

Iman

Iman is an Arabic word which has been naturalized in many Muslim lands, where it is commonly understood. All those whose mother tongue is Persian, Turkish, Swahili or Urdu are more or less familiar with it. Though in English the words, like faith, belief and trust are also used in the same sense, neither of them is fully synonymous with *iman* which is commonly used and generally understood. To make its sense clear, we cite here a few examples:

When we have full trust in the integrity of a person and unhesitatingly rely on him, we say that we have *iman* in him. Similarly when we believe fully in the veracity of a statement, we say that we have *iman* in it. If we have a firmly founded faith in an intellectual system or 'ideology' and feel such an ardent attachment and zeal for it that we spontaneously make it the basis of our activities and life with perfect peace of mind, inclination and fervour and establish the program of our activities and life on it, we say that we have *iman* in that 'ideology'.

These examples show that *iman* means firm faith and complete trust in a subject, an idea, a doctrine etc.

The antonyms of *iman* are doubt, reluctance and indecision. The doubt may be in respect of a person, a point or a doctrine. It may be fifty per cent either way. It is also possible that it may be accompanied by a short-lived optimism or pessimism. However, in any case, its natural result is distrust. Even when doubt is accompanied by optimism it is not possible to attach oneself to and believe in a person or an ideology, especially in cases where it is necessary, in pursuance of such an attachment, that one should make a practical stand in the face of real or potential dangers and should show perseverance.

Now let us look minutely at the life of man in order to find out what is the role of *iman* in our modern life, let alone the olden times.

But from which point should we start our study? Should we do so from the exciting scenes of the heroic struggle of the under-privileged but faithful people who fight for acquiring their human rights or from a

comparatively tranquil area, for example from the warm atmosphere of the life of a family or a school? In our view it would be better to study the question at several stages, so that we may reach the depth of the matter.

Role of iman in the life of a child

Iman is the foremost psychological factor in the life of a child even in this age of advanced technology and mastery over space. *Iman* is the axis round which the life of a child mostly revolves. It is *iman* in those associated with him, e.g. his parents, brothers, sisters, teachers etc., in the matter of things which he does in imitation of them or according to their instructions and *iman* in his own efforts and discernment in the matter of things which he does on his own account. The children trust their parents, their brothers, their sisters and their teachers. They have faith in the correctness of what their elders teach them and in what they do independently on their own account.

If as a test case this vital trust is taken away for a few days from the children of a family even in one of the technologically and industrially most advanced countries and is replaced by doubt and suspicion, you will see how those poor children are doomed. No amount of scientific or technical aid will be able to bring back their lost zeal and self-confidence unless and until that trust or *iman* is restored.

The sound and balanced growth of a child and his future happiness largely depend upon the *iman* of his parents, teachers and all those who are responsible for his upbringing. Only those who have *iman* in their vital task can acquit themselves well in this respect. There is no doubt that a mother who fosters and brings up her child with a sense of devotion and responsibility, a father or a teacher who carries out his responsibility wholeheartedly, all have a role in ensuring the happy life of their ward.

A family atmosphere which lacks devotion, the mutual trust of the parents and the children, and their reciprocal respect for the rights of each other is one of the most important factors causing misery to the children. In such an insipid and dark family atmosphere the child does not feel peace of mind and confidence. Gradually he loses faith in everything including himself and is deprived of the most valuable factors of progress and evolution viz. *iman* in himself and in the environments of his life.

In principle the *iman* of a child is largely a reflection of the love and trust which his parents show to him and to each other. Similarly the *iman* of a teacher has a profound and constructive effect on his pupils, especially during the early years of their education.

Undoubtedly a part of your best memories must have been related to the days when you enjoyed the guidance of a sincere and dedicated teacher in your school.

Subdual by doubt

With the approach of adolescence the *iman* of the childhood is subjected to incredibility and reluctance. Even during his childhood one is faced occasionally with the events which violently shake his confidence in a person or a thing. However, during this period another *iman* fills the place of the first *iman* (*viz. iman* in the opposite direction of the first *iman*), without the child being faced with a prolonged doubt. But during this period he does not suffer from a feeling of uncertainty and usually develops confidence in the opposite direction. That is why a child often changes his views rapidly and in quick succession. For example, at one moment he is not on speaking terms with his play-mate, but the next moment he again becomes chummy with him. Often during a single spell of play this drama is staged several times.

Gradually this period passes away and adolescence commences. During that period a number of physical and mental developments take place.

One of these changes is this that one loses faith in the correctness of many ideas in which he believed previously during his childhood. One is subjected to incredibility and reluctance, the scope of which varies from individual to individual. Some persons lose faith in almost everything and become skeptical.

Constructive doubt

Adolescent incredulity is a very effective factor in the human development, provided it is accompanied by a sort of earnestness and faith in investigation and search. Only this sort of incredulity may be called constructive doubt. Although the function of doubt is to destroy all that we already believe and construction is connected with the search and investigation which we undertake after this destruction, but as we do not undertake investigation and research unless the unstable beliefs of childhood are destroyed we consider doubt also to be a participant in this construction and call it the "constructive doubt".

Role of iman again

Adolescent incredulity usually impels man to inquire and investigate. It may be said that at this stage man wishes to discard what he was taught during the preadolescent period and in this field also, like many other fields, he wants to stand on his own legs. He wants to be independent and to show that he is no more a child. This doubt is, therefore, accompanied by a sort of *iman* – *iman* in himself; *iman* in this that he should stand on his own legs and should see what he can understand himself. With the adolescent incredulity we find ourselves face to face with a new world a boundless world of unknown things. At that time a desire to know is roused and we set out to inquire and investigate with abundant

hope and usually with *iman* in this that now we can acquire purer and more dependable information about these unknown things by relying on our own power of recognition, investigation and research.

