

## Islamic Concept of Faith and Human Development

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### Abstract

*The current psychological theory of faith proposes that faith is not restricted to belief. Rather, it is a way of being in this world incorporating all cognitive, emotional, and spiritual aspects of human life. Furthermore, faith is developmental in nature. The current article takes this developmental approach to faith, comparing its Islamic concept with the current Western paradigm. Undertaking an analysis of the concept of faith in the Qur'ān and ḥadīth, the discussion proceeds to discuss the stages of faith in Islam namely islām, īmān, and iḥsān. The cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions of human faith are discussed within Islamic paradigm with their implications for moral judgment and unique spiritual pathways for the individual. The article emphasizes how the integrative principle of tawḥīd binds all these dimensions together for a coherent and balanced human self.*

### Keywords

faith, human development, Islam, tawḥīd.

### Introduction

This article is a discourse on the Islamic concept of faith, analyzing its cognitive, affective, social, spiritual, and ethical dimensions. It attempts to link Western developmental approaches to faith with the Islamic vision. It emphasizes the holistic nature of Islamic concept of faith comprising of human growth and development in all spheres of life. Introducing the Western paradigm and its theological relevance, the article outlines the Islamic concept of faith as deduced from the Qur'ān and ḥadīth. Deliberating on the stages of faith namely *islām*, *īmān*, and

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*ihsān*, the discourse is expanded into cognitive, affective, behavioural, and ethical dimensions of faith to draw conclusions about the nature of Islamic faith and its relevance to the current Western theory of faith.

Faith is usually understood as a set of precepts and beliefs. However, recent psychological perspectives have drawn attention to the potentials of faith to grow and contribute to human development.<sup>1</sup> Following the developmental tradition set by Jean Piaget<sup>2</sup> in cognitive development and Lawrence Kohlberg in moral development, James Fowler put forward faith development theory that challenged the concept of faith as a belief-constrained view and proposed that faith was not belief but a way of being, relating to self, others, and the Transcendent.<sup>3</sup> Faith advances as one's cognitive faculties, worldviews, and perspectives about reality and existence broaden with life experiences. The postulates of these modern psychological paradigms presented several challenges to religion. In its early encounters with Christianity, this psychological view of faith was taken as a heresy, though there are strong narratives in Christian faith that propose a developmental and growing view.<sup>4</sup> An overview of the Islamic vision of faith can further dialogue with these modern psychological perspectives.

Islam presents a view of faith that is progressive as well as grounded in human existential realities. It is developmental in nature, as it sees all aspects of human life as genuine and aims to realize their full potential. It is integrative in addressing human beings in their totality of being, as Islam regards itself as a *dīn*, or a way of life, not only a set of beliefs. The current article takes an overview of Islamic concept of faith locating various cognitive, affective, social, spiritual, and ethical elements and Islamic vision of human growth and development in all these aspects of life.

### The Concept of Faith in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth

The term for faith in the Qur'ān is *īmān*. The Prophet (peace be on him)

<sup>1</sup> James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1981); Fowler, Heinz Streib, and Barbara Keller, *Manual for Faith Development Research* (Atlanta, GA: Center for Research in Faith and Moral Development, Emory University, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Jean Piaget, "Intellectual Evolution from Adolescence to Adulthood," *Human Development* 15, no. 1 (1972): 1–12; Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World*, trans. Joan and Andrew Tomlinson (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield Adams, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Kohlberg, "Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education," in *Moral Education: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. C. M. Beck, B. S. Crittenden, and E. V. Sullivan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 23–92.

<sup>4</sup> Amina Hanif Tarar and Syeda Salma Hasan, "Faith Development Theory and Christian Theological Faith," *Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 13, no. 2 (2015): 37–42.

said, “Faith (*īmān*) has over seventy branches—or over sixty branches—the uppermost of which is the declaration: ‘There is no god but Allah,’ and the least of which is the removal of harmful object from the path, and modesty is a branch of faith.”<sup>5</sup> Habib Ali al-Jifri holds that this *ḥadīth* makes it clear that faith is not only complex and hierarchical, but also has higher and lower branches and that those who have faith are distinguished from each other according to the degrees they have attained.<sup>6</sup> The word faith is used in the Qur’ān in various contexts emphasizing the qualities and levels of the faithful.

One context is its *opposition to infidelity/disbelief* mentioned as in the verses: “But whoever changeth from Faith to Unbelief, hath strayed without doubt from the even way.”<sup>7</sup> Another context is affirmation of the unseen (*ālam al-ghayb*).<sup>8</sup> Cognizance of the unseen Creator is made possible through a revert to *fiṭrah*—the original nature on which human beings are created and which is itself realized in divine connection. The Qur’ān says, “So set thou thy face steadily and truly to the Faith: (establish) Allah’s handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: no change (let there be) in the work (wrought) by Allah: that is the standard Religion: but most among mankind understand not.”<sup>9</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) has interpreted *fiṭrah* as the knowledge of One Creator.<sup>10</sup> This primordial divine connection is mentioned in the Qur’ān as “When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam—from their loins—their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): ‘Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?’ They said: ‘Yea! We do testify!’ (This), lest ye should say on the Day of Judgment: ‘Of this we were never mindful.’”<sup>11</sup> In the Islamic framework, faith is the original potential for recognition of the divine Reality instead of being a mere belief, as the Prophet (peace be on him) said, “Each child is born in a state of ‘*fiṭrah*,’ but his parents make him a Jew or a Christian.”<sup>12</sup> Al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī (d. 502/1108)

<sup>5</sup> Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-īmān, Bāb shu‘ab al-īmān.

