Individual basics of faith from Imam Ali Attitude in Nahj al-Balagha

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Abstract

The faith is the key entrance to the pure life and approaching God possesses some pillars such that identifying and enhancing these pillars will consequently result in firm faith. Weak or collapsed pillars will lead to faith downfall. As stated by Imam Ali, in Nahj al-Balagha, sermon 31, ‘patience, certainty, justice, and Jihad’ are faith’s major foundations, each with sub-categories. The first two are associated with individual life; whereas, the two other correlate with social life. This paper explains faith individual dimensions. In this regard, Imam Ali introduces ‘enthusiasm; fear, solicitude, and anxiety; asceticism (reluctance, philosophy) and expectation (eagerly anticipate, prospect, death awareness)’ and تبصره الفطن (brilliant insight, sagacity), تأويل الحكمة (wisely reception of facts), موعظة العبرة (taking advices, learn from events), سُنَّة أولين (risk taking, following the true way of ancestors) as the patience and certainty foundations, respectively. Proper, accurate knowledge and observing of the aforementioned may guide us toward true faith, which ultimately results in prosperity.

Keywords: Faith, patience, certainty.
Introduction

Faith is one of the frequent, always recommended concepts in Islamic teachings and Quran. It is particularly manifested in Imam Ali’s words such that in one sermon, on the virtue of faith, he expresses “the best (thing) for the (God) devotees is to appeal faith and belief in God and the prophet...” (Nahj al-Balagha¹, Sermon 110).

However, it is worth to notify that faith is a hierarchical truth in several levels, which can be strengthened or weakened. Imam Ali, for instance, regarded love and hatred for God as faith perfection component “anyone achieves perfection in faith; unless, the individuals have great affection for those whom loved by God and are the enemies of those bear enmity by God” (Ibn Abi Al-Hadid, 1415; 18-51).

However, such expressions merely narrate faith general classification rather than specific sorting (categories). It should be noted that faith and blasphemy as well as polytheism and hypocrisy all are hierarchically ranked such that the individual achieves heaven or hell levels respecting to its ranks. Therefore, the essence of faith; in spite of weakness, is the first and least accepted from human being causes felicity; nevertheless, it is necessary to any believer to attain higher levels of faith. It is also growing as explained by Quran. God states that “it was he who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the believers” (Al-Fath; 4).

Strengthening requires knowing the basics and foundations of every issue. Reinforced foundations may lead to enhanced object and feeble foundations may consequently result in attenuation. Regarding to life barriers including temptations, passions and various social factors, the faith also needs enhancement. Thus, the faith requires scaffolding in order to avoid any damage and to influence human happiness. To prevent feebleness, deviation or collapse in faith, it is necessary to first know what the faith is? And secondly, how it is maintained and enhanced? Thirdly, what factors cause feebleness, deviation of collapsing faith wall?

What are faith fundamentals? This significant question is answered by Imam Ali replying “patience, certainty, justice and Jihad” as the faith pillars. Seyyed Razi, in sermon 31 of Nahj al-Balagha, narrates that “faith is established based on four pillars of patience, certainty, justice and jihad”. The patience also has four bases: enthusiasm, fear, piety and anticipation. The one aspires for paradise, may reduce its lusts; the one who is afraid of burning in the hell, stays away from forbidden; and the piety will simplify the disasters; and finally, the individual anticipating death may hasten in goodness.

Certainty is based on the four foundations of brilliant insight, facts wisdom reception, learning from life events and paving the right way of ancestors. Therefore, the intelligent look at the realities may cause openly perceiving the wisdom; and the open eyes perceived wisdom would result in taking lessons; and finally, taking lessons is as if the individual has historically lived with predecessors.

¹The Peak of Eloquence
Four basics of justice are as follows: contemplation, deep knowledge reaching the truth, good judge, and being firm in patience. Hence, the right thinking will lead to contemplation; and the one reaches the truth of knowledge is drunk with Sharia pure spring; the patient may never exceed and preserve its well-reputed life.

Further, the four pillars of Jihad are enjoining good, and forbidding wrong, veracity in any conditions, and enmity with transgressors. In this regard, any good enjoining strongly supports believers; and the one forbids the wrong would knock out the hypocrites; further, the individual honestly promotes in the battlefield has fulfilled its duty; and God gets angry for the one fighting wrongdoers and makes him satisfied in doomsday (Dashti, 2000; 631). This paper discusses explaining based on ‘patience and certainty’ observing the believer’s individual life.

The concept of faith

The term faith root comes from ‘Amn’ (safe) meaning secure. Some lexical scholars such as Zajaj define it as expressing docility, approving Sharia (obeying law) and heart authentication (Ibn Mantoor, 1414; 13-21). Moreover, it is also referred as humility, subjection and virtue (Sajadi, 1994; 1-314). Faith is secured, safe submission. The faith is not only the belief or certainty; rather, it is the certain submission. This term and its derivatives were frequently used in Nahj al-Balagha.

According to lexical view, faith is accepting by heart and subordination to religion and law such that the human being enters into the realm of safety, faith and what he must believe in. The attitude of faith is its most significant component; in addition, the essence of faith consists of submission and humility.

Faith literally means conversion, believing and acknowledgement. Islam also literally refers to faith as God and the messenger’s acknowledgement and to believe in what revealed by the messenger.

