

IMAN AND ISLAM IN THE QUR'AN

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This study is based on a compilation of the usages of various forms of iman and islām as listed in Flugel's Concordance. It is perhaps significant that the majority of these pages are those with the verbal form of the word. In the case of iman, the most common form is *āmanū*, of which there are two hundred and forty-four instances.

This seems to suggest that the Qur'ān in addressing those who believe was exhorting them to act in a certain manner, or to orient themselves and their actions in a particular direction, rather than to possess 'a certain abstract substance (to have faith).

The pattern which recurred most frequently was *yā ayyuha alladhina amanū* which is translated 'O ye who believe'. There are fifty-five instances. These contexts suggest that belief is an on-going active process, and that those who believe cannot just rest content in their certain salvation, but are in constant need of reformation and improvement. In all of these instances, the invocation 'O ye who believe' is followed by a command to some particular action.

Believers are exhorted not to follow Satan (24:21), to fast (2: 179), to take precautions in battle (4: 73), to remember God's favour towards them (33: 9), not to indulge in usury (2: 278), to fear God and crave the means to approach Him (5: 39), to stand

steadfast (5: 11), not to be treacherous (8: 27), and not to take idolaters as patrons (4: 143).

Several instances suggest that belief is an active response to God, helping him (47: 8). One such instance reads:

“O ye who believe! answer God and His Apostle when He calls you to that which quickens you.” (8: 24).

This would seem to indicate that response to Revelation is being ‘Quickened’, coming alive, and that it is a process which continues after the believer has entered the community of the faithful.

The second most frequently recurring pattern was *amanū wa ‘amilū Sālihāt* which was translated ‘believe and do right’. There were thirty-six instances of this.

The promise that those who believe and do right will enter Paradise was frequent. It was stated that the unjust are the opposite of those who believe and do right (3: 50). Several times it was stated that those who believe and do right are the best of creatures (98: 6), They need have no fear (6: 48), they may expect God to support them (26: 227), and to answer their prayers (42: 25). It would seem significant that the phrase ‘believe and do right’ recurs so regularly the implication would seem to be that ‘to believe’ and ‘to do right’ are parts of one process, which are not to be separated—the process of entering into an active relationship with God. The contexts mentioned above all seem to indicate that

God also acts in response to the human action of believing and doing right, and that His response is to help and to reward.

There were three instances where to believe was related to fighting in God's cause.

Belief in the sense of acceptance of the unseen is indicated twice:

“Say to those who believe not, ‘Act according to your power; verily, We are acting. And wait yet; verily, We are waiting too!’” “God's are the unseen things of the heavens and of the earth; and unto Him the affairs doth all return.” (11: 122)

Belief in the unseen is thus equated with waiting in expectancy for the hidden to be made known; belief is certainty that the unseen will be known, and hence ordering one's life in expectation of a certain judgment. This seems very closely parallel to the Pauline affirmation:

“For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” (Romans, 8: 24)

If one asks what is the object of belief according to the Qur'ān' one receives the impression that the first and most emphatic exhortation of the Qur'ān is the commandment to believe in the Judgment Day. There are instances of this commandment.

“when the Day comes, then it will be too late to believe. (6: 159)

“And when it has fallen—will ye believe in it now?” (10:52)”
Those who believe not would hurry it on; and those who believe shrink with terror at it and know that it is true.” (42: 17)

If it is right to consider that *imān* is certainty that the Day will come, then perhaps one can say that this truth which is to be believed is both objective and subjective. It is objective in the sense that the eventual arrival of the Day is posited as an objective fact like the arrival of any other day. It is subjective in the sense that the response in the believer’s heart—what the waiting for the Day means to him, and how it affects his life—is necessarily subjective. On the Day, she will be alone.

Other phrases which are regularly used to denote the objects of belief are:

“Belief in God and His Apostles, and the Book which He hath revealed to His Apostle, and the Books which He sent down before; for whoso disbelieves in God, and His angels, and His Apostle and the Last Day, has erred a wide error.” (4: 135)

These additional objects of belief would seem complementary rather than opposed or even extraneous to the central warning to believe in the Day. Belief in God Who will judge men on the Day; to believe in God without believing in the Day would seem false in the perspective of the Qur’ānic imperatives.

