



Weakness of faith

[Kinza Ramzan]

Weakness of Faith

What is faith?

The Islamic concept of faith is known as “iman” in Arabic. It is one of the five pillars of Islam, and it refers to a deep, unshakable belief in the oneness of Allāh, the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ and the divine origin and authority of the Qur’ān.

It is something that Muslims must continuously strive to strengthen and deepen throughout their lives. This involves seeking knowledge of Islam, reflecting on the meaning and significance of its teachings, and cultivating a close personal relationship with Allāh through prayer, supplication, and good deeds.

The root of the word is “amana” (أمن), which means to have faith, be secure, safe, or free from fear. From this root, several related words are derived, including:

- Aman (أمان): security, safety, protection
- Mumin (مؤمن): believer, one who has faith
- Amn (أمن): peace, tranquillity, security

The word “iman” (إيمان) is derived from the same root, but with a different pattern of letters. Specifically, it is formed by adding the letters “ya” (ي) and “mim” (م) to the root. In Arabic grammar, “iman” is a feminine noun that is typically used with the definite article “al” (الإيمان) to refer to the specific concept of faith in Islam.

The word “iman” can be translated into English as faith, belief, or trust. However, it carries additional connotations in Arabic that are not fully captured by these translations.

For example, the word “iman” implies a deep, rooted conviction in the truth of something, as well as a sense of loyalty, commitment, and devotion. It also suggests a sense of security and peace that comes from having faith in Allāh and His guidance.

Causes of decrease of imaan

Internal Causes

These are many factors.

i. Ignorance

This is one of the most significant causes for the decreases of iman, just as knowledge is one of the greatest causes for the increase of iman. The knowledgeable Muslim does not prefer the love and enactment of matters that harm him and cause him pain and misery to that which constitutes his benefit, success and rectification.

The ignorant person on the other hand, because of his excess ignorance and deficient knowledge, he may give preference to some of these things over that which contains his success and rectification. This is because the scales with him have been turned upside down and it is because of his feeble perception.

Knowledge lies at the root of all good and ignorance lies at the root of all evil

Ibn al-Qayyim writes: "It has been purported that the corruption of intent is caused by the corruption of knowledge. Since, if the person truly knew of the harm and its implications within the detrimental action, he would not have preferred it. This is why when one has knowledge that a particular desirous and delicious food contains poison, he does not dare approach it. Thus, his knowledge of the various types of harm present within the harmful act is weak and his resolve to avoid what he could fall into as a result of committing the act is also weak. One who examines the Noble Qur’an, will find the greatest indication that ignorance is the cause for sins and disobedience.

Allah says:

'....Ask them: "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?..." (Al-Qur'an 39:9)

Allah says:

" ... They said, 'O Musa, Make for us a deity just as they have deities.' He said, 'Verily, you are a people who are ignorant.'" [Al-Qur'an 7:138]

Allah says:

"And remember Lut. When he said to his people, 'Do you approach vile sins while you see (each other). Do you approach men in your lusts rather than women. Rather, you are a people who are ignorant.'" [Al-Qur'an 27:54-55]

Allah says:

"Say, 'Do you order me to worship other than Allah, O you ignorant people.'" [Al-Qur'an 39:64]

Allah says:

"And stay in your houses and do not display yourselves like that of the times of ignorance ... " [Al-Qur'an 33:33]

The meaning of ignorance ... " in these *ayah's* is the doer's ignorance of its consequences and obligation of the anger and punishment of Allah. It is his ignorance of the fact that Allah sees and observes him and ignorance of the decrease of *iman* that returns to him or its complete disappearance.

Mujahid said: "Everyone who disobeys his Lord; he is an ignorant person, until he comes away from his disobedience."

He also said: "Anyone who commits disobedience of Allah, that is ignorance on his behalf until he leaves off his disobedience."

As-Siddi states: "As long as he is disobeying Allah, then he is an ignorant person."

ii. Heedlessness, Aversion and Forgetfulness

These three matters constitute immense cause for the decrease of iman. One who is stricken with heedlessness, troubled with forgetfulness and turns away, his iman will decrease in accordance to the presence of some or all of these three matters. It will impose on him ailment of the heart or its death because of its prevalence by misconceptions and desires.

Concerning heedlessness, Allah has condemned it in His Book and He mentioned that it is a reprehensible mannerism, which is from the code and conduct of the disbelievers and hypocrites. Allah also warns against it very severely. Allah says:

"And surely, We have created for Hell, many (a people) from the jinn and mankind. They have hearts with which they understand not, they have eyes with which they see not and they have ears with which they hear not: they are like cattle. Rather, they are even more astray. They indeed, are the heedless ones." [Al-Qur'an 7:179]

Allah says:

"Verily, those who hope not for their meeting with Us, but are pleased and satisfied with the life of the present world and those who are heedless of our signs; those, their abode will be the Fire because of what they used to earn." [Al-Qur'an 10:7-8]

Allah says:

" ... and verily, many among mankind are heedless of our signs." [Al-Qur'an 10:92]

Allah also says:

"They know only the outside appearance of the life of this world whilst they are heedless of the Hereafter." [Al-Qur'an 30:7]

Allah also says to His Messenger:

"And remember your Lord (by your tongue and) within yourself, humbly and with fear without loudness in words in the mornings and in the afternoons and be not of those who are heedless." [Al-Qur'an 7:205]

Thus heedlessness, which is defined as negligence that occurs as a result of a lack of care and alertness, is a dangerous disease. If it afflicts a person and overwhelms him, he will not bother with obedience of Allah, His remembrance and worship. Instead, he will be occupied with matters of distraction, which distance him from the remembrance of Allah. Moreover, if he does perform certain deeds in obedience to Allah, he does them in an inadequate state and inappropriate manner, so his actions are void of humility, humbleness, repentance, fear, tranquility, truthfulness and sincerity.

