:95), and «And indeed, it is the truth of certainty» (al-Ḥāqqā, 69:51). Yet faith on the level of the knowledge of certainty is itself dependable and acceptable; for knowledge pertains to the mind's perception, and its certainty is attained by the heart's assurance and firm belief.

To have knowledge of the articles of faith, and for the mind to accept them, is the lowest level of faith, and is enough to make the morally responsible person a believer (*mu'min*); yet faith at this level is exposed to disturbances, and could be beset by the gales of doubt, disturbed by the winds of uncertainty, or uprooted by the hurricanes of trial and misfortune. To ascend, however, to a higher level than the knowledge of certainty makes faith firm and stable so that it is impervious to backsliding. This can only be attained through a feeling of cognisance of God's signs which are manifest in existence; and one of the clearest of these signs are those that exist in the soul of man, as the Almighty says: «And in the earth are signs for the certain; and in your own selves – will you not, then, see?» (al-Dhāriyāt, 51:20-21). It can also be through cognisance of how God is watching over the believer's heart, as He says: «We created man, and We know what his heart whispers; and We are closer to him than his jugular vein» (Qāf, 50:16). This is the level of excellence, which is to worship God as though you see Him; for if you see him not, He assuredly sees you. Because of this, faith is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an with the meaning of excellence; God says: «They who have faith, and whose hearts find tranquillity in the remembrance of God; verily, in the remembrance of God do hearts find tranquillity» (al-Ra'd, 13:28). Tranquillity is a state of the heart connected to certainty and vigilance. Another element of success in the station of excellence is perfection; the Messenger of God (God bless him and his family and grant him peace) said: 'God (Almighty and Glorious) loves that, if any of you performs an action, he should do it with perfection'.<sup>(17)</sup> In this way, the connection between surrender, faith and excellence can be clearly seen.

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<sup>(17)</sup> Narrated by al-Bayhaqi in *Shu'ab al-Īmān* (4/344 no. 5312).

### **Fifth: the increase and decrease of faith.**

The Proof of Islam Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, in his book *Iḥyā 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, says:

Faith is a word with various meanings, used in three ways: the first is belief with the heart by way of doctrine and imitation, without there being any personal discovery of expansion of breast; this is the faith of the ordinary people, the faith of all mankind save for the elite. This doctrine (*i'tiqād*) is a knot (*'uqda*) tied around the heart; sometimes it tightens and strengthens, and at other times it loosens and weakens, just like a knot in a piece of string.<sup>(18)</sup>

This is illustrated by the Almighty's words: ﴿And when a sūra is revealed, some of them say, 'Which of you has been increased in faith by this?' As for those who have faith, it increases them in faith, and they rejoice﴾ (al-Tawba, 9:124), His words ﴿The faithful are but they who, when God is mentioned, their hearts quake, and when Our signs are recited to them they increase them in faith, and who rely on their Lord﴾ (al-Anfāl, 8:2), His words ﴿He it is who sent down the Spirit of Peace into the hearts of the faithful, that they might increase in faith upon faith﴾ (al-Fath, 48:4), and His words ﴿That they who were given the Book might have certainty, and that the faithful might increase in faith﴾ (al-Muddath'thir, 74:31).

The second usage is belief and action together, as the Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) said: 'Faith is seventy-something portals';<sup>(19)</sup> and he (God bless him and grant him peace) said: 'When the fornicator fornicates, he is not a believer.'<sup>(20)</sup> When action is included in the meaning of the word 'faith', the fact that it increases and decreases is obvious; as to whether this implies the increase of the faith which is only belief, that is a matter of debate; we have indicated before that indeed it does.<sup>(21)</sup>

There are around fifty Qur'ānic verses that couple faith with righteous deeds; for example, God says: ﴿Your guardian can be only Allah; and His messenger and those who believe, who establish regular prayers and regular charity, and bow down [in worship]﴾ (al-Mā'idah, 5:55). Hence, God made it clear that those who believe are those who

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<sup>(18)</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Beirut, Dar al-Marifa), vol. 1, p. 120f.

<sup>(19)</sup> Narrated by Imam Aḥmad in his *Musnad*, 2/445, no. 9747, and by Tirmidhī in his *Sunan*, 5/10, no. 2614; he declared it to be rigorously authentic.

<sup>(20)</sup> Narrated by Imam Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Ḥudūd, Bāblithm al-Zunnah*, 8/164, no. 2810.

