

IMAN

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Introduction

When studying the Quran and traditions, one finds terms that are less seen in the preceding human literature; such terms as *wahy* (revelation), *taqwa* (piety), *iman* (faith), *tawakkul* (trusting in God) and *ihsan* (kindness). These terms have special meanings in the words of God and the Infallibles (a); the meanings which, though not identical with their common usage, are not totally irrelevant to it either. The aim of this article is to discover the specific meanings of these terms in the Quran and traditions through a careful analysis of the texts and contexts in which they are situated.

When trying to understand the true meanings of the aforementioned terms, we must gather their characteristics and features in our main religious sources. Each of these characteristics will take on the role of explaining part of what the intended meaning is. When doing so, we must act as comprehensively as possible. In other words, we should not limit our research to only a portion of the scripture available and neglect the rest. Any interpretation or theory pertaining to a religious matter, including understanding religious terminology, must be assessed with all religious teachings in order that its true position in religion's system of thought becomes clear. If such comprehensiveness is not taken into consideration, our research will be methodologically deficient.

This paper will focus on the term *iman*, trying to discover its special meaning based on the words of Imam Ali (a) and through finding relevant Quranic verses to his words.

Section One: The Characteristics of IMAN

I.I. First characteristic: The Birthplace of IMAN

No matter what its essence, *iman* has to do with that part of the person referred to as the “heart”. The heart is where *iman* resides, and as long as the heart does not open its doors to *iman*, it will not be achieved. Imam Ali (a) narrates the Prophet (s) as saying, “The *iman* of the servant will not be sound until his heart becomes sound (Nahj al-balagha, Sermon 176). The prophet (s) has also said, “Faith emerges in the heart as a white spot; the more one’s *iman* grows, the more the white spot grows.” (Majlisi, Bihar al-anwar 1403AH, 66:196).

In the holy Quran, the link between *iman* and the heart is expressed as follows:

The Bedouins say, “We have faith.” Say, “You do not have faith yet; rather say, ‘We have embraced Islam,’ for faith has not yet entered into your hearts.” (Quran 49:14)

From the whole of what was said, several points can be concluded:

I.I.I. The Difference between ISLAM and IMAN

There is a difference between *islam* (submission) and *iman*. *Islam* is an outward submission to religion, and unlike *iman*, it has nothing to do with the heart. That which takes place in the heart is *iman*, not *islam*. This does not necessarily mean that there is a time lapse between *islam* and *iman*; rather, it is possible for the two to occur simultaneously. This can happen when one is confronted with the call of Prophets, and his heart carries out the specific action of *iman*.

I.I.2. General Faith and Specific Faith

What was said had to do with the real connection between *iman* and *islam* and man's different facets, although Islam's approach is to attribute *iman* to every Muslim individual and assume that everyone bears this quality, regardless of whether or not *iman* has really entered his heart. Hence, *islam* can also be referred to as "iman in its general sense", and *iman* can be referred to as "iman in its specific sense".

Proofs for this claim are the narrations that compare the relationship between *iman* and *islam* to that of the Ka'bah and the Masjid al-Haram. Clearly, reaching the Ka'bah means being in the Masjid al-Harām as well. The Ka'bah is like the heart of Masjid al-Haram. Now, if we take *iman* to be entering the Ka'bah and *islam* to be entering Masjid al-Harām, it will be clear that the degree of *iman* is a degree that entails passing through the degree of *islam*, and that anything that holds for one's *iman* will also hold for one's *islam*. The opposite however, is not true; it is not the case that whatever *iman* has, also holds for one's *islam* (Shaykh al-Saduq 1398 AH, 228).