<sup>6</sup> Habib Ali al-Jifri, *The Concept of Faith in Islam* (Amman: The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2012), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Qur’ān 2:108. Also see 3:167; 9:23. All Qur’ānic translations in this article are from Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s translation, available at <https://corpus.quran.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 30:30.

<sup>10</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Razī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1997), 9: 98–99.

<sup>11</sup> Qur’ān 7:172.

<sup>12</sup> Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-janā‘iz, Bāb idhā aslama al-ṣabī wa māta hal yuṣallā ‘alayh.

interprets *fiṭrah* as knowledge about God deeply ingrained in human beings, which when evoked makes people cognizant of their Creator.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the concept of *īmān* or faith corresponds to a particular gestalt of human psyche comprising of *nafs*, that is, the self that has states such as the commanding soul (*al-nafs al-ammārah*), the self-accusing soul (*al-nafs al-lawwāmah*), the satisfied soul (*al-nafs al-muṭma'innah*), the spiritual heart (*qalb*), spirit (*rūh*), the secret (*sirr*), intuition (*khafī*), and deepest subtlety, the point of unity in the human being (*akhfā*). These hidden subtleties are attuned to the divine realm. The human is thus infused with the Divine as both the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* hold that God breathed his own Spirit into human beings: "When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him."<sup>14</sup> However, human nature is paradoxical. It is infused with the Divine and seeks to revert to its Origin, but is also vulnerable to heedlessness of mundane life and forgetting. God's remembrance offers revert to the spirit, which is the ultimate basis of life, "O ye who believe! give your response to Allah and His Messenger, when He calleth you to that which will give you life."<sup>15</sup> Once the divine connection is established through God's remembrance and *dhikr*, one is attuned to the unseen (*ghayb*) and capable of sensing and intuiting it.

### ***The Progressive and Reverting Journey of Faith***

The Qur'ānic perspective on faith is essentially progressive and yet reverting to its divine Origin, the most sublime symbol of which is the *ṭawāf* or circumambulation of the *Ka'bah*. Each round of the *ṭawāf* culminates at the same starting point of the Black Stone (*al-Ḥajar al-Aswad*) which, as a gift from Paradise, reminds one of the Divine.<sup>16</sup> The ritual in its meaning depicts the literal manifestation of the regressive principle of "coming back" to one's divine origin.

The Qur'ān sees faith as increasing. For instance, faith increases with divine communion and is experienced as the peace and tranquility of heart, "Whenever there cometh down a sura, some of them say:

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<sup>13</sup> Al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Kīlānī (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 382; Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2001), 21:47–48; Sayyid Abū 'l-A'lā Maudūdī, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* (New Delhi: Markazī Maktabah-i Islāmī, 2002), 3:752–53.

<sup>14</sup> Qur'ān 15:29.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:24.

<sup>16</sup> Muḥammad b. 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-ḥajj, Bāb mā jā'a fī faḍl al-Ḥajar al-Aswad wa 'l-Rukn wa 'l-Maqām.

‘Which of you has had His faith increased by it?’ Yea, those who believe, their faith is increased and they do rejoice.”<sup>17</sup>

There has been a debate in the Muslim tradition about the increase, decrease, or stagnation of various elements and components of faith in isolation.<sup>18</sup> For instance, whether it is *taqwā* or the fear of God that increases was the view of Ash‘arī school. Nevertheless, the Qur‘ān as the centre of general agreement for Muslim thought takes a developmental rather than a static approach to faith as it can be observed with the above-cited verse.

### ***Islām, Īmān, and Iḥsān***

Faith in the Islamic paradigm makes a progression from *Islām* (submission) to *īmān* (security, affirmation) and then *iḥsān* (spiritual excellence/beauty/refinement of character). These three stages occur in different contexts in the Qur‘ān as discussed in the current and next sections.

The word *islām*, with lexical meaning of submission, has been differentiated in the Qur‘ān in some instances from *īmān* meaning assurance and security. For instance, the Qur‘ān says “The desert Arabs say, ‘We believe.’ Say, ‘Ye have no faith; but ye (only) say, “We have submitted our wills to Allah,” For not yet has Faith entered your hearts. But if ye obey Allah and His Messenger, He will not belittle aught of your deeds: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”<sup>19</sup> One may enter Islam by proclamation of the tongue (*iqrār bi ‘l-lisān*) and be recognized as a Muslim (the one who has entered Islam), but one will only become a *mu‘min* (the one who has *īmān*) when assurance is secured in the heart (*taṣḍīq bi ‘l-qalb*). Thus, by moving from *islām* to *īmān*, one moves from exoteric, outward, and *zāhir* domain to esoteric, inward, and *bātin* domain respectively. In fact, some hold that the *sharī‘ah* or the manifest religious law is different from *ḥaqīqah* or the inner reality.<sup>20</sup> Thus, as Ḥamd b. Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/998) holds, “Every *mu‘min* is a Muslim, not every Muslim is a *mu‘min*.”<sup>21</sup> Rather, sometimes those

<sup>17</sup> Qur‘ān 9:124. Also see 3:173; 8:2; 48:4; 74:31.