<sup>(21)</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *op. cit.*

establish regular prayers and charity (zakah) which are amongst the highest righteous deeds. In fact, the Holy Qur'ān goes so far as to state in the context of describing believers, that faith – in a sense of attainment and firmness – is confined to those who perform such deeds: ﴿The believers are only those who, when Allah is mentioned, their hearts become fearful, and when His verses are recited to them, it increases them in faith; and upon their Lord they rely. The ones who establish prayer, and from what We have provided them, they spend. Those are the believers, truly. For them are degrees [of high position] with their Lord and forgiveness and noble provision﴾ (al-Anfal, 8:2-4). So, God made here a bond between true faith and the establishment of the regular prayers and charity.

The third usage is that it means belief based on certitude by way of unveiling, expansion of the breast, and contemplation through the light of inner vision. This is the most unlikely of the three to be subject to increase; but I say that when it comes to something certain in which there is no doubt, the soul's assurance of it can differ: the soul's assurance that two is greater than one is not the same as its assurance that the world is created and contingent, even if neither one of them are doubted. Certain matters differ in their level of clarity, and how assured the soul is about them.<sup>(22)</sup>

God says: ﴿The believers are only those who believe in Allah and His Messenger and, when they are [meeting] with him for a matter of common interest, do not depart until they have asked his permission. Indeed, those who ask your permission, [O Muhammad] - those are the ones who believe in Allah and His Messenger﴾ (al-Nūr, 24:62). This verse affirms that the word Iman [faith] signifies a multiplicity of meanings. It is noted here that the faithful are defined as those who believe, and this describes the state of heart, and that they do not depart until they have asked his permission, and this pertains to action. So the Almighty God mentioned the attribute of faith in defining the faithful ﴿The believers are only those who believe﴾: This only makes sense if the definition which uses the very word being defined has an implication which goes beyond the word itself.

**Sixth:** The ways in which faith affects action and is affected by it.

Faith affects action inasmuch as it is the energy by means of which one performs the action. Man needs motivation to make him stir into action and bear the difficulties and discomforts that he must endure in order to do something or abstain from it. The worker's faith in his need for money to feed, clothe and sustain himself and care for his family is the motivation that makes him rise early in the morning and bear the toil and effort he expends in his work. Likewise, faith in God is what makes the believer follow an upright course in obedience to His commands and deference to His prohibitions, even if this is hard for the soul.

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<sup>(22)</sup> AbūḤāmid al-Ghazālī, op. cit.

It also affects one's steadfastness and excellence in work, according to his intention for doing it, and the clarity of one's path and way of acting, and the absence of any internal conflict regarding the decisions one makes when the emotions of desire and fear become involved: neither desire nor fear drives him to cheat, swindle, betray or do anything else that might otherwise impact on the level or endurance of one's actions. The Almighty says: ﴿He who created me, and who guides me; and He who feeds me, and gives me to drink; and if I fall ill, He cures me; and He who causes me to die and then brings me to life; and He who I desire to forgive me on Judgement Day﴾ (al-Shu'arā', 26:78-82); and He says: ﴿They to whom the people said, 'The people have mustered against you, so fear them!', yet this only increased them in faith; and they said, 'God is our Sufficiency, and a most excellent Guardian!' So they returned with grace and bounty from God: no evil touched them, and they followed God's good pleasure; and God is of bounty abiding﴾ (Aal-'Imran, 3:173-174).

Action also affects faith, inasmuch as if the soul becomes accustomed to a lack of adherence to something, and it goes a long time without doing it, its concern and faith in it might decrease, and it might lose interest in it and build its life on an absence of its effects. So when the soul's faith in this thing conflicts with the behavioural habits and desires that have become engrained in the soul, it is easier for it to deny this thing than it is to change what has become second nature to it. The Almighty says: ﴿Nay, but their earnings are even as rust over their hearts. Nay, on that Day they shall be veiled from their Lord﴾ (al-Muṭaffifīn, 83:14-15). And Abū Hurayra reported that the Prophet (God bless him and his family and grant him peace) said:

'When the believer sins, it is a black spot on his heart; if he repents, and desists, and prays for forgiveness, his heart is polished; and if he increases, the spot increases. That is the rust (*rān*) of which God speaks in His Book: ﴿Nay, but their earnings are even as rust (*rān*) over their hearts﴾.<sup>23</sup> And the Almighty says: ﴿Say: then why did you slay the prophets of God aforetime, if you were faithful?﴾ (al-Baqara, 2:91); so God made the act of slaying an indication of the absence of faith.