Now, using the division of *iman* into general *iman* (*islam*) and specific *iman*, it can be said that not every *mu'min* in its general sense is a *mu'min* in its specific sense, while every *mu'min* in its specific sense is a *mu'min* in its general sense. Obviously, there is total contrast between *kafir* (disbeliever) and Muslim, as there is essential disparateness between *kafir* and *mu'min*, such that no *kafir* is Muslim, the same way no *mu'min* is *kafir*. In other words, *islam* and *iman* are both disparate to *kufr* (disbelief). This is while in Islamic tradition, what has been mentioned opposite to *kufr* is only *iman*; hence, the justification of the division of *iman* into general and specific.¹

1.1.3. How IMAN, ISLAM, KUFR, and NIFAQ Develop

Both types of *iman* – general and specific – are something the individual needs to achieve. General *iman* is the responsibility of faculties that precede the heart and have to do with man's outer sphere; as a matter of fact, it is possible that the heart has nothing to do with general *iman* at all. As to specific *iman* though, it is carried out by the heart, and after being attained,

¹ See (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:26-7). Please do note that the Islamic laws pertaining to the Muslims have to do with *iman* in its general sense, which is assumed through saying the *shahadatayn*, even if the heart does not believe in what the tongue is verbalizing.

can even positively impact the outer layers of one's existence. It is due to this that the fruit and outcomes of the *islam* of a *mu'min* differ from that of *islam* before *iman*.

In any event, as long as these two have not been taken care of, one stands in the realm of *kufr*. Also, since *islam* has to do with the outer sphere, it is possible for some who are actually in the realm of *kufr* to make it seem as if they have entered the realm of *islam*, in order that they may enjoy the worldly rights of Muslims. For these individuals – referred to as *munafiqs* – there is no way into the realm of *iman*, the reason being that *iman* is an internal realm that bears no place for pretension and make-believe. Due to the worldly rights of *mu'mins* and Muslims being the same, it is manifest that the *kafir* who, with his hypocritical nature, stands in the lines of the Muslims, reaches his objectives in this world.

1.1.4 The Accessibility of the Realms of IMAN, ISLAM and KUFR

The same way entering the realm of *islam* means passing through and putting behind the realm of *kufr* and entering the realm of *iman* necessitates passing through the realm of *islam*, there also exists a backward movement. What is meant is that sometimes a *mu'min* will be thrown back to the realm of *islam* and is revoked of the title of “*mu'min*” and is sometimes even expelled to the realm of *kufr*. This path will always remain a two-way one, and it is only in the end that it becomes clear in which of these one is located.¹

From all of what was said, it becomes clear that identification of the heart in man plays a pivotal role in distinguishing whether one bears *iman* or not. In explaining the realm of the heart, the following propositions can be helpful:

1.1.5. Identifying the Realm of the Heart

- a) Every person has only one heart (Quran 33:4).
- b) The heart is the most hidden and original existential realm of man; it rules over other realms and is also influenced by them. If this realm is shaken, it will be the epicenter of an earthquake whose waves will extend to

¹ In some narrations, *iman* has been divided into *mustaqarr* and *mustawda*. For example, see Kulayni (1407AH, 2:418).

the outmost layers of one's existence. At the same time, if it is given tranquility, one's entire existence will experience calmness and comfort.¹

c) The heart is involved in cognitive activities such as contemplation, certainty, and understanding:

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ عِبَادَ اللَّهِ تَعِيَّةَ ذِي لُبٍ شَعَلَ التَّفَكُّرُ قَلْبَهُ

Fear God like the wise one whose heart has become preoccupied with contemplation. (Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 83)

لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْعُيُونُ بِمُشَاهَدَةِ الْعِيَانِ وَ لَكِنْ تُدْرِكُهُ الْقُلُوبُ بِحَقَائِقِ الْإِيمَانِ

The eyes cannot see Him, but the hearts see him through the realities of *iman*. (Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 179)

d) The heart is capable of being described as healthy, as well as being described as ill:

وَ أَشَدُّ مِنْ مَرَضِ الْبَدَنِ مَرَضُ الْقَلْبِ

And worse than the illness of the physical body is the illness of the heart. (Nahj al-Balaghah, Wisdom 388)

It is possible for one's body to be healthy and sound, but for the core of his existence to be ill; the opposite holds as well, one's physical body can be sick, while he enjoys a totally sound heart. There is no direct connection between the health of the body and the health of the heart; each can do without the other, the same way they can co-exist.