Allah also informs that He has set a veil and locks upon the heart of the one who turns away, so he does not comprehend or come upon the right path, ever, as in Allah's statement:

"And who is more oppressive than one who is reminded of the signs of His Lord, but turns away from them forgetting what (deeds) his hands have sent forth. Truly, We have set veils over their hearts lest they should understand it (i.e., the Qur'an), and in their ears, deafness. And if you call them to guidance, even then they will never be guided." [Al-Qur'an 18:57]

Allah also informs that the one who turns away from the remembrance of Allah is assigned associates from amongst the Shayatin, whom thereafter corrupt his religion, as Allah says:

"And whosoever turns away from the remembrance of the Most Beneficent, We shall appoint for him a Shaytan to be an (intimate) companion." [Al-Qur'an 43:36]

Furthermore, Allah informs that the one who turns away will bear a heavy burden of sins on the Day of Resurrection and that he will enter a severe punishment.

Allah says:

"Whoever turns away from it (i.e., the Qur'an), verily, he will bear a heavy burden (of sins) on the Day of Resurrection." [Al-Qur'an 20:100]

The forgetfulness mentioned in the Qur'an is of two types. The first type is one that a person is not excused for. This is in reference to the type that occurs deliberately, as in His saying:

"And do not be like those who forget Allah, thereupon Allah caused them to forget their own selves." [Al-Qur'an 59:19]

The second type is one in which the person is excused. This is in reference to when the reason for the forgetfulness does not emanate from the person (whereby he intends that), as in the saying of Allah:

" ... Our Lord, do not hold us to account if we forget or commit mistakes ... " [Al-Qur'an 2:286]

It has been recorded in a hadith (in connection to this ayah) that Allah said: *"I have done so Allah will not hold to us to account if we forget or commit mistakes ... - and all praise is for Allah. Related by Muslim 1/116 from the Hadith of Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him.*

The Muslim is required to fight his nafs and to distance it from falling into this, so that he does not become harmed in his religion and iman.

iii. Committing Disobedience and Embarking upon Sinful Deeds

The harm and bad effect of this factor upon iman is well known to all. Thus iman, as stated by more than one of the Salaf, *"increases with obedience and decreases with disobedience"*. Just as accomplishing the obligatory and recommended deeds that Allah has ordained increases iman, then likewise, performing the forbidden and disliked deeds that Allah has not enjoined decreases iman.

However, sins vary greatly with respect to their rank, the evils they entail and the intensity of their harm. This is as Ibn al-Qayyim has mentioned: *"Without doubt, kufr; fusuq and disobedience are of levels just as iman and righteous actions are of levels. Allah says:*

They are in varying grades before Allah and Allah is All-Seer of what they do. [Al-Qur'an 3:163]

He says:

For all there will be degrees, according to that which they did. And your Lord is not unaware of what they do. [Al-Qur'an 6:132]

He says:

The postponing (of a sacred month) is indeed an addition to kufr ... [Al-Qur'an 9:37]

He also says:

... As for those who believe, it has increased their iman and they rejoice. But as for those whose hearts is a disease, it will add doubt to their doubt. [Al-Qur'an 9:124-125]

Statements of this kind are many in the Qur'an..The Qur'an and Sunnah show that sins are of major and minor types. Allah says:

"And if you avoid the major of the sins that you are forbidden from, We shall remit for you your (minor) sins and admit you to a noble entrance." [Al-Qur'an 4:31]

Allah also says:

"Those who avoid major sins and Al-Fawahish except the small faults ... " [Al-Qur'an 53:32]

It is recorded in Sahih Muslim, that Abu Hurayrah, may Allah be pleased with him, relates the Messenger of Allah as saying: *"The five prayers, the Friday prayer to the (next) Friday prayer and Ramadhan to (the next) Ramadhan; they expiate all (sins committed) between them as long as the major ones are avoided."* (sahih muslim)

Also recorded in the Sahihayn, the Messenger of Allah was asked, "Which sin is the greatest before Allah?" He replied, *"That you ascribe to Allah an equal whilst it is He who created you."* It was asked, "Then which?" He said, *"That you kill your child in fear that he will also need nourishment alongside you."* It was asked, "Then which?" He answered, *"That you have a sexual relationship with the wife of your neighbor."* [105]Al-Bukhari, (12/187 Faith) and Muslim, 1/91, from the hadith of Ibn Mas'ud, may Allah be pleased with him.

Many other texts also show the varying levels of sins and that they are classified into major and minor ones.

Furthermore, from another perspective, these sins can be classified into four categories: Malikiyyah, Shaytaniyyah, Sab'iyyah and Bahimiyyah; all sins can be classified under these types.