The significance of works can also perhaps be best understood by viewing works as the response of the individual to the expectancy of the coming of the Day. The individual is often

warned to believe and do right because he must fear the Day. It would be wrong, however, to deduce from this that imān means simply fear. On the contrary, as Ringgren has pointed out, the sense of the word imān as used both in pre-Islamic poetry and in the Qurʾān is the opposite of fear. Ringgren has maintained that the words related to imān carry connotations of security, trust and confidence, and that such words imply the opposite condition to fear. In the Qurʾān there are several instances where such words are used in the sense of trust and certainty. For example, it is narrated of Joseph that the king thought him worthy to be placed in a position of permanent ‘trust’ (12: 54). In this instance, the translation ‘trust’ indicates that the meaning is completely reliable and secure. One of the early Meccan sūrahs contains the promise:

“So let them serve the Lord of this hour Who feeds them against hunger and makes them safe against fear.” (106: 3)

In at least one instance al-amānah has the meaning of a responsibility laid upon men, in the sense of something which is entrusted to them, a trust.

Verily, we offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, and shrank from it; but man bore it.” (33: 72)

It is, however, certainly true that believers are often warned to fear God and the Day, and disbelievers are condemned because they jeer and mock and do not fear.

“They only believe in our signs who ... call upon their Lord with fear and hope.” (32:15)

This is yet another example of paradox resulting from the mode of expression of Semitic prophecy. Believers should fear, and should also be free from fear because God is both righteous and trustworthy. Those who are proud and hypocritical are warned to fear because He knows them and will judge them, and those who are humble and sincere, and who give alms and obey are assured of their reward and their freedom from fear.

Works should lead to no fear if the works are sincerely offered in gratitude to God; but works in themselves are no guarantee of salvation, because God knows the heart, the intention, that lies behind the works, and will pass judgment on the Day.

There are three contexts where increase of faith is mentioned.

“That those who have been given the Book may be certain, and that those who believe may be increased in faith.” (74: 31).

These contexts seem to imply that the Qurʾān as it continued to come to the believers effected a continuous process of growth in understanding and faith in the hearts of the persons who responded. The believers grew closer to God’s purpose for them, and the unbelievers, as they continued to mock and scorn the Revelation, grew increasingly separated.

Many of the contexts of imān describe the qualities of those who do not believe. Disbelief is often equated with failure to recognize the signs from God. Many of these signs are the destructions wrought by God among the peoples who rejected the warnings delivered by the former prophets.

Several contexts emphasize hypocrisy as one of the major aspects of disbelief.

“And God bears witness that the hypocrites are liars.... That is because they believed and then disbelieved, wherefore is a stamp set on their hearts so that they do not understand.” (63: 2)

There are a number of contexts which indicate that God hardens the hearts of those who disbelieve. A characteristic instance is as follows:

“Verily, those who disbelieve, it is the same to them if ye warn them or if ye warn them not; they will not believe... God has set a seal upon their hearts and on their hearing... They would deceive God and those who do believe: but they deceive only themselves and they do not perceive.” (2: 7 and 8).

In each of these instances, it appears that to disbelieve is equated with refusal to perceive, refusal to recognize the significance of the signs. It seems that disbelief is willful rejection of the warnings, and that God responds by abandoning the disbelievers to their fate. In no instances does the hardening of hearts appear as an arbitrary act of God against innocent men; it is

always related to the activities and attitudes of those who scorn the warnings and the prophets.

The contexts of the term ‘they do not believe’ indicate that ‘to disbelieve’ is an active attitude towards life as a whole. In the early Meccan surahs, those who disbelieve are those who heed not the warnings of the Judgment Day. They laugh at those who believe (83: 29). They quarrel, especially over theology (16: 43); they value the things of this world (12: 107), and worship idols. Thus the opposite of Imān is an active attribute of character; it is the attitude of heedlessness and scorn and pride.