<sup>18</sup> Sakin Özişik, “Intergenerational Changes in the Religiosity of Turkish Islamic Immigrants in Contemporary Germany: A Qualitative Analysis Using the Faith Development Interview” (PhD diss., University of Bielefeld, Germany, 2015), 72–73.

<sup>19</sup> Qur‘ān 49:14.

<sup>20</sup> M. Hamiduddin, “Early Sufis: Doctrine,” in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M. M. Sharif (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1983), 1:318.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1959), 1:125.

verbally confessing but not sincere at heart are *munāfiqūn* or the hypocrites and it is reflected from their deeds that they actually race towards evil but proclaim orally that they are Muslims, as mentioned in the Qur'ān: "O Messenger! let not those grieve thee, who race each other into unbelief: (whether it be) among those who say 'We believe' with their lips but whose hearts have no faith."<sup>22</sup> Thus, the heart's testimony marks faith. The stages are not binaries rather they build upon each other. If *islām* means submission and *īmān* connotes its attestation and affirmation, then the true focal point of these two states is the *qalb* or the heart of an individual, and proclamation by the tongue and deeds are the physical manifestations of faith. The relationship of the exoteric form of religion and inner faith may take on different faces, as "a man might submit outwardly whilst not acquiescing inwardly, and he might believe inwardly whilst not acquiescing outwardly."<sup>23</sup> A verse by the Persian poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) holds that when Pharaoh said, "I am God," and al-Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) said, "I am the Absolute Truth," these identical statements meant two different things.<sup>24</sup> For Pharaoh it was darkness of disbelief, for al-Ḥallāj it was light of faith and becoming one with Allah. The inward affirmation (*īmān*) is a superior degree, as without the inner change, a superficial change or conversion does not matter. However, the outward deeds (*ẓāhir*) are not futile. Good deeds, or the behavioural dimension, are an objective testimony of the faith within, as the Qur'ān says, "A.L.M. Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, 'We believe,' and that they will not be tested? We did test those before them, and Allah will certainly know those who are true from those who are false."<sup>25</sup> As one moves from the outward confession to inward affirmation, the development of faith enters the realm of spiritual excellence and beauty (*iḥsān*). *Iḥsān* entails witnessing the signs of God or at least an awareness of the divine Presence watching over oneself. The features of these stages of faith are narrated in the famous *ḥadīth Jibrīl*, in which the Prophet (peace be on him) defines *islām* (submission), *īmān* (affirmation), and *iḥsān* (spiritual excellence). He said, "*Islām* (submission) is to testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muḥammad is God's Messenger, to perform the prayer, bestow the alms, fast Ramaḍān and make, if you can, the pilgrimage to the holy House." He explained *īmān* as follows: "To believe

<sup>22</sup> Qur'ān 5:41.

<sup>23</sup> Al-'Asqalānī, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, 1:145.

<sup>24</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Mathnavī Maulavī Ma'navī*, trans. Sajjād Ḥusain (Lahore: Hamid & Company, 1976), 5:208.

<sup>25</sup> Qur'ān 29:1-3.

in God and His angels and His books and His messengers and the Last Day, and to believe in predestination, the good of it and the evil of it.” Finally he defined *ihsān* as follows: “To worship God as if you saw Him; for if you see Him not, He assuredly sees you.”<sup>26</sup>

Thus, faith progression follows verbal proclamation, affirmation by heart to spiritual excellence where through divine communion one either sees the signs of God or has an awareness of God seeing him/her. *Ihsān* or the stage of excellence shows an integration of thought, affect, and behaviour—the integrative principle of *tawhīd*.

### Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioural Dimensions of Faith

#### *Faith and cognition*

Growth of faith is not possible without self-reflection and *taḥqīq* (search for knowing more). *Tahqīq*, or the personal search for knowledge, seems as contrasting with *taqīd* (imitation). The former is essential for individual growth and the latter basic to the continuation of any tradition across generations. While *taqīd* focuses on the form or content of a religion, *taḥqīq* looks for the essence of different forms according to the intellectual level of the individual. Sakin Özışık mentions Ibn Rushd’s categories of intellectual levels of people as 1) the induced who would like to follow judgements by scholars; 2) the dialectical who would justify through rational discussions; and 3) the sophisticated who would require philosophical proofs and rational grounds for acceptance.<sup>27</sup> The tradition, continuing itself in form through *taqlīd*, thus finds levels of understanding and communion with other traditions according to *taḥqīq* of an individual. Cognition and reflection are as essential to faith as to human existence. Several verses of the Qur’ān encourage to employ reason, rationality, and intellect. The Qur’ān regards those who do not use reason as the misguided ones who made no use of their senses.

For the worst of beasts in the sight of Allah are the deaf and the dumb,- those who understand not.<sup>28</sup>

Many are the Jinns and men we have made for Hell: They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears

<sup>26</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-īmān, Bāb su’āl Jibrīl al-Nabī ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhi wa sallama ‘an al-īmān wa ‘l-Islām wa ‘l-ihsān wa ‘ilm al-sā’ah and Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-īmān, Bāb ma’rifat al-īmān wa ‘l-Islām wa ‘l-qadar wa ‘alāmāt al-sā’ah.

<sup>27</sup> Özışık, “Intergenerational Changes,” 73-74.