e) The heart can experience life and death; it bears the capacity to die and live. Of course, the life and death of the heart differ from that of the body. It is possible for one's body to be alive, and yet his heart to be dead. Due to

¹ The verses speaking of consolidating one's state (e.g. 18: 13-14) and of scaring the heart (e.g. 59:2) back this claim.

this, what a live heart does cannot be seen and acknowledged by one whose heart is dead. There is no contradiction between the life of the body and the death of the heart, and sometimes sickness of the heart can lead to its death:

When one loves a thing it blinds him and sickens his heart. Then he sees but with a diseased eye, hears but with unhearing ears. Desires have cut asunder his wit, and the world has made his heart dead, while his mind is all longing for it. Consequently, he is a slave of it [the world]. (Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 109)

f) Like the body, the heart also has parts, and these parts are similar to that of the physical body. It has eyes by which it sees, ears by which it hears, and sense of taste by which it tastes. If it happens, as was pointed to in (e), that a heart is dead, neither will its eyes see, nor will its ears hear. The eyes of the heart see the same way the eyes of the body see; the difference between the two lying in the object being seen. The live heart sees that which the dead heart is deprived of, the same way the seeing person sees that which the blind person cannot. Seeing and not seeing have no effect on the object being seen; rather, the seeing person develops a copulative existence (*al-wujud al-rabti*) between himself and the object, while the blind one cannot accomplish such, not at the physical level nor at the inner level of the heart.

g) All concepts that our religion gives importance to take place in the realm of the heart, and it is from there that they extend to other realms. Any form of *rida* (consent), *tawakkul* (reliance on God), *tafwid* (handing over management of one's affairs to God), *taslim* (submission), *ḥubb* (love), and *bughḍ* (hate) are all fruits of *iman*. In other words, the existence of such concepts is contingent upon the existence of *iman*, and it is in *iman*'s cradle, meaning the heart, that they emerge. Imam Ali (a) says, "*Iman* is constituted of four pillars: reliance on God, handing over the management of one's affairs to Him, satisfaction with His decree, and submission to His command" (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:47).

The key question here is to ask, what is the origin of the heart's life, and what is the cause of its death?

1.2. Second Characteristic: The Gradation of IMAN

The concept of *iman* is a gradational one, bearing various degrees and taking on different levels upon development. Both the common and distinguishing factors of these degrees and levels is *iman*. It is not that this reality either exists or does not; rather, if it exists, it can have various degrees of existence, to the extent that some of its degrees can be considered as relatively non-existent, while attributing total non-existence to them is definitely erroneous. For example, the second level of *iman* is simply its existence, so it is correct to say that *iman* exists at this level, nonetheless, the third level of *iman* is negated from this level. As was mentioned in the first characteristic, the *mu'mins* need to pass through the realm of *islam* in order to enter the realm of specific *iman*, nonetheless, they do not share the same proximity to its center; each *mu'min* has his own respective degree of proximity to the center of this realm.

'Abd al-'Aziz narrates that Imam Sadiq (a) said to him, "O 'Abd al-'Aziz, indeed *iman* has ten degrees; the people climb them step by step like a ladder. He who stands on the second step should not tell the one on the first that he is nothing; even the one on the tenth step should not say such a thing. Do not do away with he who is lower than you so that the one higher than you does not do away with you. When you see another who is lower than you, easily pull him up towards you without burdening him with more than he can bear so to break him, because whosoever breaks a *mu'min* is bound to compensate for the breakage (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:45).

By referring to other traditions, one finds that there is much distance between these very degrees of *iman* as well and that the degree and level of the *mu'min* who is higher, is incomprehensible to the one who stands at a lower degree of *iman*. In reference to "degree" [one's level and station], it has been said that

الدَّرَجَةُ مَا بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ

The degree is between the heaven and earth. (Majlisi, Bihar al-anwar 1403AH, 66:171)

It is as if the person who stands at a higher degree somehow sees the entire contingent universe covered in light, in a way different than that which is seen at a lower degree. In some traditions it has been disclosed that, for instance, Miqdad was at the eighth degree, Abu Dharr at the ninth, and Salman al-Farsi at the tenth (Majlisi, Bihar al-anwar 1403AH, 22:351).