Malikiyyah sins are committed when one takes upon himself qualities of Lordship, which are not befitting for him, such as majesty, pride, domination, subjugation, highness, enslavement of people and other qualities of this type. Sins belonging to this category are of the most serious type.

As for **Shaytaniyyah sins**, it is by resembling Shaytan in envy, oppression, cheating, hatred, deception, plotting evil, ordering disobedience of Allah and beautifying it, prohibiting obedience of Allah and censuring it, committing innovations in the religion of Allah and the call to innovations and deviation. This category is placed second to the first type with respect to its harms, even though its harms are lesser.

Sab'iyyah sins are sins of transgression, anger, spilling blood, pouncing upon the weak and incapable. This gives birth to many types of harms to fellow humans and boldness towards committing oppression and transgression.

As for **Bahimiyyah sins**, examples of this are gluttony and the desire to satisfy lusts of the stomach and genital organs. This gives rise to fornication, adultery, theft, consumption of wealth belonging to orphans, miserliness, avarice, cowardice, restlessness, impatience and much more besides these.

This particular category is where most of the sins are perpetrated by people because of their incapability of committing sins of the Saba'iyyah and Malikiyyah type. It is from this category where they enter into the remaining categories, since this leads them to the rest by the reigns. Thus, as a result of this category they enter into the area of Saba'iyyah sins, then the Shaytaniyyah, then finally, towards contesting the Lordship and committing shirk in the oneness of Allah.

In any case, these matters show us that sins vary in their effect upon iman and upon its decrement and weakening of it.

This diversity of sins and of their effect upon iman trace back to a variety of considerations. Some of these are: the class of the sin, its amount, the degree of its harmful effects, the place, the time, with regard to its doer and other such considerations.

Ibn al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy upon him, says: "On the whole, the levels of Al-Fahishah (i.e., lewd and illicit deeds) are determined by their corresponding evils. Thus, the issue of a man who befriends a woman or a woman who befriends a man is deemed less evil than the issue of a man or woman who has an (illegal) sexual relationship."

The one who does the crime in secret is less sinful than the one who does it publicly. The one who conceals his sin is less sinful than the one who relates it publicly to the people; this one is far removed from receiving well being and pardon from Allah ...

Likewise, having a sexual encounter with a woman who has no husband is less sinful than having a sexual encounter with one who has a husband, because of the oppression and transgression it entails against the husband as well as ruining his bed. The sin of this person can be greater or lesser than the mere sin of fornication.

To have a sexual encounter with the wife of a neighbor is more severe than having a sexual encounter with one who is far from home, because of its connection to harming the neighbor and not maintaining the instruction of Allah and His Messenger with regard to the neighbor.

Similarly, having a sexual relationship with the wife of a soldier on Allah's cause is worse than having a sexual relationship with the wife of another ...

Just as its levels differ in relation to the person one has a sexual encounter with, then likewise, it also differs according to the place, the time, the circumstances and the doer.

To fornicate or commit adultery for example, in the days and nights of Ramadhan is more sinful than at any other time. Its occurrence in the blessed and virtuous places is more sinful than in any other places.

As for its difference in relation to its doer, it being committed by a free person is more vile than it being committed by a slave. This is why the punishment of the slave is half of that of the free person. It is more repugnant from the married person than the virgin; likewise the same applies for the old person in relation to the young person.

With what has preceded, the conclusion is that sins decrease iman and that the amount of decrease varies in accordance to a multitude of considerations. Some of these are:

The class of the sin

- The degree of its harmful effects
- The amount
- The place and time
- The indifference towards it
- The doer

The explanation of this has already preceded, and with Allah lies all tawfiq.

Some matters that protect a person from sins and help him to remain distant from them and to not fall into them are the knowledge of their dangers, what they give rise to, their evil consequences and extreme harms.

Ibn al-Qayyim mentions in this respect a brief and yet more than adequate statement, which is to the point. He says: "Lack of tawfiq; incorrectness of opinion; concealment of truth (from him); corruption of the heart, lack of

remembrance, squandering of time; dislike of creation (of him); alienation between the servant and his Lord; prevention of supplications being answered; hardness of heart; the exclusion of blessings in one's sustenance and life; deprivation of knowledge; the apparel of degradation; humiliation subjected by the enemy; constriction of the chest; being put to trial with evil companionship who corrupt the heart and waste time; lengthy anxiety and sorrow; hardship of life and gloominess of circumstance ... are a result of disobedience and negligence of the remembrance of Allah, which is comparable (in magnitude) to the vegetation that is produced by water and the burning that is caused by fire. The opposites of these matters arise from actions of obedience." (*Al-Fawa'id*, page 62. Also see *Al-Jawab al-Kafi* of Ibn al-Qayyim, page 46 and onwards)

iv. The nafs that Greatly Commands Evil

This is a condemned nafs, which Allah placed inside the individual. It orders him with every evil, invites him to all perils and guides him to every vulgarity.