## **Seventh: an explanation of the six articles of faith**

### **Faith in God**

The foundation and basis of faith is faith in God Almighty, which is innate to man's primordial nature, which all spirits acknowledged from the beginning in the 'realm of the seed' before creation, as God Almighty says: ﴿Remember when your Lord took the seeds of the sons of Adam from their loins and made them bear witness against

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(23) Narrated by Tirmidhī in his *Sunan*, Abwāb Tafsīr al-Qur'ān, 5/434, no. 3334,

themselves, and said: 'Am I not your Lord?' They said: 'Yea, we testify.' This was lest you should say on the day of Resurrection: 'Of this we were unaware' (al-A'rāf, 7:172). The spiritual void we now see is but a consequence of the yearning of all spirits to relive that defining moment by reviving their faithful connection to the Almighty Creator.

The Muslim believes, and is certain, and testifies, that there is no god but God, alone with no partner: a Mighty God, a Glorious King, besides whom there is no other Lord, nor any other object of worship. He is Eternal, without beginning or end; there is no beginning to His first-ness, nor any end to his last-ness. He is One, the Self-Sufficient Besought of all, who neither begat nor was begotten, and none is like Him. He has no likeness nor counterpart; there is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing. In his Holiness he is beyond time and space, and beyond the resemblance of any created thing. Direction does not encompass Him, nor do temporal events befall Him. He is upon His Throne in the way that He said it, according to the meaning He intended, in a manner that befits the might of His majesty and the height of His Glory and His Grandeur. He is near to all things, and is nearer to man than his jugular vein. He watches over all things, and observes them. He is Living and All-Sustaining. Neither slumber nor sleep overcome Him. He made the heavens and the earth; and when He decrees a thing, He but says to it 'Be!', and it is. God is the Creator of all things, and the Patron of all things.<sup>(24)</sup>

### **Faith in the angels**

Another article of faith is faith in the noble and holy angels (peace be upon them), who are creatures of light, who «do not disobey God when He commands them, and who do as they are commanded» (al-Taḥrīm, 66:6). Qur'ānic verses and noble hadiths speak of them with praise and honour, and indeed with love; for God mentioned those of them who bear the Throne, and made it clear that the hearts of the believers should be filled with love for them: «Those who bear the Throne, and those around it, hymn the praise of their Lord and have faith in Him, and ask forgiveness for those who have faith: 'Lord, You encompass all things in mercy and knowledge; forgive, then, those who repent and follow Your way, and guard them from the torment of Hell!'» (Ghāfir, 40:7); «The heavens are well nigh rent above them, when the angels proclaim the praise of their Lord, and ask forgiveness for those on earth. Indeed, God is the Forgiving, the Merciful» (al-Shūrā, 42:5). There are also angels who come in turns to mankind by night and by day, and the recording scribes who abide with every person at all times.

There are also angels charged with certain tasks pertaining to mankind, including:

Revelation: Gabriel

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<sup>(24)</sup> Imam 'AbdAllāh ibn'Alawī al-Ḥaddād on the doctrine of the people of the Sunna and the community, from the conclusion of *Kitāb al-Naṣā'ih al-Dīniyya wal-Waṣāyā al-Īmāniyya*, Dar al-Ḥawāliil-Ṭabā'awal-Nashr, 1413 AH, pp. 415-416.

Provision: Michael  
Blowing the Trumpet [of the Resurrection]: Isrāfīl  
Taking spirits: the Angel of Death  
Counting good and bad deeds: the Diligent Observer  
The questions of the grave: Munkar and Nakīr  
The guardian of Paradise: Riḍwān  
The guardian of Hell: Mālik  
Peace be upon them all.

### **Faith in the scriptures and messengers**

Another article of faith, without which the Muslim's faith is invalid, is faith in the messengers and prophets (peace be upon them all), and in the revealed scriptures that God Almighty sent down; these include the scriptures of Abraham, Moses, the Psalms, the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'ān. None of these scriptures contained a promise from God to undertake to preserve them, save only the Holy Qur'ān, in which the Almighty says: ﴿It is We who have sent down the Remembrance; and indeed, We are its Guardian﴾ (al-Hijr, 15:9). Islam is the religion which includes all the prophets and envoys in faith, belief, allegiance and love; and God Almighty has made our worship contingent on faith in all the messengers and prophets, may God's blessings and peace be upon them.

So for us, faith is invalid if one does not believe in the prophethood of our master Noah, or our master Abraham, or our master Moses, or our master Jesus, or any other of the prophets whom God mentions in his Glorious Book when He says: ﴿Say: We believe in God, and in what has been sent down to us, and what was sent down to Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the Tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we surrender﴾ (Āl'Imrān, 3:84). From the article of faith in all the prophets and messengers, the Holy Qur'ān made a foundation upon which the Muslim community can base its relations to other communities. The Almighty says: ﴿O you who have faith! Have faith in God, and His Messenger, and the Book which He has revealed unto His Messenger, and the Book which He revealed aforetime. Whoso disbelieves in God, and His angels, and His books, and His messengers, and the Last Day, has indeed wandered far astray﴾ (al-Nisā', 4:136).