It is certainly clear that *lorān* is often used in the Qur’ān with reference to those who follow the warnings from the former prophets.

There are a number of instances where the term is used in connection with Abraham. Abraham warned against idolatry, and those who believed his warning were promised security and guidance (6: 77). There are also eleven instances where the term is used in connection with Moses. In addition there are twenty-two instances where the term is used with reference to the warnings brought by other prophets after Abraham and Moses. A typical instance of such a verse is as follows:

“And when our order came We saved Hud, and those who believe with him, by mercy from Us; and We saved them from harsh torment. That (tribe of) ‘Ad denied the signs of the Lord, and rebelled against His apostles, and followed the bidding of

every headstrong tyrant, They were followed in this world by a curse, and on the resurrection day—'Did not 'Ad disbelieve their Lord! away with 'Ad the people of Hud'." (12: 62)

It appears that Imān was an attribute of the persons who responded to the messages brought by Abraham, Moses and the former prophets, who feared God, and lived in expectancy of the Judgment Day. This suggests that Imān was not restricted to those who responded to the Qur'ān but applied to all who responded to the warnings of the former prophets.

The Qur'ān refers several times to the matter of belief and disbelief among the Jews and the Christians in the lifetime of Muhammad. The people of the Book are severely criticised for their quarrelling and their disobedience. It seems clear, however, that some among these people have the attribute of Imān.

“They are not all alike. Of the people of the Book there is a nation upright.... They believe in God, and in the last Day, and bid what is responsible, and forbid what is wrong, and vie in charity; these are among the righteous.

What ye do of good surely God will not deny, for God knows those who fear.” (3: 106)

In another instance, the Qur'ān states:” And We sent Noah and Abraham; and placed in their seed prophecy and Book; and some of them are guided, though many of them are workers of abomination!

Then we followed up their footsteps with our apostles; and we followed them up with Jesus, the son of Mary; and we gave him the gospel; and We placed in the hearts of those who followed him kindness and compassion. But mockery, they invented it;... But we gave to those who believe amongst them their hire; though many amongst them were workers of abomination....

That the people of the Book may know that they cannot control aught of God's grace; and that grace is in God's hands. He gives it to whom He will." (57: 24 ff.)

Another verse says:

“ And God has struck out a parable: two men, one of them dumb, able to do nothing, a burden to his lord; wherever he directs him he comes not with success ; is he to be held equal with him who bids what is just and who is on the right way?

Do they not see the birds subjected in the vault of the sky—none holds them in but God: verily, in that is a sign unto a people who believe.” (16: 81).

The implication here would seem to be that for man to be properly subjected to God, as the birds in the vault of the sky, would be for him to be active and creative, on the right way. It appears that the ‘bad’ person is the man useless to God, able to do nothing, negative, sterile.

Further contexts of 'Islām' suggest that there is a close relation-ship between Islam and good works, and also that God is an active agent in leading men to submission.

Conclusion

It appears that Imān and Islām in the Qur'ān are both attributes of persons in action, terms which distinguish certain persons in opposition to other persons. Persons who have these attributes will be recognizable by their fruit—justice, charity, humility. Persons who do not have these attributes will be recognizable by their fruit—injustice, idolatry, mutual quarrelling, claims to exclusive control of God's grace, and the rejection of prophets.

The mode of expression in the Qur'ān is the mode characteristic of Semitic prophecy, that is, the mode of exhortation in particular situations. Hence paradox in Semitic prophecy results not from inherent contradiction, but from the fact that the prophecies are a revelation of God's judgment on particular situations, and the judgment varies with the situation. Thus the exhortation to fear God is a warning directed against those who are proud, heedless of the coming judgment, and unjust. The assurance that those who believe need not fear is an affirmation that sincere response to guidance from God will assuredly receive a just reward.

It is true that the Qurʾān warns of harsh judgment on hypocrites and liars, but it is difficult to understand how anyone could imagine that the New Testament promises a more easy fate for such persons.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.” (Matt. 23: 27)