This is its nature and that is its trait, except for the nafs that Allah grants tawfiq and which He makes firm and assists. None has been saved from the evil of his nafs except by the tawfiq of Allah, as Allah says relating from the wife of Al-'Aziz:

"Nor do I absolve my own self (of blame): the (human) nafs is certainly prone to evil, unless my Lord do bestow His Mercy: but surely my Lord is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful" [*Al-Qur'an* 12:53]

Allah says:

" ... And had it not been for the Grace of Allah and His Mercy on you, not one of you would ever have been pure ... " [*Al-Qur'an* 24:21]

Allah also says to the most honorable and beloved creation to Him:

"And had We not made you stand firm, you would nearly have inclined to them a little." [*Al-Qur'an* 17:74]

Furthermore, the Prophet used to teach them (i.e., the people) the 'Speech of Need' (Khutbah al-Hajah): *"All praise is for Allah; we praise Him, seek His aid and forgiveness. We seek refuge with Allah from the evil of our nafss and from the wickedness of our actions. Whosoever Allah guides, then none can misguide him and whosoever Allah misguides, then none can guide him."* (This speech has been related by Abu Dawud, 2/237, An-Nasa'i, 3/105 and others. Refer to Al-Albani's treatise, Khutbah al-Hajah for he gathered all the narrations and wordings of this speech.)

Thus, evil is concealed within the nafs and it necessitates actions of evil. If Allah lets the servant have his own way with his nafs, he will perish at the evil of his nafs and the evil actions that it sanctions. If Allah on the other hand, grants the servant tawfiq and assists him, he will deliver him from all of this.

Allah has made in contrast to this nafs, a nafs that is content not another nafs but a different characteristic of the same nafs. If the nafs that constantly commands evil urges the servant with something, the content nafs prohibits him from it. The person at times obeys this nafs, and at other times obeys the other; he himself is one of the two that is prevalent over him.

Ibn al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy upon him, states: "Allah has assembled two nafss: a nafs that greatly orders (evil) and a nafs that is content, and they are hostile towards one another. Whenever one diminishes, the other strengthens. Whenever one takes pleasure in something the other suffers pain as a result of it. Nothing is more difficult for the nafs that constantly encourages evil than performing deeds for Allah and preferring His pleasure to its own desire and there is nothing more beneficial to it than Allah. Likewise, there is nothing more difficult upon the content nafs than performing deeds for other than Allah and that which the incentives of desire bring about, and there is nothing more harmful to it than desire... and the war is continuous, it cannot come to an end until it completes its appointed time from this world." *Al-Jawab al-Kafi* of Ibn al-Qayyim, pg. 184-185.

Hence, there is nothing more harmful to a person's iman and religion than his nafs that constantly commands evil, whose standing and description is such. It is a primary reason and effective and active constituent that weakens iman, unsettles it and impairs it.

As such, it becomes imperative for the one who seeks to safeguard his iman from diminution and weakness to tend to the matter of calling his nafs to account, admonishing it and to increase in censuring it, so that he can deliver himself from its adverse and devastating consequences and ends.

Calling one's self to account is of two types: a type (that occurs) before the action and a type (that occurs) after the action.

As for the first type, it is to take a stance when one first has an intention and desire, and not to embark upon the action until it becomes clear to him that performing that action outweighs leaving it.

As for the second type, which is to take account of one's nafs after the action, this is of three sorts:

The first is to call it to account over any obedience in which it has fallen short with regard to the right of Allah, whereby it has not performed it in the manner required.

The second is to call his nafs to account over every action, which had he not undertaken would actually have better than having embarked upon it.

The third is that he calls his nafs to account for every permissible and habitual action; why did he embark upon it? Was his intention behind the action for Allah and the home of the Hereafter; so that he be profitable? Or did he desire the world and its immediate and instant (pleasures)? If so he would lose out on that profit and that achievement will pass him by.

The greatest harm upon the servant is negligence, to forgo calling oneself to take account, to let oneself go, to take things lightly and accommodate them. This will eventually lead him to destruction and this is the state of the people of delusion: one of them shuts their eyes to consequences, lets matters take their course and depends upon attaining pardon (from Allah). Thus, he neglects calling himself to account and pondering over the outcomes. When he does behave in this manner, committing sins become an effortless matter for him, he feels at ease with it and it becomes difficult for him to break away from his habitual sinning.

The sum and substance of this is for the person to first call himself to account over the obligatory duties. If he finds deficiency in this regard, he amends this either by repayment or rectification. He then calls himself to account over prohibited matters. If he knows that he has perpetrated something prohibited, he amends this through repentance, seeking forgiveness and enacting good deeds that wipe such bad deeds away. He then calls himself to account over heedlessness. If it is the case that he has been careless of that which he was created for, he amends this through remembrance and turning to Allah. He then calls himself to account over what he has spoken, or where his feet have taken him, or what his hands have struck out at or what his ears have listened out to: What did you intend from this? Who did you do it for?

He must know that for every movement and utterance he makes, two registers have to be set up: a register titled 'Who did you do it for?' and (the second register titled) 'In what manner did you do it?'

The first (register) is a question on sincerity and the second is a question on conformity (to the Shari'ah).

If the servant is responsible and accountable for everything: his hearing, his sight and his heart, it is therefore very becoming of him to call himself to account before the account is examined (ultimately, by Allah). The obligation of calling oneself to account is established by His saying:

"O you who believe! Fear Allah and keep your duty to Him. And let every person look to what he has sent forward for tomorrow ... " [Al-Qur'an 59:18]

We ask Allah that he give us refuge from the evils of our nafss and from the wickedness of our actions. Indeed, He is the Most Munificent, the Generous.