The principal and general basis, then, for our relations with all of our blessed prophets (upon them all be peace and blessings) is the connection of faith, love, belief and allegiance to their guidance: ﴿It is they whom God has guided; follow, then, their guidance﴾ (al-An'ām, 6:90), and taking lessons and wisdoms from their stories and experiences with the communities of old. The best of the prophets are 'the resolute (*ulū al-'azm*) from among the messengers', namely our masters Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad,<sup>(25)</sup> peace be upon them. Faith in the messengers must make no distinction between them, for God Almighty says: ﴿The Messenger believes in what has

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<sup>(25)</sup> See sūrat al-Aḥqāf, 46:35.

been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the believers. Each believes in God, and His angels, and His books, and His messengers: ‘We make no distinction between any of His messengers’ (al-Baqara, 2:285). Yet it is valid to believe that some of them are preferred over others, for God has said: ﴿These are the messengers; We favoured some of them over others. Some there are to whom God spoke, and some He raised in rank; and We gave Jesus son of Mary clear signs, and aided him with the Holy Spirit﴾ (al-Baqara, 2:253).

The Father of the Prophets and the Friend of the Compassionate, our master Abraham (peace be upon him) was blessed with a special position, which gives him a certain eminence in our connection to him, in several ways. These include the ascription of the primordial faith (*al-ḥanīfiyya*) to him, as well as how our prophet Muhammad (God bless him and his family and grant him peace) is descended from him, and is the answer to the prayer he made when he called upon God Almighty, saying: ﴿Our Lord, raise among them a messenger from them, who shall convey unto them Your signs, and teach them scripture and wisdom, and cause them to grow in purity; You are the Almighty, the wise﴾ (al-Baqara, 2:129).

Our master Moses (peace be upon him) also has a special eminence in his connection to us, which was manifested when our master Muhammad (God bless him and grant him peace) went back to him several times during the his holy Ascension; each time, he advised him to ask God Almighty to lessen the burden of the canonical prayer for his community, until finally God decreed it to be five prayers, after it had been fifty.<sup>(26)</sup>

As for our master Jesus (peace be upon him), he has a special place with regards to his connection to the Islamic community in that God Almighty made him one of the most distinctive major portents of the Hour, and one of the keys of deliverance for this community in the end times, when Jesus (peace be upon him) will descend, as our Messenger described it: ‘He will descend by a white tower east of Damascus wearing two robes of pale yellow, his hands placed on the wings of two angels. When he lowers his head, beads of water will drip from it; and when he raises it, silver beads like pearls will scatter from it.’<sup>(27)</sup>

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<sup>(26)</sup> See the narration of Imam Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (1/132), *Kitāb al-Ṣalāh*, *Bāb Kayfa Furiḍat al-Ṣalawāt fil-Isrā’*, (no. 349); and Imam Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Īmān*, 2/176, no. 136 according to Nawawī’s commentary, *Bāb al-Isrā’ bi-Rasūllillāh ilā al-Samāwāt wa Farḍ al-Ṣalawāt*, on the authority of Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (God be pleased with him).

<sup>(27)</sup> Narrated by Imam Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Fitan wa Ashrāṭ al-Sā’a*, 18/51, no. 2937 according to Nawawī’s commentary, *Bāb Dhikr al-Dajjāl wa Ṣifatih wa mā ma’ah*, on the authority of Nawwās ibn Sam’ān (God be pleased with him). The word *mahrūdatayn* means two robes dyed with *wars* [a yellow herb] and then with saffron. *Jumān* means large silver beads which resemble pearls in their resplendence and beauty.

How beautiful, then, will be the scene of this descent, and how awe-inspiring will his appearance be (peace be upon him). The fact that this description is so detailed only adds to the certainty and the attachment of mind, understanding and sensibility to the meaning of our connection with this holy man so ennobled by his Lord. The hadiths which describe the time, place and manner of his blessed descent are at the level of mass-transmission.<sup>(28)</sup>

Therefore, the Muslim believes that he has a special connection with Christ (peace be upon him), and that he will lead the Muslims after he descends, according to God's religion that He revealed to His messengers, and His law that He made the seal of the messages of all His envoys: that of our master Muhammad (God bless him and his family and grant him peace).

Islam addresses the faithful in a way that gives them a special attachment, great love, firm esteem and spiritual aptness for following our master Christ (peace be upon him) when he descends. May God make us among those whom He chooses to love, serve and aid him – Amin!