<sup>28</sup> Qur’ān 8:22.

wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle,- nay more misguided: for they are heedless (of warning).<sup>29</sup>

No soul can believe, except by the will of Allah, and He will place doubt (or obscurity) on those who will not understand.<sup>30</sup>

Reason is the supreme attribute that makes humans capable of independent inquiry and thought. Those who reject faith and reason become blind followers.<sup>31</sup> The sensory knowledge through eyes and ears is to be used by the intellect and intelligence to explore the works as well as the purpose of the universe. Reason, when properly used, is the way to salvation.<sup>32</sup>

This suggests that Islamic concept of faith does not mean blind belief. Rather, it encourages rationality. However, the use of reason in Islam is not confined to the epistemological inquiry unlike in modern science that asks how phenomena exist. Rather, it is a holistic framework in which rational thinking is aware of the ontological and existential reality that involves why phenomena exist. Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1143) explains that while *fiṭrah* refers to the human potential to accept the oneness of God, it works in harmony with the rational faculty that further validates this conclusion.<sup>33</sup> Ibrahim Kalin points out that the intelligibility of the universe results from the reasoning that it has a system or plan.<sup>34</sup> The Qur’ān asks, “Do they not reflect in their own minds? Not but for just ends and for a term appointed, did Allah create the heavens and the earth, and all between them: yet are there truly many among men who deny the meeting with their Lord (at the Resurrection)!”<sup>35</sup>

The emphasis on reason and reflection in Islam resulted from a certitude about the coherence of an inter-related universe attributed to a final cause than mere conjectures and baseless hypotheses. For instance, the Qur’ān states, “Wert thou to follow the common run of those on earth, they will lead thee away from the way of Allah. They follow nothing but conjecture: they do nothing but lie.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 7:179.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 10:100.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 2:171.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 67:10.

<sup>33</sup> Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaqā’iq al-Tanzīl wa ‘Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta’wīl* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1997), 3:484–85.

<sup>34</sup> Ibrahim Kalin, *Reason and Rationality in the Qur’an* (Amman: The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Qur’ān 30:8.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 6:116.



*Tahqīq* allows to look beyond one's own tradition and question it. An excerpt from Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* shows how thinking and reflection grounded in the spiritual connection with the Divine lead one to an unbiased inquiry free of belief constraints. He writes,

I began by saying to myself: "What I seek is knowledge of the true meaning of things. Of necessity, therefore, I must inquire into just what the true meaning of knowledge is." Then it became clear to me that sure and certain knowledge is that in which the thing known is made so manifest that no doubt clings to it, nor is it accompanied by the possibility of error and deception, nor can the mind even suppose such a possibility. Furthermore, safety from error must accompany the certainty to such a degree that, if someone proposed to show it to be false—for example, a man who would turn a stone into gold and a stick into a snake—his feat would not induce any doubt or denial. For if I know that ten is more than three, and then someone were to say: "No, on the contrary, three is more than ten, as is proved by my turning this stick into a snake"—and if he were to do just that and I were to see him do it, I would not doubt my knowledge because of his feat. The only effect it would have on me would be to make me wonder how he could do such a thing. But there would be no doubt at all about what I knew! . . . The only hope I have of acquiring an insight into obscure matters is to start from things that are perfectly clear, namely sense-data and the self-evident truths. . . . In the case of this and of similar instances of sense-data the sense-judge makes its judgments, but the reason-judge refutes it and repeatedly gives it the lie in an incontrovertible fashion. . . . While everything you believe through sensation or intellection in your waking state may be true in relation to that state, what assurance have you that you may not suddenly experience a state which would have the same relation to your waking state as the latter has to your dreaming, and your waking state would be dreaming in relation to that new and further state? If you found yourself in such a state, you would be sure that all your rational beliefs were unsubstantial fancies. . . . Perhaps this present life is a sleep compared to the afterlife. Consequently, when a man dies, things will appear to him differently from the way he now sees them. . . . At length God Most High cured me of that sickness. . . . It was the effect of a light that God the Most High cast into my breast. And this light is the key to most knowledge. Therefore, whoever thinks that the unveiling of truth depends on precisely formulated proofs has indeed straitened the broad mercy of God.<sup>37</sup>

Al-Ghazālī's journey of faith starting from pure sensory knowledge to reason and finally to intellect guiding the both is an excellent example

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<sup>37</sup> Richard McCarthy, trans., *Al-Ghazali: Deliverance from Error* (Boston: Twayne, 1980), 55–58, 78–83.

of how a holistic view of faith not only imparts a freedom of inquiry but also looks for truth into any tradition without prejudices. This *tahqīq* led him to look beyond Islam into other traditions and their essence, seeking guidance from intellect. It is the divine connection that refines reason. The seat of intellect is *qalb* (heart) which, when attuned to the Divine, casts its reflection on reason.