2. External Causes

These are external causes or influences, which bear effect upon the iman by decreasing it. These are in reference to when the cause of the effect traces back to other than the person himself. Such causes can be generalized into three factors:

i. Shaytan

He is held to be a strong external reason, which causes iman to decrease. Shaytan is a vehement enemy to the believers. He awaits calamities to afflict them. He has no desire or goal other than to jolt the iman in the hearts of the believers and to weaken and corrupt it. Whoever submits to the whisperings of Shaytan, complies with his notions and does not retreat to Allah for refuge from him, his iman weakens and decreases. Indeed, it may disappear in its entirety depending on the Muslim's response to such whisperings and notions.

It is for this reason that Allah has warned us of Shaytan in the sternest sense and He has clarified his dangers, the detrimental consequences of following him as well as the fact that he is an enemy to the believers. Allah ordered the believers to take him as an enemy and therefore deliver themselves from him and his whisperings.

Allah says:

"O you who believe! Do not follow the footsteps of Shaytan, and whosoever follows the footsteps of Shaytan, then, verily he (i.e., Shaytan) commands Fahsha' (i.e., to commit indecency and lewdness, etc.) and Al-Munkar (i.e., disbelief, shirk, to do evil and wicked deeds, to speak or to do what is forbidden in Islam, etc.) ... " [Al-Qur'an 24:21]

Allah also says:

"Surely, Shaytan is an enemy to you, so treat him as an enemy. He only invites his hizb (followers) that they may become the dwellers of the blazing Fire." [Al-Qur'an 35:6]

Allah says:

"Verily! Shaytan is to man an open enemy!" [Al-Qur'an 12:5]

Allah also says:

"Shaytan has taken hold of them. So he has made them forget the remembrance of Allah. They are the party of Shaytan. Verily, it is the party of Shaytan that will be the losers!" [Al-Qur'an 58:19]

Ibn al-Jawzi says: "Hence it is an obligation upon the sane person to be on his guard against this enemy, who has manifested his enmity since the time of Adam. He has sacrificed his life and self in corrupting the circumstances of the children of Adam and Allah has ordered one to be cautious of him ... " He then mentioned a number of such texts and then said: "The like of this in the Qur'an is abundant." Talbis Iblis, pg. 23.

Abuu Muhammad al-Maqdasi says in the introduction of his book Dhamm al-Waswas: "To proceed, Allah has indeed made Shaytan an enemy to man. He sits in wait against him along the straight path and comes to him from every direction and way, as Allah has related from him that he said:

Surely I will sit in wait against them on Your Straight Path. Then I will come to them from before them and behind them, from their right and from their left, and You will not find most of them as being grateful ones (i.e., they will not be dutiful to You). [Al-Qur'an 7:16-17]

"Further, Allah has warned us against following him and commanded us to possess animosity towards him and to oppose him, He said:

Verily! Shaytan is to man an open enemy! [Al-Qur'an 12:5]

"He also said:

O Children of adam! Do not let Shaytan deceive you, as when he brought your parents (i.e., adam and Hawwa) out of Paradise ... [Al-Qur'an 7:27]

"Allah informed us of what he did with our parents as a way of cautioning us from obeying him and also to cut short any excuse for having followed him and Allah commanded us to follow the straight path ... " Dhamm al-Waswas, pg.46. Also refer to Ibn al-Qayyim's introduction of his own book Ighathah al-Lahfan, 1/10

Thus, Shaytan is an enemy to man. His desire is to corrupt the beliefs and to wreak havoc on one's iman. Whoever does not fortify himself from him through remembrance of Allah, resorting back to Allah and seeking refuge with Him, will become a breeding ground for Shaytan, who will lure him to actions of disobedience, entice him to perpetrate prohibited matters and push him to embark upon lewd sins. What a perish of his religion and what a corruption of his iman will it be if man submits to him!

Ibn al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy upon him, says: "Beware of enabling Shaytan to establish himself in the very home of your thoughts and intentions, as he will corrupt them in such a manner that will make difficult its correction thereafter. He will cast all sort of whisperings and harmful thoughts at you and he will prevent you from thinking about what may benefit you and it is you who have aided him against yourself by empowering him over your heart and thoughts and he then placed you in the possession of such thoughts."Al-Fawa'id, pg. 309

He, may Allah have mercy upon him, put forward an excellent similitude in this regard, which lies in total agreement. He says in another excerpt from his book: "If you would like a consistent example for this, then his parable is that of a dog that is extremely famished; between you and the dog is a piece of meat or bread. He looks attentively at you and sees you not opposing him and he is so close to you. You drive him away and yell out at him and yet the dog refuses but to hover round you in circles and to try to deceive you with regard to what you possess in your hand."At-Tibyan fi Aqsam al-Qur'an, pg. 419.

His intention, may Allah have mercy upon him, behind this parable is to demonstrate the scope of Shaytan's danger to man if he does not seek refuge with Allah from him and fails to retreat back to Allah for refuge from his evil, through beneficial words of supplication and blessed forms of remembrance.