If adolescent incredulity is not followed by a positive desire to discover and an earnestness in inquiry, it cannot be called constructive. In that case it will shake our confidence in everything and will bring about only boring reluctance. Thus *iman*, in rediscovery, has a positive role during the marvelous period of adolescence.

Scientific and industrial progress is normally the outcome of the extensive efforts of those who carry out incessant research and to make one discovery undertake hundreds of tests and trials. Sometimes to ascertain the validity or otherwise of a new scientific or industrial idea which comes to their mind they repeat the same test so many times. You might have observed some scientists from close quarters and might have noticed with what dedication and zeal they follow their job and what a glitter of *iman* in their work and in scientific research sparkles from their face. It is possible that you yourself may also have experienced the enjoyment of this delight, exultation and *iman*.

Constructive iman

We are talking about the role of that *iman* which is constructive and which effectively leads to action, and not of that which only keeps the hope alive during a period of distress without giving a definite direction to life.

While the latter kind of *iman* also has some value in human life, its bad effects cannot be overlooked. We leave the consideration of the pros and cons of this sort of *iman* to some other occasion. Suffice it to say that the Qur'an does not regard this *iman* enough for the prosperity of mankind even in respect of faith in Allah. Tens of the verses of the Qur'an expressly say that human salvation depends on the *iman* accompanied by such action as is proper and commensurate to the goal. The verses 82 and 277 of the Surah al-Baqarah may be cited in this connection.

The Surah Yunus, verse 22, the Surah al-Ankabut, verse 65 and the Surah Luqman verse 32 severely censure those who do not pay much attention to Allah in their ordinary life and indulge in all sorts of perversions; and only recollect Him in the moments of distress and misery. The Qur'an at several places describes the deeds as the touch stone of *iman*. Referring to those who make tall claims, but at critical moments evade making a sacrifice, it says: "*Do men imagine that they will be left at ease on saying we believe and will not be tested with affliction?*" (Surah Ankabut, 29 : 2).

Unbridled liberty is not compatible with belief in an ideology

Constructive and positive *iman* naturally creates certain obligations and limitations. In human society every ideology has its own rules to which those who believe in it, have to adhere. Even the nihilists who do not accept any system have to observe certain norms and rules. The groups which form clubs to oppose the conventional way of life, do not allow a person conforming to the normal standards, to attend them, because they consider such a thing to militate against their system. If a system of 'no system' creates certain duties, how can it be expected that a constructive ideology should involve no moral and legal obligations. The liberal minded section of our society should know that escape from responsibilities is neither in keeping with realism nor with true liberal mindedness.

The *iman* of childhood despite its purity and serenity is incomplete because it does not originate from consciousness accompanied by an analysis. It is mostly an involuntary response to the environment and is a sort of its echo. That is why it cannot stand its ground in the face of the doubts of adolescence, and as we said earlier, is shaken with the onset of puberty.

The fact is that nothing more than such a simple and superficial *iman* can be expected during the period of childhood. But during adolescence and the period following it we can have a conscious *iman*, an *iman* obtained as the result of calculation, study and deep analysis. The amount of success in obtaining conscious *iman* varies from individual to individual. In the case of many people the doubt of adolescence is very simple and of limited effect. It little affects most of the questions in which they believed from their childhood.

The *iman* of such people even in their mature age is more or less a follow up of that which they had during their childhood. It only deepens with the passage of time. Anyhow, it cannot be called a conscious *iman*. Such people are common even among the highly educated classes. Many an eminent scholar, though outstanding in his own field, has without any critical examination worthy of his learned position, followed the same doctrine or the same political or social policy as was provided to him by his environment. Islam does not approve of this attitude. The highest source of Islam, viz. the Qur'an repeatedly exhorts us to deliberation and logical analysis. It disapproves following a system or a doctrine blindly. It says:

"They say: We found our ancestors following a certain belief and we are guided by their footsteps. Even so we sent not a warner before you (O' Muhammad!) into any township but its luxurious ones said: We found our ancestors following a certain belief and we are following in their footsteps". (Surah al-Zukhruf, 43:22 - 23).

Again it says:

"When it is said to them: Come to that which Allah has revealed and to the messenger, they say: Enough for us is that wherein we found our ancestors. What! Even though their fathers had no knowledge whatsoever and no guidance". (Surah al-Maidah, 5: 104).

On the question of the adoption of a doctrine the Qur'an emphasizes that *iman* should be based on knowledge and satisfactory study. If it is not based on knowledge, it has no value and search for truth should be continued.

After adducing certain logical arguments against idol worship, the Qur'an says:

"Most of the unbelievers follow only conjecture in the matter of idol worship. Surely conjecture by no means can take the place of truth. Surely, Allah is aware of what they do". (Surah Yunus, 10:36).

From Qur'anic point of view it is the duty of man that irrespective of the ideas imparted to him by his parents or acquired by him from his environment during his childhood, he should exercise his learning and knowing faculties, to look carefully at himself and the world surrounding him and should continue to contemplate coolly till he arrives at a definite conclusion which may form the basis of his belief and personal and social behavior in life.

Outlook on the world

The adoption of such a goal and direction of life has a direct connection with one's outlook on the world and man's role in it. As this outlook is the only sanction and infrastructure of any ideology, one should be careful in selecting it and should refrain from being complacent or superficial in this respect.

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