### ***Heart as the Seat of Faith***

The Messenger of God (peace be on him) said, “Indeed, in the body there is a morsel which, if it is sound, the whole body is sound, and if it is spoiled, the whole body is spoiled. Indeed, it is the heart.”<sup>38</sup> The Islamic perspective associates levels of faith, certainty, and certitude with levels of knowledge. As knowledge and witnessing increases, so does certainty about the coherence of being and the universe. Certitude has three levels: the knowledge of certainty (*‘ilm al-yaqīn*), the vision of certainty (*‘ayn al-yaqīn*), and the truth of certainty (*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*), as mentioned in the Qur’ān.<sup>39</sup> Cognition and mind pertain to knowledge but certainty relates to the heart. A person may believe that there is a Creator of the world (*‘ilm al-yaqīn*), another may be able to witness the signs of God (*‘ayn al-yaqīn*), and yet another may attain a level of faith where his/her heart is filled with divine Presence (*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*). It is noteworthy that *yaqīn* or certainty accompanies all levels of knowledge. Only the depth of certainty varies for various levels of faith. Moreover, the heart becomes alive with Allah’s remembrance.<sup>40</sup> The heart as the seat of the totality of being in its transcendence contains intellect which is above reason. Kalin quotes Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640) in this regard, “The essence of the intellect is like a polished mirror on which the form of the Truth shines. On the mirror itself, there is no existential entity except the reflected form, and the reflected form is nothing but the form related to the Truth.”<sup>41</sup>

It is the reflection of *qalb* on the thoughts that refines reason and allows one to see the signs of God by self-reflection and observation. It itself is pre-cognitive and spiritual. A heart with *iḥsān* (spiritual excellence) polishes mind and refines thoughts. Thus, faith involves a cognitive dimension, but itself, faith is pre-cognitive.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-īmān, Bab faḍl man istabra’a li dīnīh.

<sup>39</sup> Qur’ān 56:95; 69:51.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 13:28.

<sup>41</sup> Kalin, *Reason and Rationality in the Qur’an*.

<sup>42</sup> Qur’ān 22:46.

### ***Faith and Affect: Between Fear and Hope***

Faith is experienced affectively as a state of peace and tranquility followed by rejoicing, bliss, and spiritual happiness.<sup>43</sup> The state of *sakīnah* is often paralleled with *shekhina* in Judaism, which implies God's dwelling and presence.<sup>44</sup> The root of the word *sakīnah* means dwelling and staying in place. It also means reassurance from God.<sup>45</sup> *Sakīnah* is an emotional and spiritual state as well as an experience. The Qur'ān mentions the *sakīnah* that was sent down upon the companions of the Prophet (peace be on him), sitting together under the tree in the plain of Ḥudaybiyyah, taking a pledge at the hand of the Prophet (peace be on him).<sup>46</sup> The spiritual togetherness in *sakīnah* is also evident in the following verse: "Allah sent down His Tranquillity to his Messenger and to the Believers, and made them stick close to the command of self-restraint; and well were they entitled to it and worthy of it."<sup>47</sup> The togetherness and communion implied in *sakīnah* are also witnessed in a Qur'ānic verse that mentions home as a means of rest and quiet.<sup>48</sup> All these different yet related interpretations imply that faith imparts knowledge to the heart and that a heart where Allah dwells rejoices in bliss and contentment.

The Qur'ānic view of the faithful is not one end of emotional polarity of total fear of God and total hope. Absolute fear leaves no grounds for hope, and too much hope may become unrealistic. The spiritual quest in faith is oscillating on a middle way between the contrasting emotions of fear and hope.<sup>49</sup> Fear and hope also correspond to the majesty, power, splendor (*jalāl*), mercy, beauty, and kindness (*jamāl*); qualities in the names of Allah. A true servant fears *al-Mutakabbir* and *al-Qahhār* (names reflecting *jalāl*) while hoping for mercy from *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm* (names reflecting *jamāl*). As one relates to the All-Encompassing Allah, one also relates to one's own polarities of spiritual and emotional experience harmonizing them in submission to One God. The Persian Sufi poet Abū 'Alī al-Rūdhbārī (d. 322/934) says, "Fear and hope are like the two wings of a bird. If they are both balanced, the flight will be well balanced. But, if one is stunted, the flight will also be stunted. And, to be

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 48:4.

<sup>44</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (London: HarperOne, 1992), 224.

<sup>45</sup> Qur'ān 2:248.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 48:18.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 48:26.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 16:80.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 7:56; 32:16.

sure, if the two are lost, the bird will soon be in the throes of death.”<sup>50</sup> An excerpt from the *Fundamentals of Islamic Creed* by Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/933) reads that a slave should remain between fear and hope. For, the right and approved kind of fear is that which acts as a barrier between the slave and the things forbidden by Allah. However, if fear is excessive, the possibility is that the man will fall into despair and pessimism. On the other hand, the approved state of optimism is of a man who does the good in the light of the *sharī‘ah* and is hopeful of being rewarded for it, or of a man who commits a sin, repents sincerely, and is hopeful of being forgiven. Allah said, “Those who believed and those who suffered exile and fought (and strove and struggled) in the path of Allah, they have the hope of the Mercy of Allah: And Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.”<sup>51</sup> In contrast, if a man indulges in sins, but is hopeful that he would be forgiven without doing anything good, then, this is self-deception, mere illusion, and false hope. Allah has praised the people of hope and fear in the following verse: “Is one who worships devoutly during the hour of the night prostrating himself or standing (in adoration), who takes heed of the Hereafter, and who places his hope in the Mercy of his Lord (like one who does not)?”<sup>52</sup> Hope then also demands fear. If that was not the case, one would be in a state of false security. Conversely, fear demands hope, without which there is only despair.<sup>53</sup>

### ***Faith and Behaviour***

The behavioural dimension or deeds have also remained an important debate as to whether they are a part of faith or not. It is true that the Qur’ān considers deeds conceptually separate from faith but part of the same set, as it combines them on numerous occasions, “And those who believe in Allah and work righteousness, He will admit to Gardens beneath which Rivers flow, to dwell therein for ever.”<sup>54</sup> Deeds or behaviour are conceptually separable from faith, but close to it, as deeds and faith complement each other. Faith enlightens the heart and its radiance is necessarily reflected in deeds and character. Therefore, the highest quality of faith or *iḥsān*, is seen as good deeds. For instance, following are some verses mentioning various instances of *iḥsān*, and

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<sup>50</sup> Ahmed Salamah al-Azadi al-Tahavi, *The Fundamentals of Islamic Creed*, trans. Syed Iqbal Zaheer (Toronto: Al-Attique Publishers, n.d.), 152.