However, whoever turns away and is instead averse to that, Shaytan will cling to him in this way in which he will tempt and dictate to him until he eradicates his iman. Allah says:

"And whosoever turns away (blinds himself) from the remembrance of the Most Beneficent (i.e., this Qur'an and worship of Allah), We appoint for him a shaytan to be a Qarin (i.e., an intimate companion) to him. And verily, they (i.e., shayatin) hinder them from the Path (of Allah), whilst they think that they are guided aright! Till, when (such a) one comes to Us, he says (to his qareen), 'Would that between me and you were the distance of the two Easts (or the East and West), a worst (type of) companion (you are indeed)!' " [Al-Qur'an 43:36-38]

ii. The World and its Allurements

This is the second external factor, which bears effect on a person's iman by decreasing it.

Hence, one of the causes of the decrease and weakness of iman is to be engrossed with the transient things of this temporary worldly life; to occupy one's time with it; be devoted to seeking it and to race after its pleasures, temptations and seductions.

Whenever the servants longing for this world intensifies and his heart becomes attached to it, his obedience will weaken and his iman will decrease accordingly. Ibn al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy upon him, says: "The extent of the servants desire for the world and of his pleasure with it determines his slackness towards obedience of Allah and seeking the Hereafter."Al-Fawa'id, pg. 180.

Accordingly, Allah, the Wise the All-Aware, censured the world in His Book and made clear its vileness and wretchedness in many ayat in the Noble Qur'an, Allah says:

"Know that the life of this world is only play and amusement, pomp and mutual boasting among you, and rivalry in respect of wealth and children, just like the vegetation after rain, which pleases the tillers; afterwards it dries up and you see it turning yellow; then it becomes straw. But in the Hereafter there is a severe torment (for the disbelievers, evil-doers), and there is forgiveness from Allah and (His) Good Pleasure (for the believers, good-doers), whereas the life of this world is only a deceiving enjoyment." [Al-Qur'an 57:20]

Allah also says:

"And put forward to them the example of the life of this world, it is like the water (rain),which We send down from the sky. The vegetation of the earth mingles with it, and becomes fresh and green. But (later) it becomes dry and broken pieces, which the winds then scatter. And Allah is Able to do everything. Wealth and children are the adornment of the life of this world. But the everlasting righteous deeds are better with your Lord, for rewards and better in respect of hope." [Al-Qur'an 18:45-46]

Allah says:

" ... and they rejoice in the life of the world, whereas the life of this world as compared with the Hereafter is but a brief passing enjoyment." [Al-Qur'an 13:26]

Allah also says:

"Verily, those who hope not for their meeting with Us, but are pleased and satisfied with the life of the present world, and those who are heedless of Our ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.). Those, their abode will be the Fire, because of what they used to earn." [Al-Qur'an 10:7-8]

This contains the greatest warning to one who is pleased with the life of this world, is comforted by it, is heedless of the ayat of Allah and who does not hope to meet Him.

Furthermore, Allah says in censuring those of the believers who are pleased with this world:

"O you who believe! What is the matter with you, that when you are asked to march forth in the Cause of Allah (i.e., Jihad) you cling heavily to the earth? Are you pleased with the life of this world rather than the Hereafter? But little is the enjoyment of the life of this world as compared with the Hereafter." [Al-Qur'an 9:38]

The Prophet said: *"By Allah, it is not poverty that I fear for you, but I fear that the world will be spread out for you just as it was spread out for those before you and then you will compete for it just as they competed for it and then you will be destroyed just as they were destroyed."* The hadith is agreed upon both Al-Bukhari and Muslim relate it. [t] Al-Bukharee, (6/258, 7/320 Fath) and Muslim, 4/2273 from the hadith of 'Amr ibn 'Awf, may Allah be pleased with him. In another wording of theirs, *" ... you will be distracted just as they were distracted."*

There are other such texts, which are great in number. Thus, one who wants his iman to have growth, strength, safety from weakness and decrement must strive against his nafs in distancing himself from this world, its temptations, seductions and distracting amusements, and what a multitude they are.

This can only be achieved and become true after considering two matters:

The first: to consider and look at the world, its rapid termination, passing away and disappearance; its deficiency and vileness; the pains of competing against one another for it and coveting it and what this contains of agony, embitterment and adversity.

The end of all that will be disappearance and discontinuance along with the regret and sorrow that follows on from it. Thus, its seeker can never be free of anxiety and worry before he attains it or even when he actually achieves it and he can never be free of grief and distress after it passes on.

The second: to consider and look at the Hereafter and its approach and arrival that is inevitable; its perpetuity and eternity; the glory of what it is within it of blessings and joy; the disparity between such things and what is in this world. It is as Allah said:

"Although the Hereafter is better and more lasting." [Al-Qur'an 87:17]

They are blessings that are perfect and everlasting, whereas these (things of the world) are fantasies that are deficient, sporadic and transitory.

If one contemplates over these two matters and considers them and looks into them in a proper manner, this will direct him to prefer the Everlasting Hereafter to the transient world.

The greatest aid for him in fulfilling this is to take a look at the state of Messenger and his biography as well as his Companions. The fact that they renounced the world, turned their hearts away from it and discarded it. They never accustomed themselves with it and instead deserted it. They never inclined towards it and they regarded it to be a prison and not a heaven and thus, abstained from it in a true manner and if they had desired it they would have acquired every loved thing and arrived at every cherished matter from it. Indeed, the keys to the treasures of the world were offered to the Prophet but he rejected them. The world also poured out to the Companions but they did not opt for it and did not exchange their portion of the Hereafter for the world.