### **Faith in the Last Day**

Another article of faith is faith in the resurrection, the Last Day, the reckoning and the requital according to divine mercy and justice, as God says: ﴿Save for those who repent and do good works: God shall replace their sins with good deeds, and God is forgiving, merciful﴾ (al-Furqān, 25:70), ﴿and He forgives much﴾ (al-Shūrā, 42:30), ﴿Whoso does an atom's weight of good shall see it; and whoso does an atom's weight of evil shall see it﴾ (al-Zalzala, 99:7-8). This is His way of stirring the believer's aspiration and strengthening his resolve to take hold of himself and buckle down to acts of obedience and good deeds, and to forswear indulging caprices and delusions of happiness based on passions and fleeting pleasures. It also shows the believer how to take the long view of his future, which will stretch out without limit, far beyond the time he spends in this world.

### **Faith in Providence**

The last of these articles is faith in Providence, both the good and the bad, the sweet and the bitter; and faith that the universe is never outside the control of the Lord's mercy, justice and wisdom. This is what causes the believer to live a life which is refined by contentment, tranquillity, security and patience.

It remains to be said that all the articles of faith are indicators that constitute powerful means of building a soul that is assured and confident of its connection to God Almighty,

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<sup>(28)</sup> 'Ali al-Jafrī, *al-Masīḥ 'Īsā wa Ummihi al-Ṣiddīqa'alayhimā al-Salām* (Abu Dhabi, Dar al-Faqih, 2011), pp. 11-15.



its outlook on life, and its consequent deeds and conduct, especially in light of the breadth of the concept of the branches of faith, which cover every aspect of human outlook and interaction.

### **Eighth: the branches of faith.**

The essential cultural basis of the concept of the branches of faith is the saying of the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace): ‘Faith is seventy-something’ – or ‘sixty-something’ – ‘branches; the greatest of them is saying “there is no god but God”, and the least of them is to remove harmful objects from the road. Shyness is a branch of faith.’<sup>(29)</sup>

So there are many means of refinement in the circle of the branches and portals of faith, between the testimony of Divine Oneness at the top, and removing harmful objects from the road at the bottom. This means that all the aspects of individual and communal life are included. One of the greatest of them is to love God, the Messenger and his Family, one’s brother and one’s neighbour; he (God bless him and his family and grant him peace) said: ‘Three things which, if they are in a person, he experiences the sweetness of faith: for God and His Messenger to be more beloved to him than anything else; for him to love a man for no reason other than God’s sake; and for him to hate to return to unbelief just as he would hate to be cast into fire.’<sup>(30)</sup> He (God bless him and his family and grant him peace) also said: ‘By Him in whose hand is my soul, no servant believes until he loves for his brother the goodness he loves for himself.’<sup>(31)</sup> He (God bless him and his family and grant him peace) also said: ‘He who has no trust has no faith; he who has no covenant has no religion.’<sup>(32)</sup> He (God bless him and his family and grant him peace) also said: ‘The believer is not he who sleeps full while his neighbour

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<sup>(29)</sup> Narrated by Imam Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb Shu‘ab al-Īmān*, 1/63, no. 35, on the authority of Abū Hurayra (God be pleased with him); similar versions are narrated by Bukhārī and others, such as: ‘Faith is sixty-something branches, and shyness is a branch of faith’; ‘Faith is seventy-something portals, the greatest of which is “there is no god but God”, and the least = of which is to remove bones from the road; and shyness is a branch of faith’; “faith is sixty-four portals, the highest and loftiest of which is to say “there is no god but God”, and the lowest of which is to remove harmful objects from the road”; and “faith is seventy (or seventy-two) portals, the highest of which is “there is no god but God”, and the lowest of which is to remove harmful objects from the road; and shyness is a branch of faith.’

<sup>(30)</sup> Narrated by Imam Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb Ḥalāwat al-Īmān*, 1/12, no. 16.

<sup>(31)</sup> Narrated by Imam Aḥmad in his *Musnad*, 3/206, no. 13169.