<sup>51</sup> Qur’ān 2:218.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 39:9.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Tahavi, *The Fundamentals of Islamic Creed*, 152–53.

<sup>54</sup> Qur’ān 65:11. Also see 24:55.

each one of them involves refinement of acts or deeds if salvation is to be achieved. *Muḥsin* or the one who does *iḥsān* is the doer of good deeds.

Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents.<sup>55</sup>

Nay,—whoever submits His whole self to Allah and is a doer of good,—He will get his reward with his Lord; on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.<sup>56</sup>

And spend of your substance in the cause of Allah, and make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction; but do good; for Allah loveth those who do good.<sup>57</sup>

And for this their prayer hath Allah rewarded them with gardens, with rivers flowing underneath,— their eternal home. Such is the recompense of those who do good.<sup>58</sup>

The higher the stage of faith, more integrative becomes the behavioural dimension with emotional experience of faith and its cognitive precepts, all standing on the philosophy of *tawḥīd*, or integration of human self. Therefore, the Qur'ān urges for moving towards an integration of words and deeds, “O ye who believe! Why say ye that which ye do not?”<sup>59</sup> Faith induces a refinement of deeds that is not contaminated. An act of charity would be contaminated by a reminder to the beneficiary that he owes one something.<sup>60</sup>

Good deeds cannot be reduced to only one level of practice. It is left up to the individual to decide what constitutes good in what context. For instance, to disclose charity is good, as it sets a good example for others, but to conceal one's name is best, as it purifies the self. Allah says, “If ye disclose (acts of) charity, even so it is well, but if ye conceal them, and make them reach those (really) in need, that is best for you: It will remove from you some of your (stains of) evil. And Allah is well acquainted with what ye do.”<sup>61</sup> Whatever level is achieved, it should have a completeness and perfection. The Prophet (peace be on him) said, “God the Exalted One, loves that if any of you performs an action, he should do

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 17:23.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 2:112.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 2:195.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 5:85.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 61:2.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 2:195, 262.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 2:271.

it with perfection.”<sup>62</sup> Perfection of a good act or *ihsān*, for instance charity, is held by the Qur’ān and *ḥadīths*, to involve amongst other traits, persistence and consistent attitudes towards it. The maturity of faith thus shows up as the stability of character. It does not mean taking actions to extremes in anything. Rather it requires consistency and perseverance in actions however small they may seem. For instance, *ihsān* does not require that one would give everything in charity and be a desolate; but it is a balance and stability in all circumstances.<sup>63</sup>

Deeds and faith have a bilateral relation. Just as behaviour shapes attitudes good deeds strengthen the soul and nourish faith. The Qur’ān explains this by a parable, “And the likeness of those who spend their substance, seeking to please Allah and to strengthen their souls, is as a garden, high and fertile: heavy rain falls on it but makes it yield a double increase of harvest, and if it receives not Heavy rain, light moisture sufficeth it.”<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, evil doings blemish and corrupt faith. The Qur’ān warns against contaminating faith with evil deeds, “It is those who believe and confuse not their beliefs with wrong - that are (truly) in security, for they are on (right) guidance”<sup>65</sup> and “By no means! but on their hearts is the stain of the (ill) which they do!”<sup>66</sup> Evil deeds and perfect *īmān* cannot stay together at a given moment. The Prophet (peace be on him) explains the effect of evil deeds on faith as follows: “When the believer commits a sin, a black dot is engraved on his heart. If he repents, refrains, and regrets, his heart is polished again. However, if he commits more errors, the dots increase until they cover his heart.”<sup>67</sup> Faith thus involves a moral conscientiousness in actions.

### ***Faith and Moral Judgement***

Islamic moral ideals are cognizant of the paradoxes and complexity of human existence. Hence, they are sequential than binary. For instance, between allowed (*ḥalāl*) and strictly forbidden (*ḥarām*), there is a human margin of that which can be done but not appreciated (*makrūh*). Similarly, the Qur’ān sets rules of moral justice in society as “an eye for an eye,” but it also holds that world is imperfect and absolute justice is not practically possible. Justice is one stage of moral judgement and

<sup>62</sup> Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Shu’ab al-Īmān*, ed. Muḥammad al-Sa’īd Basyūnī Zaghlūl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1410 AH), 4:334.

<sup>63</sup> See Qur’ān 3:17, 134; 13:22–24.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:265.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:82.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 83:14.