The same applies to the subsequent outcomes of *iman*. The outcomes and fruits of one's *iman* follow the strength and weakness of his *iman*; the difference and distance between these outcomes can sometimes be so great, rendering their comparison difficult.¹

1.3. Third Characteristic: The Strength and Decreasibility of IMAN

Iman can be strengthened and solidified, or weakened and decreased. According to the second characteristic mentioned, *iman* has various degrees and although this third characteristic depends on the second, it is not identical to it. As per this characteristic, one can put a degree behind and move towards another degree. Therefore, when it comes to the essential properties of *iman*, they should firstly have different grades and levels, and secondly passing through one level to the next should also be feasible in them. The third characteristic presumes the second to exist, although it is possible to consider the second without taking the third into consideration. Based on this, if a discourse encompasses the third characteristic, it will be directed towards the second as well.

In regard to strengthening the *iman*, the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (a) says,

We would not suffer from any calamity or hardship, except that it would bring about [in us] an increase in faith, engagement in the truth, and submission to the command

¹ For further details, see Quran 6:132 and 3:163. For the descriptions of the mentioned degrees, see Majlisi (1403AH, 66:169).

of the messenger of God (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 122)

These words of Imam Ali (a) are pointing to quranic verses which explain this third degree:

And when His signs are recited to them, they increase their faith, and who put their trust in their Lord. (Quran 8:2)

1.4. Fourth Characteristic: IMAN is Voluntary

Iman is a reality that one voluntarily carries out and in no way can be forced and compelled. The sole responsibility of the Prophets and Infallible Imams (a) is to show the straight path and call everyone to traverse it. It is up to each person to embrace *iman* or not, and he will be held accountable for the decision he makes in this regard. What was mentioned in the first characteristic sheds light on the fourth: *iman* goes back to one's inner dimension, concealed to all except himself. It is due to this inaccessibility to others that no outside factor can compel it. This is why, if a person among the believers claims *iman*, it will be accepted from him, because there is no way to verify and learn of what is truly going on in one's heart. Of course, *islam* is also voluntary, but since it has to do with the pre-heart stage and one's outer dimension, one can be compelled to present himself as a Muslim when he really is not.¹

1.5. Fifth Characteristic: The Assessability of IMAN

Iman will definitely be put to the test. No matter what the essence of *iman*, and regardless of which realm one's *iman* is in touch with, tests and trials will be sent one's way, both so it becomes known at what degree the individual is at, and also to set the grounds for the emergence of the third characteristic. Before being tested, the degree of one's *iman* is but a claim in need of verification. It is only hardship and calamity that can either confirm the veracity of such a claim and open the doors to higher degrees or prove its falsehood and hollowness. Imam Ali (a) says,

¹ See Nahj al-Balagha, (Letter 16).

إِنَّهُ لَمَّا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ قَوْلَهُ - الْم أ حَسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ عَلِمْتُ أَنَّ الْفِتْنَةَ لَا تَنْزِلُ بِنَا وَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ص بَيْنَ أَظْهَرِنَا فَقُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ مَا هَذِهِ الْفِتْنَةُ الَّتِي أَخْبَرَكَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى بِهَا فَعَالَ يَا عَلِيُّ إِنَّ أُمَّتِي سَيُفْتَنُونَ بَعْدِي

When God Almighty revealed His words: “What! Do people imagine that they will be let off on (their) saying: ‘We believe!’ and they will not be tried?” [Quran 29:2] I knew that as long as the messenger of God (s) was amongst us, that trouble would not befall us. So I said, “O messenger of God! What is this trouble that God has informed you of? He said, “O Ali! Very soon, after me, my nation will fall into trouble and corruption.” (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 157)

Section Two: The Fruits and Outcomes of IMAN

Now that we have become familiar with some of the characteristics of *iman*, we will delve into some of the outcomes of *iman* in order to become more familiar with this concept. These outcomes can help us further distinguish between specific and general *iman*.