<sup>(32)</sup> Narrated by Imam Aḥmad in his *Musnad*, 3/135, no. 12410.

goes hungry.<sup>(33)</sup> He (God bless him and his family and grant him peace) also said: 'Whoso believes in God and the Last Day, let him honour his guest. Whoso believes in God and the Last Day, let him not offend his neighbour. Whoso believes in God and the Last Day, let him say what is good, or be silent.'<sup>(34)</sup> He (God bless him and his family and grant him peace) also said: 'A servant's faith is not upright until his heart is upright, and his heart is not upright until his tongue is upright; and no man will enter Paradise whose neighbour is not safe from his harm.'<sup>(35)</sup> He (God bless him and his family and grant him peace) also said: 'God has divided your characters among you just as He divided your provision among you. God Almighty gives this world to those He loves and those He loves not; but He only gives religion to those He loves. If God gives religion to someone, then He loves them. By Him in whose hand is my soul, no servant surrenders until his heart and tongue surrender; and he does not have faith until his neighbour is safe from his harm.'<sup>(36)</sup> He (God bless him and his family and grant him peace) also said: 'By Him in whose hand is my soul, you will not enter Paradise until you have faith, and you will not have faith until you love one another. Shall I not show you something that, if you do it, you cause you to love one another? Give one another greetings of peace.'<sup>(37)</sup>

**Conclusion: the building of the faithful soul is the beginning of the building of faith-based civilisation.**

The building of the faithful soul and its education according to the concept of faith outlined by the aforementioned articles and qualities, followed by the things the Messenger of God (God bless him and his family and grant him peace) called the 'branches of faith', and the signs explained by the scholars of faith's increase and decrease – these all have consequences in real life on the individual, communal and global level, and on all political, economic, social and cultural levels, which lead to the building of a faith-based civilisation.

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<sup>(33)</sup> Narrated on the authority of Anas ibn Mālik (God be pleased with him), in the *Musnad* of Bazzār 14/26, no. 7429, and in the *Mu'jamKabīr* of Ṭabarānī, 1/259 no. 754, and in the *Majma'* of Haytamī 8/167, where he ascribed it to Ṭabarānī and Bazzār with a sound chain.

<sup>(34)</sup> Narrated by Imam Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Adab, Bāb Man kānaYu'minubil-Llāhwal-Yawm al-ĀkhirfalāYu'dhīJārah*, 8/11, no. 6018.

<sup>(35)</sup> Narrated by Imam Aḥmad in his *Musnad*, 3/198, no. 13079.

<sup>(36)</sup> Narrated by Imam Aḥmad in his *Musnad*, 1/387, no. 3672.

<sup>(37)</sup> Narrated by Imam Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb annahū lā Yadkhul al-Janna illa al-Mu'minūn wa anna Maḥabbat al-Mu'minīn min al-Īmān wa anna Ifshā' al-Salām Sabab li-Ḥuṣūlihā*, 1/74, no. 54.

This is because man, as all religious teachings indicate, is composed of a spirit, a soul, a heart, a mind and a body. If a man understands the meaning of faithful interaction with God with his entire being – that is to say, with his spirit, mind, heart, soul and body, things will be right between him and God. And if his connection to God Almighty is healthy, then his connection to all others around him will also be healthy. What this means is that the turmoil in which we are currently living, and in which the whole world is living – not only the believers – is simply the natural result of man’s rejection of, and obliviousness to, the purpose for which God created him, and for which He subjected all existence to him.

### **The Spirit**

The spirit, as Imam Ghazali (God have mercy on him) defines it, is the divine connection inside man, which inspires him to turn toward the higher realm and the holier realm, and to connect with the mystery of the first address that took place between him and God Almighty. It is because of the spirit that the believer is able to connect to his Lord with worship: ﴿And I breathed into him of My Spirit﴾ (al-Ḥijr, 15:29), and it is the means by which the believer ascends the stations of love: ﴿He loves them, and they love Him﴾ (al-Mā’ida, 5:54); the love which leads to endless states of extinction in the Beloved, and to subsistence through Him: to integration with Him, to separation, to the integration of integration, to the separation of separation, and so on.

### **The Soul**

What is meant by ‘soul’ is that part of man that is subject to change, so that thereafter the extent of his connection to damnation or felicity can be determined, as the Lord says: ﴿By the soul, and Him who shaped it, inspiring it with its lewdness and its God-consciousness. Prosperous is he who purifies it, and a failure is he who stunts it﴾ (al-Shams, 91:7-10). The most important element of man that has to do with change and progress to a higher state, or regression to a lower state, is the soul, which ascends through seven levels, according to the scholars of spiritual discipline and purification.

### **The Seven States of the Soul**

The first of them is the soul that enjoins evil, to which the Almighty alluded through the words of the Court Officer’s wife: ﴿‘Nor do I exonerate my own soul; indeed, the soul enjoins evil, save when my Lord has mercy’﴾ (Yūsuf, 12:53). The word *ammāra* [‘one who enjoins’] is an emphatic nominal form, which implies that it continuously embellishes evil to its owner. Yet this evil-enjoining soul can be raised, by means of effort and purification, to the second level, which is that of the reproachful soul.