They knew that the world was a crossing point and passageway not a place of dwelling and settling, that it was a place of transit ('ubur) and not a place of happiness (surur) and that it was a summer cloud which will soon disperse and an apparition no sooner is it completed than is it on the brink of departure.

As Allah has said:

"Tell Me, if We do let them enjoy for a number of years, then afterwards comes to them that (punishment) which they had been promised; all that with which they used to enjoy shall not avail them." [Al-Qur'an 26:205-207]

He said:

"And on the Day when He shall gather (resurrect) them together, (it will be as if) they had not stayed (in the life of this world and graves, etc.) but an hour of a day. They will recognize each other." [Al-Qur'an 10:45]

He also said:

"And on the Day that the Hour will be established, the Mujrimun (criminals, disbelievers, polytheists, sinners, etc.) will swear that they stayed not but an hour ... " [Al-Qur'an 30:55]

Allah is the one who is beseeched to aid us with iman and to protect us from trials and temptations, the apparent and hidden.

iii. Associates

They are the most harmful people to a person's iman, behavior and manners. Mixing with them and accompanying them is a great cause that decreases and weakens iman.

It has been established that the Prophet said: "*A man is upon the din (i.e., way of life) of his khalil (i.e., close companion), so each one of you should look to see whom he takes as a khalil.*" Related by Abu Dawud, (13/179 'Awn); At-Tirmidhi, 4/589; Ahmad, 2/303; Al-Hakim, 4/171 and Al-Baghawi in Sharh as-Sunnah, 13/70 and it is a hasan hadith.

Ibn 'Abdil-Barr said: "The meaning of this and Allah knows best is that a person accustoms himself to the actions he views from those he accompanies and the (meaning of) din is habitude. As such, he ordered one to only accompany the person who is seen to have (manners) that are graceful and beautiful, since goodness is mannerism.

"The saying of 'Adi Ibn Zayd embodies the meaning of this hadith:

About the person, do not question, but ask about his companion

Since every companion emulates the one he associates with

"Likewise, the saying of Abi al-'Itahiyah:

Who could (still) remain unknown to you If you were to look at his companion?

"The like of this is very great. The meaning of this is that a person is not to associate with one who will lead him to actions and ways that are lamentable. As for the one who is not feared (to give such an effect) in this regard then there is no harm in accompanying him."Bahjah al-Majalis, 2/751.

Abu Sulayman al-Khattabi said: "His saying, '*A man is upon the din (i.e., way of life) of his khalil (i.e., close companion)*', means: do not take as an intimate companion anyone other than one whose din and trustworthiness you are pleased with, because when you do take one as an intimate companion, he will lead you to his din and way. Do not endanger your din or take a risk with your nafs by taking as an intimate companion one whose din and way is not pleasing."

Sufyan ibn 'Uyaynah said: "It has been transmitted in connection to this hadith, 'Look at Fir'awn, with him was Haman. Look at Al-Hajaj, with him was Yazid ibn Abi Muslim, who was worse than he was. Look at Sulayman ibn 'Abdul-Malik; he was accompanied by Raja' ibn Haywah, who then put him aright and directed him.'

"It is said that Al-Khullah is derived from 'The love interpenetrated (takhallala) the heart and firmly established itself within it'. It is the highest level of brotherhood and that is because people are initially strangers to each other. Once they attain a familiarity, they strike harmony with each other, so they become good friends. If they become homogeneous, they then have love for each other and if this love intensifies it becomes khullah."Al-'Uzlah, pg. 56.

It has also been said, "People are like flocks of sand grouse; a type of game-bird, because of the resemblance of form they bear to each other and also because of their imitation of the actions of each other. It is for this reason that the one who initiates good or evil will carry the same share of reward or sin of the one who follows him."Refer to Al-Istiqamah by Ibn Taymiyyah, 2/255.

Some wise folk have said: "The pillar of love is homogeneity and every love or friendship that is not based on homogeneity is swift to dwindle and be over."Al-'Uzlah by Al-Khattabi, pg. 62

The reason for the prohibition on mixing with associates of evil and for the warning of taking company with them is that the make up of a person is naturally disposed for emulating and copying whoever he associates with. Thus, taking company with students of knowledge stirs in oneself the eager desire to seek knowledge. Taking company with ascetics, causes one to renounce worldly pleasures. Taking company with the people of desires causes one to tumble into the abysses of innovations and taking company with one who covets the world stirs in oneself the eager desire for the world and so on.

As such, it is essential that a person chooses of his colleagues and associates those who will bring about for him good and benefit because of mixing with them.

One who reflects on the condition of the Salaf and contemplates on their life histories will come to know this and he will observe their severe caution and warning against associates of evil be them fussaqa, innovators or others. Look up on this for example, Al-'Uzlah by al-Khattabi, pg. 56 and onwards, Al-Ibanah of Ibn Battah, 2/431 and onwards and others.}

Abu Darda' said: "It is from the intelligence of the servant (to consider and be aware) of whom he walks with, enters with and exits with." Abu Qilabah, who related this account, then said: "May Allah fight (Not to be taken in its literal sense in this context, since the Arabs employ such terms in different ways and at times they use phrases containing words of censure but actually intend meanings of the opposite such as praise and amazement) the poet who said:

About the person, do not question, but look at his companion

"Since the companion emulates the one he associates with."Related by Al-Khattabi in Al-'Uzlah, pg. 59 and Ibn Battah in Al-Ibanah, 2/439.