<sup>67</sup> Muḥammad b. Yazīd b. Mājāh, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-zuhd, Bāb dhikr al-dhunūb.

revenge on part of an oppressed person is justified, but it sets mercy and forgiveness as the best course of action.<sup>68</sup> Secondly, the Islamic moral framework does not recommend extremes. The Prophet (peace be on him) said, “Beware of going to extremes (in religion), for those before you were only destroyed through excessiveness.”<sup>69</sup> The Qur’ān also prohibits extremism, “O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion.”<sup>70</sup> Thirdly, the Islamic moral vision is not completely idealistic or pragmatist. It neither requires self-denial nor does it completely disregard others. Rather, it recommends a middle way depending upon sincerity of human judgement. Faith development involves then not a fixed moral judgement but an ethical conscientiousness and broadening its universe. The Prophet (peace be on him) 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>71</sup> Not everyone from whom one is safe is trustworthy but a *mu’min* is the one whose moral universe expands to every human being and anyone can trust him. The Islamic vision of moral domain thus expands from justice (*‘adl*) to mercy (*iḥsān*) as one attains higher levels of faith. The Qur’ān says, “Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion.”<sup>72</sup> Justice is highly desirable for any system to survive, involves approximations of what is rightfully deserved by oneself and others in various conditions, and may involve various ideations of individual and society. Mercy and forgiveness are above justice and are unconditional. The one who bestows mercy does not think what is deserved rather he thinks what must be delivered unconditionally to the recipient’s character.

Moral conscientiousness and striving for its perfection form the basis of Islamic philosophy of *sunnah*, a human model and a solid example of a life in totality of human existence from personal to political rather than knowing the Divine in a void. The Islamic moral framework holds that it is the trust in human that leads to knowing God, “Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in

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<sup>68</sup> Qur’ān 5:45.

<sup>69</sup> Aḥmad b. Shu’ayb al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan*, Kitāb manāsik al-ḥajj, Bāb iltiqāṭ al-ḥaṣā.

<sup>70</sup> Qur’ān 4:171.

<sup>71</sup> Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-īmān, Bāb mā jā’a fī anna al-Muslim man salima al-Muslimūn min lisanihi wa yadihi.

<sup>72</sup> Qur’ān 16:90.

the Praise of Allah.”<sup>73</sup> The Prophet (peace be on him) was called always truthful (*ṣādiq*) and the one who always keeps a trust (*amīn*) by all tribes and people of all religions in Mecca all his life before and after prophethood. The trust which all tribes of Mecca placed in him was matchless.

The Prophet’s flexibility amidst disagreements and his ability to take the perspective of the other in a judgement was noticed by everyone around him. Spiritual excellence refines character to unconditional mercy as the Prophet (peace be on him) demonstrated when his enemies were totally at his disposal. The day he emerged as victorious in Mecca, he forgave his enemies who had tortured him and his companions, had made them leave their homeland, and had made their lives extremely miserable. He announced the day of victory over Mecca as the “day of mercy.” It was a unique victory achieved without bloodshed. The worst of enemies now turned into the best of companions and were ready to sacrifice everything in his name.<sup>74</sup> Virtue gathered virtue in return. *Iḥsān* or virtue coming back to the virtuous is mentioned in the Qur’ān, “Is there any Reward for Good - other than Good?”<sup>75</sup> *Iḥsān* in the form of forgiveness and kindness to fellow human beings is returned to the doer in the form of divine mercy.<sup>76</sup> One thus cannot attain the degree of *iḥsān* without a character that is felt by human beings around as polite, merciful, forgiving, trustworthy, and strengthening of others in every sense. A transcendence towards the Divine is not possible without a human regard for fellow human beings.

### ***Faith and Spiritual Pathways of Practice***

Practicing faith in Islam is thus not based on renunciation or giving up of relationships. The Catholic idea of renunciation for the development of faith is not condemned in Islam, but it is treated as an exception to the rule. It is in exceptional cases that one, as a Sufi saint, chooses to give up the worldly engagements to venture into a spiritual domain. For some, it was a temporary interval, for others permanent. The realization of this call is intense. The episode related to Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. ca. 165/782) is one example of this call. One night he was resting in his palace when he heard someone walking on his roof. Disturbed in his sleep, he asked who was there. The voice said, “I am searching for my camel on this

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 33:21.

<sup>74</sup> Bertold Spuler and Hans Kissling, *The Age of the Caliphs: History of the Muslim World* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1994).

<sup>75</sup> Qur’ān 55:60.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 24:22.



roof!” “Are camels found on roof tops?” Ibn Adham asked angrily. “Is God found in the king’s bed?” The voice questioned back. Hearing this, Ibn Adham changed his kingly robes, left the palace, and set out for his spiritual journey of faith.<sup>77</sup> This unique mode of faith development is not for everyone just as not all aspects of the Prophet’s (peace be on him) life are set as an example for all to follow. His meditation in the cave of Ḥirā’ before prophethood, his fasting for several days, praying for the whole night, and many other aspects of his life cannot be set as a rule but exception. Here, faith in Islam is highly cognizant of human individuality and diversity of pathways to Allah. Beneath the collective and similar spiritual practices are individual relations with Allah bestowing upon humans degrees of piety according to purity of their intent.