The reproachful soul is that which sometimes incites good, and sometimes evil; and when its owner commits evil, it reproaches him and tells him to repent and turn back. God alludes to it when He says: ﴿Nay, I swear by the reproachful soul﴾ (al-Qiyāma, 75:2).

Higher still is the third level, that of the inspired soul, to which God alludes when He says: ﴿Inspiring it with its lewdness and its God-consciousness﴾ (al-Shams, 91:8). When a person rises in his faith in God, his soul begins to abate from its instigations and passions. When he begins to ascend up the levels of his connection to God Almighty, struggling against his reproachful soul, this soul comes to be receptive to the inspirations of the Almighty Real, and its instigations of caprice and desire begin to subside. It comes to be dominated by reflection, meditation and deep thought, and is inspired to utilise sound insight and powerful perception, resulting in a prevalent inclination towards what is good and righteous.

If the person continues to ascend in self-purification, he reaches a higher level than the inspired soul, namely that of the soul at peace, of which God says: ﴿O soul at peace!﴾ (al-Fajr, 89:27). When the light of divine inspiration shines upon this soul, it comes to find peace in the Almighty Real, and its certainty becomes stronger, and the vicissitudes and phenomena around it are no longer capable of wresting this peace from it.

This peace or tranquillity is a quality of the righteous friends of God: it is related that Ibrāhīm ibn Ad'ham (God have mercy on him) once boarded a ship which was beset by waves on all sides. Ibrāhīm wrapped his cloth around his head and lay down to sleep, for there was nothing that could physically be done, and all that remained was either fear or tranquillity. The other passengers of the ship clamoured with cries of fear and prayers, and woke him up and said, 'Do you not see the peril we are in?' (You can well see how this turbulent situation resembled the panic and dire straits the world is experiencing today.) 'That's not peril', he said. 'And what is peril, then?', they asked. He answered: 'To have need for human beings.' He then said: 'O God, You have shown us Your power; show us now Your clemency'; and the sea became as calm as a jug of oil.<sup>(38)</sup> When peace and inner stability were preponderant in the soul of one man, this led to a kind of stability in real life, to the point that the sea became as calm as a jug of oil. This is something we need to seek for our own souls, to bring the ship of our modern world back under control.

Then comes another level higher still; the fifth level of the soul. This is the contented soul, to which God alludes by saying: ﴿Return to your Lord, contented﴾ (al-Fajr, 89:28). This contentment is higher than conventional contentment, for it means the settling of contentment in the soul so that it becomes content with God's actions and His planning

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<sup>(38)</sup> Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faraj al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa* (Cairo, Dar al-Hadith, 2000), vol. 2, p. 337.

in this world. This contentment, whose locus is the heart, does not oppose or contradict the actions of the body in utilising means to change reality for the better; we are speaking here about a contented soul, endowed with wisdom, genius and depth, not a soul that neglects the real world or fails to deal with it and work to improve it.

Then comes the sixth level, namely the accepted soul, to which the very same verse alludes: ﴿Return to your Lord, contented and accepted﴾ (al-Fajr, 89:28), because of how close it is to the contented soul. He who is content is given contentment, and he who lives according to the meaning of contentment in God is in turn gladly welcomed by God Almighty, and thus is accepted.

And when the contentment of the servant is combined with the contented acceptance of the Almighty Lord, the soul becomes ready to ascend to the highest level of human souls, that of the perfect soul. The meaning of perfection here is relative perfection, since absolute perfection belongs only to God; and this perfection makes a person worthy and able to continue onward to infinite horizons of connection to God Almighty.

### **The Mind**

As for the mind, it is one of the most important constituents of man, and is what singles him out from all other creatures. It is the core of perception, and the means by which man measures the barrage of events that surround him against the changes of his own soul at moments of anger, sadness, joy, love or hate; for the mind comes to weigh things according to knowledge, whether it be religious knowledge or empirical knowledge. Both of these come back to the mind, which in turn is equipped to receive them; a person benefits from them according to the power of his mind, once he has cleansed it from the distractions of his soul's caprices and desires.