2.1 The Impenetrability of One of the Degrees of IMAN

There is a degree of *iman* which is not affected the least by any doubt, question, or storm of afflictions. At such a degree, the *mu'min* is not shaken by these misfortunes; rather, they have a reverse effect and consolidate his *iman*. It was mentioned in the third characteristic that *iman* can vary in weakness and strength. But there is a degree of *iman* that is sealed and is not prone to any weakness or deficiency. The only transition that takes place here is to higher degrees. On the weaker side of the *iman* spectrum, lies *islam*, to which one devolves as one's *iman* weakens. Also, one located in the realm of *islam* may even lose the requirements for *islam*, setting him all the way back to the realm of *kufr*. Therefore, the lower side of *iman* has an end, while the higher end of the *iman* spectrum is not bound by any limits. The point being made here is that a state of *iman* can be achieved, in which there is no decline or weakness, no matter how many afflictions or challenges there are. Such a *mu'min* can in no way be shaken or manipulated.

2.2. Experiencing Tranquility of the Heart

One of the features and fruits of *iman* is *sakinah* (tranquility). *Sakinah* derives from *sukun*, which is the opposite of movement and shakiness. When this rare feature enters the heart of man, all anxiety and suspense cease. Anxiety and distress are a state that man experiences in different forms throughout his life, that none of the contingent matters of this world can free one of, because, essentially, it is these very contingent matters that create anxiety and distress in the first place. Thus, even if all contingent matters of this world gather in order to rid one of suspense, distress, and anxiety, the problem will not be solved, if not worsened. *Sakinah* is not something attained by the individual himself, or the product of a process connected and related to him, it is rather an endowment by the Creator to the *mu'min* individual. In other words, no contingent matter plays any role in the acquisition of *sakinah*, and it is solely a divine gift and blessing to the *mu'min*'s heart. By virtue of this gift, tranquility takes over one's entire existence. The same way, if fear is thrown onto one's heart by God, none of the worldly matters will be able to relieve that heart, even if they all work hand in hand.

It seems as if this outcome is related to the previous one mentioned, in the sense that *sakinah* protects one from sinking to lower levels of *iman* and only pushes him upwards towards higher levels:

It is He who sent down composure into the hearts of the faithful that they might enhance their faith. (Quran 48:4)

2.3. Experiencing Detachment of the Heart

One of the other fruits of *iman* is that it brings about change in the conditions and states of man, breaking the chains of imprisonment, leading to freedom and liberty. In this life, the individual is perpetually living in his hopes, dreams, and ideals but also experiences failure, deprivation, and reaching dead ends. Fear of the future, not achieving one's goals, losing all belongings, etc. never leave him alone. The changes that he undergoes in this life only change the subject of his fears, with fear itself always being there. He tries to live an ideal life but very well knows that no matter how ideal and good the life, there is no guarantee of its continuation. His knowledge is subject to forgetfulness, his beauty is subject to perishing, his love may turn to disgust and hate, and his joy is threatened by anxiety and depression. Even

love of self – assuming that it is the most essential form of love – is not guaranteed survival, and this explains why sometimes people put themselves in the danger of suicide.

With the birth of *iman*, everything changes in one's different states mentioned above. At such a stage, the *mu'min* discovers the true and pure attachment that other attachments would not allow him to see. And by receiving that true attachment, he becomes free of all other attachments and settles at the shore of tranquility and stability. This attachment is the attachment of the created to the Creator; an attachment that drives one in all of his states and conditions to his Creator, and he learns that all creation share with him this attachment to the Creator. All of these intertwined links are hanging from their independent cause, and none of these links is contingent upon itself. The *mu'min* feels in harmony and solidarity with other creatures, but in the line of dependence on God. This makes health and illness, need and wealth, life and death, rough and easy times, etc. all equal in the eyes of the *mu'min*. Each of these states creates a sensational scenario for him, and the *mu'min*, through the role he plays, finds a relationship within himself with one of the names of God. By relying on his Lord, who is always with him, the *mu'min* benefits from each of these states. Imam Ali (a) says in this regard,