### Faith in Islam: Progression and Reversion

The progressive journey of faith as espoused in Islamic teachings involves intellectual and spiritual refinement to a degree where the realization is that it is in fact only God who is the Ultimate Witness and Ultimate Vision within all of us in our diverse forms. Allah says, “Soon will We show them our Signs in the (furthest) regions (of the earth), and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth. Is it not enough that thy Lord doth witness all things?”<sup>78</sup> The Prophet’s (peace be on him) statement that *iḥsān* is “to worship God as if you saw Him; for if you see Him not, He assuredly sees you” refers to the intellectual vision of the Divine in one’s life. *Iḥsān* is nothing but finding the certitude (*īmān*) of the Divine in oneself and the submission (*islām*) to His will. At each stage of faith, there is a reversion to the original commitment: submission to the will of God. Just as a plant begins with a seed, grows up, flowers, gives fruit, and finally reverts again to a seed, *īmān* and *iḥsān* ultimately constitute submission (*islām*) to the will of God. By attaining spiritual excellence and divine qualities, one practices true submission to God’s will. This is the essence of Islam as a religion. That is why, the Prophet (peace be on him) concluded the famous *ḥadīth Jibrīl*, saying, “It was Gabriel. He came unto you to teach you your religion.” Allah says, “[I] have chosen for you as religion al-Islam”<sup>79</sup> and “The Religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His Will).”<sup>80</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>77</sup> Jalal al-Din Rumi, *The Masnavi: Book Three*, trans. Jawid Mojaddedi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>78</sup> Qur’ān 41:54.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:3.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:19.

progression of faith in Islam constitutes reversion to a beginning point with enriched vision of being a Muslim.

### **Islamic and Western Developmental Perspectives on Faith**

A developmental view of faith seeing it as a core human value rather than a ritualistic domain alone has been welcomed by theological quarters on several grounds. First, faith development theory sees faith as a way of being in this world not just a belief system.<sup>81</sup> Second, the aspects of “being” relating to oneself and the world described by faith development theory as morality, locus of authority, social perspective taking (awareness of others’ perspective and with further development the understandings of relativity of contexts), bounds of social awareness (how broadly one constructs the circle of human beings that one calls one’s own), world coherence (worldview including the sense of ideal world and questions of existence), form of logic (typical thought patterns development indicated by performing though on one’s own system of ideas), and symbolic function (how one relates to the religious symbol) imply that faith and its development gradually refine these cognitive, affective, behavioural, moral, and social areas of life. Third, the above postulates of a psychological theory imply that faith is thus an existential question rather than prescribed set of beliefs negating human inquiry. Fourth, faith is viewed as developmental and growing in nature rather than a static entity where some major changes involve moving from a self-centred point of view to regard for truth in other traditions, cognitive development inculcating self-reflection over one’s own system of ideas, and a creative engagement with the religious symbol beyond a literal understanding.

Whilst a comparison of Western psychological perspectives on faith with Islamic view demands another thorough discussion, the current article opens various dimensions in this regard. First, Islam wholeheartedly welcomes a view of faith as an existential entity beyond religious beliefs and introduces itself as a way of life than a set of precepts. Moreover, the Islamic view of faith puts lifelong human development in all domains of life at its focus. It, therefore, invites human beings to think and reflect on their existence and search for truth with their own rational and spiritual faculties. The Islamic view of rational thought emphasizes the unity, coherence, and inter-relatedness

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<sup>81</sup> Heinz Streib and Barbara Keller, *Manual for the Assessment of Religious Styles in Faith Development Interviews*, 4th ed. (Bielefeld: Centre for the Biographical Studies in Contemporary Religion, 2018).

of the universe attuned to human faculties proving that creation is not futile and meaningless. The cognitive and rational aspects of Islamic faith go beyond the limited forms of logic and regard intellect and connection with the Divine as basic to human development. Thus, inviting a self-reflection of human beings to their origin, the Islamic view of faith paints a broad canvas of religion itself where the social perspective negates dogmas and engages with an inter-faith dialogue with other religions in a manner instructed by the Qur'ān: "Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance."<sup>82</sup> Islam, therefore, sees itself addressing the vastest circle of social belongingness, i.e., a message to the whole of humanity than any one creedal system.

### Conclusion

Theoretical advancements in the twentieth century on the conceptualization of faith have challenged the conventional view of religion as taking some essentialist beliefs for granted. The Islamic view of faith based upon the principle of *tawhīd* is both integrative and holistic. It invites the use of all human capacities such as reason, intellect, and intuition to their fullest in understanding one's own position in relation to the universe. This essentially imparts all human dimensions such as cognition, behaviour, emotions, social relations, and ethics to faith and creates a balance between these spheres. Faith in Islam means a life lived to its fullest potential with a balance and totality of all areas of life. Faith is a balance where the forward-looking and progressive journey is balanced by reverting, regressing, ultimate realization of belongingness, and going back to the Divine. Moreover, Islamic conceptualization of faith is universal, as it acknowledges not only existence of diverse spiritual pathways chosen by mystics, monks, scholars, and the friends of Allah and appreciates human diversity and individuality, but also acknowledges existence of diverse religious communities beyond itself. Faith in Islam propels towards interfaith dialogue with other belief systems and philosophies. A view of faith put forward by Islam invites the prepared postmodern mind to go beyond immediate beliefs into a positive engagement with one's own existence as well as other perspectives on reality. A dialogue between Islam and current psychological perspectives on religious and faith development

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<sup>82</sup> Qur'ān 16:125.

offered by the discipline of psychology of religion needs more attention from both sides. Furthermore, while there are parallels between Islamic concept of faith and the Western paradigm, the former is not a strict linear progression and is rather based on the idea of reverting to one's divine Origin and its realization amongst life experiences. The article contends that insofar as the Islamic view of faith encourages both self-reflection and positive interfaith dialogue with varying perspectives on reality, a dialogue between Islam and Western theory on the conceptualization of faith carries both theological and psychological relevance.

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