### **The Heart**

It is the seat of choice in man, which is affected by the states of the spirit, the levels of the soul and the opinion of the mind, and makes the decision based on these. It is also the thing at which the Lord looks, as the noble hadith says: 'God looks not at your bodies or your forms; but He looks to your hearts and your deeds.'<sup>(39)</sup> Spiritual ascent causes the heart to rise and live in a state of certainty, in its three levels as described by the experts in this art, namely knowledge of certainty, vision of certainty and truth of certainty, which is the highest level to which a man can rise, after which there is no end to the ascent of his heart's

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<sup>(39)</sup> Agreed upon [by Bukhārī and Muslim], on the authority of our master Abū Hurayra (God be pleased with him).

stability. In this way, the heart ascends through the nine stations of certainty, which are: repentance, renunciation, patience, gratitude, fear, contentment, hope, reliance, and love, according to how they are enumerated in *Qawt al-Qulūb*.<sup>(40)</sup>

## The Body

It is the clay-hewn container of the spirit, soul, mind and heart, and asks for various things; some are needs, and others are responses to the caprice of the soul. Needs fall into the legal categories of obligatory or recommended (such as eating for necessity or to give the body growth and preservation; vaccines or medicines to protect the body or cure its ails; or marriage for necessity or for the benefit of preserving the human species and increasing it); as for the caprices of the soul, they might fall into the category of recommended, permitted, reprehensible or forbidden.

This perspective might amount to a subtle difference, but it also shows that there is a big difference between the perspective of faith-based civilisation and that of other civilisations when it comes to life and man's role in life. Modern civilisation sees man's connection with the universe from the viewpoint of his being the master of the world, having the right to use it however he pleases; even the discourse of the environmentalists is predicated on the aim of preserving mankind and the future of the children who live on the planet, with the exception of certain civil liberties organisations which take a humanistic outlook and speak about lofty concepts.

The perspective of faith-based civilisation concerning man's connection to the life he lives, however, is higher than that, for it sees man as God's vicegerent on earth. This perspective means that when man listens to what God says to him, utilising the understanding of his mind, he rises with his spirit to a state of harmony with existence and all that is within it.

If man understands how to correct his aims in life by ridding his heart of heedlessness, correcting his concept of faith and connecting himself to God Almighty – that is, if all of our affairs, motions, words, states, and even the impulses of our hearts, as far as we are able, are characterised by an understanding of what it means to offer worshipful service to God in every part of them – if that is achieved, then our relationships with all creation will be rectified, and we will have true mastery, thriving and vicegerency. This is because man has a purpose in existence, namely to worship; and he has a task, namely to thrive; and he has a way to achieve the purpose and the task, namely self-purification. These are three essential matters of earthly existence. We find the purpose of worship in

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<sup>(40)</sup> Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qawt al-Qulūb fī Mu'āmalat al-Maḥbūb wa Waṣf Ṭarīq al-Murīdīlā Maqām al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Dr. 'Āṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayālī (Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1426 AH), Chapter 32: 'An Explanation of the Stations of Certainty and the States of the Certain'; vol. 1, p. 302f.

God's words: ﴿And I created not the jinn and mankind save that they should worship Me﴾ (al-Dhāriyāt, 51:56); and the task of thriving in His words: ﴿You have no god other than He. It is He who produced you from the earth, and has given you to thrive thereon; so ask forgiveness of Him, then repent to Him; surely my Lord is nigh, and answers prayer﴾ (Hūd, 11:61); and the way of purification in His words: ﴿Prosperous is he who purifies it, and a failure is he who stunts it﴾ (al-Shams 91:9-10).

God Almighty has made us responsible for thriving on the earth upon which we live a stage of our lives, a thriving wherein we benefit from the earth and look after it. The Prophet (God bless him and his family and grant him peace) told us that 'A prostitute of the Israelites saw a dog pacing about a well, about to die of thirst. She removed her sock and drew some water in it, and gave it to him – and on account of that, God forgave her.'<sup>(41)</sup> He (God bless him and his family and grant him peace) also told us that 'A man who never did any good at all, except to move a thorn from the road – either it was on a tree, so he cut it off and threw it away, or it was lying on the ground, so he removed it – so God thanked him for it, and admitted him into Paradise.'<sup>(42)</sup> Each of them were aware of the responsibility of having mercy on the earth and all that is upon it; and this was a means of their entering Paradise.

We need to re-examine how to link the moral of thriving with the moral of purification, and with the ascent to the meaning of faith and worshipful service of God Almighty; for upon this will be based a whole way of life and civilizational conduct. This way of life does not require us – as some people imagine – to withdraw from real life, nor to dive into its vicissitudes; rather, it is a matter of understanding faith-based interaction with the constituents and events of reality, so that we can arrive to a refined and humane civilisation.

I ask God Almighty to grant us success in attaining this, by His grace, and to help us to spread it; only He can grant it, and He is well able to do so.

Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds

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<sup>(41)</sup> Narrated by Imam Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Ādāb*, *Bāb Faḍl Sāqī al-Bahā'im al-Muḥtarama*, 4/1761, no. 2245.

<sup>(42)</sup> Narrated by Abū Dāwūd in his *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Adab*, *Bāb fī imāṭat al-Adhā' an al-Ṭarīq*, 4/532, no. 5247.