لَا يَكْمُلُ إِيمَانُ الْمُؤْمِنِ حَتَّىٰ يَعُدَّ الرَّخَاءَ فِتْنَةً وَ الْبَلَاءَ نِعْمَةً

The *iman* of the *mu'min* is not complete until he sees prosperity as trial and infliction as a blessing. (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 88)

2.4 Transformation of the Cognitive Mechanism and Transcendent Disclosure

With the development of *iman* in the heart, the cognitive faculty confronts the hearable, seeable, and other sensible things with more enhanced tools. Before *iman*, such tools either did not exist at all, or did, but could not be used due to obstacles. What goes on in this world is so charming and possessing that it makes the corresponding faculties very preoccupied with itself, disabling one from entering one's hidden and original dimension.

What *iman* does is that it gradually places one's hidden dimension at the entrance of the hidden and more original constructs of existence. This dimension of existence may remain neglected and unacknowledged by one's identifying faculty due to the hindrance of more visible and tangible constructs. At the onset of *iman*, many real and original matters remain unseen and hidden; however, through pushing aside the obstacles and tearing the veils of negligence and forgetfulness, the changes brought about by *iman* enable one to connect his cognitive faculties to the corresponding dimensions. When this happens, one's receptions of the real world are adjusted and corrected, and he sees the different dimensions the way they really are.

By reaching certain degrees of *iman*, the "mirror" of one's existence truly becomes such that it reflects the great as great, and the small as small:

عَظَمَ الْخَالِقُ فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ فَصَغُرَ مَا دُونَهُ فِي أَعْيُنِهِمْ

The greatness of the Creator is seated in their hearts, and, so, everything else appears small in their eyes. (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 193)

Since the Creator is great and magnificent, He is reflected in their hearts as great and magnificent; this results in the insignificance of the rest of creation in their eyes, and rightfully so too. The "mirror" of the *mu'min*'s existence does not falsely blow things out of proportion; rather, one comprehends all things the way they truly are. The individual rightfully sees those events which are distant to be truly distant, and those that are imminent to be truly imminent; he does not see the distant to be imminent or vice versa. If it ever happens that something truly near is seen as distant by an individual, it shows that his identifying faculty has failed to efficiently establish a connection with that matter and see it in its true position. These types of cognition predominantly have to do with one's mental and psychological aspects. For example, Resurrection seems to be a very distant event in the eyes of the disbeliever and yet imminent in the eyes of the *mu'min*. The more one's degrees of *iman* rise, the closer he sees the Day of Resurrection, and it is the *mu'min* himself who has been able to rightfully comprehend the closeness of such a day, owing it to the existential transformation he has

undergone; as long as such a change does not take place, the Day of Resurrection will continue to seem distant.

فَإِنَّكُمْ لَوْ قَدْ عَايَنْتُمْ مَا قَدْ عَايَنَ مَنْ مَاتَ مِنْكُمْ بَجَرِعْتُمْ وَ وَهَلْتُمْ وَ
 سَمِعْتُمْ وَ أَطَعْتُمْ وَ لَكِنَّ مَحْجُوبٌ عَنْكُمْ مَا قَدْ عَايَنُوا وَ قَرِيبٌ مَا يُطْرَحُ
 الْحِجَابُ

If you could see that which has been seen by those of you who have died, you would be puzzled and troubled. Then you would have listened and obeyed; but what they have seen is yet curtained off from you, but shortly the curtain will be thrown off. (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 20)

It is due to this that the believer can never attend to anything in this world without considering the Hereafter as well; the Hereafter always factors into his calculations, and he deems anything the Hereafter is not part of the equation of as merely worldly and material.

2.5. Existential Transition to the Spiritual Worlds

With *iman* seated in one's heart, the path to the world of spirituality is paved and he settles in one of these worlds. Spirituality does not sum up to one world but rather, encompasses many worlds. With *iman* settling in one's heart, he moves towards the most complete world of spirituality. The dominant rules of these worlds are all moral ones.