Al-Asma'i said concerning this verse of poetry: "I have not seen a verse more similar to the Sunnah than this one."Al-Ibanah of Ibn Battah.

It has also been reported on 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud that he said: "Assess people by their intimates, for a person only befriends one whom appeals to him and whom he admires."

Al-A'mash also relates: "They (i.e., the Salaf) did not ask about a person after (having ascertained) three (things): whom he used to walk with, whom he used to enter with and whom his acquaintances were among the people."

Sufyan said: "There is nothing more influential upon the corruption or rectification of an individual than a companion."

Qatadah said: "Indeed, By Allah, we have not witnessed a person accompany except one who is like him and of his own manner; so accompany the righteous from the slaves of Allah, you may then be with them or like them."

Al-Fudayl said: "It is not for the believer to sit with anyone he desires ... "These accounts have been related by Ibn Battah in Al-Ibanah.

One who ponders over these will know of the danger to the individual's religion and character in associating with people of evil, fisq and fujur.

You may witness a person who is upright, virtuous and righteous, when he mingles and associates with people of evil and fisq and accompanies them, he becomes a fasiq and fajir like them and this is the pattern of Allah in his creation.

Hence, mixing with the fussaqa and people of evil is one of the most severe causes for the decrease and weakness of iman. In fact, even for its disappearance and annihilation and that is dependent upon the condition of evil of such people as well as the level of mingling with them.

Symptoms of weak Iman and how to increase it?

Signs of weak Faith:

- Committing sins and not feeling any guilt.
- Having a hard heart and no desire to read the Quran. Feeling too lazy to do good deeds, e.g. being late for salat, Neglecting the Sunnah.
- Having mood swings, for instance being upset about petty things and bothered and irritated most of the time.
- Not feeling anything when hearing verses from the Quran, for example when Allah warns us of punishments and His promise of glad tidings.
- Finding difficulty in remembering Allah and making dhikr. Not feeling bad when things are done against the Shariah. Desiring status and wealth.
- Being mean and miserly, i.e. not wanting to part with wealth.
- Ordering others to do good deeds when not practising them ourselves.
- Feeling pleased when things are not progressing for others.
- Being concerned with whether something is haram or halal only; and not avoiding makroo (not recommended) things.
- Making fun of people who do simple good deeds, like cleaning the mosque.
- Not feeling concerned about the situation of Muslims.
- Not feeling the responsibility to do something to promote Islam.
- Liking to argue just for the sake of arguing without any proof.
- Becoming engrossed and very involved with dunya, worldly things, i.e. feeling bad only when losing something in terms of material wealth. Becoming engrossed and obsessive about ourselves.

Okay, how to increase our faith then ?

- Learning the Beneficial Knowledge Derived From the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger - sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam and Companions.
- Reciting the Noble Qur'an and Contemplating on it
- Recite and ponder on the meanings of the Quran. Tranquility then descends and our hearts become soft.
- Knowledge of Allah's Most Beautiful Names and Most Exalted Attributes
- To Look Attentively at the Biography of the Noble Prophet - sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam
- Significant observation and beautiful reflection over the fine qualities and advantages of this religion, Allah adorns the iman in the heart of the servant and he makes it beloved to him.
- Exerting Efforts Towards Accomplishing Sincere Righteous Actions
- To exert efforts towards enacting sincere righteous actions for the countenance of Allah; he should try to do more (good) deeds and to do them on a regular basis. Make his heart, tongue and all organs obedient to Allah.
- Remember the different levels of akhirah, for instance when we are put in our graves, when we are judged, whether we will be in paradise or hell.
- Make dua, realize that we need Allah. Be humble.
- Our love for Allah Subhana Wa Ta'Ala must be shown in actions. We must hope Allah will accept our prayers, and be in constant fear that we do wrong. At night before going to sleep, we must think about what good we did during that day.

- Realize the effects of sins and disobedience- one's faith is increased with good deeds and our faith is decreased by bad deeds. Everything that happens is because Allah wanted it. When calamity befalls us- it is also from Allah. It is a direct result of our disobedience to Allah.
- To get optimum benefit, remind yourself that Allah is speaking to you.
- People are described in different categories in the Quran; think of which one you find yourself in.
- Realize the greatness of Allah. Everything is under His control. There are signs in everything we see that points us to His greatness. Everything happens according to His permission. Allah keeps track and looks after everything, even a black ant on a black rock on a black moonless night.
- Make an effort to gain knowledge, for at least the basic things in daily life e.g. how to make wudu and ghussal properly. Know the meanings behind Allah's names and attributes. People who have taqwa are those who have knowledge.
- Attend gatherings where Allah is remembered. In such gatherings we are surrounded by angels.
- We have to increase our good deeds. One good deed leads to another good deed. Allah will make the way easy for someone who gives charity and also make it easy for him or her to do good deeds. Good deeds must be done continuously, not in spurts.
- We must fear the miserable end to our lives; the remembrance of death is the destroyer of pleasures.

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'ABDUR-RAZZAK AL-'ABBAD