It must be noted that every action taking place in each of these worlds has its own ruling particular to that world. If a demeanor is considered good in one world, it will not be bad in another, but it is possible for it not to be very appropriate and the best therein. Because of this, religion invites people to the best spiritual world whose moral code is the highest of all. Religion shows the way to such a world. Every good act can lead to a better deed and this can raise one to other worlds. Reaching higher and transcendent spiritual worlds only happens through change and evolution in this mechanism, and for change to happen, the necessary and sufficient condition is *iman*. Every degree of *iman* that is achieved puts one in a certain respective spiritual world. The actions of a person situated in higher spiritual worlds might seem unexplainable and unjustifiable for those in lower spiritual worlds. Such a construct cannot be explained through words and

discourse; one must enter this existential journey and experience those changes and evolutions for himself, and until then not only will words fall short of getting this experience across, they might even add to the ambiguity. As a matter of fact, sometimes the appearance of an act may be the same in different spiritual worlds, with there being great variance between them on the inside and in essence. It is these resemblances in appearance that opens the windows of different spiritual worlds to each other, allowing them to acknowledge each other to an extent. For example, patience in the face of prohibited desires is applauded in all spiritual worlds as a good act, nonetheless, if this patience originates from modesty and is out of respect for the presence of the Creator, it will be much more applauded than when it is out of fear of retribution in return for committing a sin.

By taking a look at the outcomes we listed, one can get a grasp of some of the differences between the *mu'min* and *kafir*. Dividing people into *mu'mins* and *kafirs* is the most fundamental division acknowledged in religious literatures. *Iman* and *kufr* are two characteristics that really and essentially segregate people from one another and place an existential difference between them. One's senses, feelings, emotions, behavior, and in one word, one's entire existential construct undergo such transformation upon the coming of *iman*; something that cannot be achieved through any other means. Other differences between people are not that important; variety in language, ethnicity, skin color, birthplace, intelligence, talent, gender, etc. bring about no essential or fundamental difference. These things do not come by choice so that one can be proud or upset in having the desirable or undesirable of them respectively.

It is only when one enters the realm of *iman* that he gains the ability to discern and identify true human values. It is within this realm that everyone sees each other as beautiful, helpful, in need of each other, and deserving respect. It is here that people see the one identity they all share, and it is also here that others' pains and joy are one's own pain and joy. It is *iman* that tears apart the made-up veils people have put between each other, and changes the grudges and animosities between them into friendship and love. The solidarity between the *mu'mins* is higher than that of relatives and there is nothing that can bring two people together like this. Indeed, it is *iman* that gathers those dispersed and scattered; no force can eradicate this solidarity and connection. Imam Sadiq (a) has been narrated to have said,

The *mu'min* is the brother of the *mu'min*; they are one body. If pain and hardship befall one of them, the rest of the body feels this pain. Their soul is of one soul, and indeed the soul of the *mu'min* is more attached to the soul of God than the rays of the sun to the sun itself. (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:166)

From what was mentioned, it becomes manifest that when it is said that someone is brave or kind, we are faced with a proposition containing a specific fact about that person. But when we say someone is a *mu'min*, although it is also a single proposition, it gives much information about that person: it means he is truthful, kind, trustworthy, God wary, etc., such that if after this proposition, we continue by saying he is a liar and betrayer, the addressee will sense discrepancy between the two statements (i.e. that he is a *mu'min* and at the same time a liar or betrayer).¹

Now, keeping what was said in mind, how can one explain the essence of *iman* in a way encompassing all of its characteristics and particularities? Here, we are dealing with theories that we have no choice but to assess through the mentioned characteristics. If the lack of each and every one of these characteristics does not refute the theory at hand, it will at the very least expose its deficiency.

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¹ Regarding the characteristics of the Mu'mins, see Majlisi (1403AH, 64:261-385) and Harrani (1983, 212, 217).

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