One important issue of faith is to investigate the faith nature and its components like what is truly faith? If anybody verbally expresses I believe in God, may he be called the believer; or the one always worships will be named the truly believer? Certainly, the true faith is mental and spiritual rather than physical. According to “the wandering Arabs say: we believe. Say (unto them, o Muhammad): ye believe not, but rather say "we submit," for the faith hath not yet entered into your hearts. Yet, if ye obey Allah and his messenger, he will not withhold from you aught of (the reward of) your deeds. Lo! Allah is forgiving, merciful…” (AL-HUJRAAT, 14), it is perceived that the faith is a truth and reality more related to human spirit than the physical body. It is not neither related to any physical signs (the signs of worshipping on the forehead), nor to the tongue to verbally say prayers; rather, it highly depends on the roots. When Imam Ali, replying what the faith is, told that faith is realized through three factors of heart belief, verbal, in word confession and physical operation through body members (sermon 227). Declaration of faith, inner, heart belief as well as body member operations regarding faith requirement are the believers’ qualification praised in Quran. As a result, the true faith realization requires other prerequisite(s) apart from knowledge including confession and meeting faith needs. It was earlier mentioned that faith has several levels (ranks) that should be enhanced. In the following, according to sermon 31,
the relationship of faith basics are initially studied; then, all basics are individually explained. This wisdom will give a precise and deep definition for the notions such as patience and certainty.

The relationship of faith basics

It is necessary to singularly clarify this wisdom as it includes similar words; in addition, it needs to make clear its structure in order to find out the relationship between the four elements stated as faith pillars (by Imam Ali), and why these were selected from abundant virtues.

‘De‘āme’ means the column of a house; it is applied fourteen times in Nahj al-Balagha (Gharashi banaei, 1998; 1-386). It is usually translated into pillar (supporting pillar) in Persian; however, it specifically refers to the feature of preventing bending and collapse. Furthermore, ‘Deām’ means supporting, too. Anyway, ‘De'ām’ are the four columns put in place around a building or roof in order to prevent roof collapse. Imam Ali introduced faith four pillars as ‘patience, certainty, justice and jihad’.

The question raises here is ‘what the relationship between these four basics is’ and ‘how faith is based on this strengthening relationship such that lacking such pillars may lead to weak, astray and probably collapsed faith. It can be said in explanation that the four pillars, mentioned by Imam Ali, are divided into two general classes including two human individual (personal) behavior basics and two social behavior basics.

Of these four, patience and certainty concentrate on individual issues instead of social life; while, justice and jihad are in social issues. Patience and certainty are selected as the faith’s two pillars since faith, on the contrary to Islam and similar notions, requires the believer intently sponsors its belief supplies. As stated earlier, good act and verbal profession also contributes in the faith. Therefore, faith preservation demanding specific behaviors needs two factors that majorly contribute in all arbitrary behaviors: the first is recognition and the other is motivation. For instance, once we are sick, the specific medication prescribed by the physician (recognition) is used for physical health (motivation). Regarding to prior discussions, it is indicated that the purpose of patience in Imam Ali’s sayings is the contributing factor influencing human motivation; furthermore, the term certainty is also used, which is from recognition category. Thus, the two concepts refer to two main and effective factors of voluntary actions of man. Observing justice and jihad for god is associated to believers’’ social life.

Explaining faith individual basics

Patience: in principle, it, means imprisonment and holding; it literally means contenance and self-imprisonment (self-control) demanded or prohibited by reason and law (Sharia); therefore, Ramadan is called ‘patience month’ enjoining the Nafs (ego). There are several instances mentioned in Nahj al-Balagha (Gharashi Banaei, 1998; 2-628). In addition, it also refers to imprisonment, being in need and difficulty and feeling the pinch (Ragheb Isfahani, 1412; 474).
Patience is one of the most beautiful and the most common human behavioral features. Resistance against the factors inviting man to oppose God needs a power that is generally termed ‘patience’. Frankly, patience means the motivation and resistance toward the factors preventing man from doing good or abnormal behavior. In other word, it is the very opposition versus different events and difficulties; the opposite of which is impatience, loss of strength and surrendering the problems.

Of patience traditions it concluded that patience and resistance are more significant than we can think. It is of high behavioral and practical importance to Islam such that it is known as the essence of all virtues, inherent nature of all felicities and the means to achieve happiness and prosperity. The messenger, for instance, says that “the patience is the greatest riding horse; the best ever granting donated by God to its servants” (Mohammadi Rey Shahri, 2005; 5-267). The metaphor of ‘the best riding horse’, in this tradition, indicates that the patience is the means of felicities and happiness such that no position attained neither in the world and hereafter.

According to Imam Ali, “You, all, are called for patience, as the patience in faith serves as head to body”. It demonstrates the key role of patience in all human life dimensions; therefore, it is also mentioned that “the faith may ever last for the man lacking patience and resistance” (sermon, 82).

Impatience not only results in positive outcomes, but also it is unable to resist against negative effects and disasters. Thus, the main key to victories is patience; moreover, regarding that religion is a series of dos and don’ts, obedience and sin abandoning lacking any patience and resistance may not survive (last) because, as earlier mentioned, the patience serves as head to body versus faith.

According to earlier discussed, recognition and motivation are the two effective factors of any voluntarily working. Deficiency in recognition or motivation means lack of voluntary work. If the two exist, the work is performed. Of motivations, however, fear of loss and hope to benefit are the significant effective motivations influencing human behavior. Thus, faith supporting, in individual behavior, should care for the issue of recognition, i.e. the behavior along with a strong, certain recognition, on one hand; and is strongly motivated to control self-behavior, on the other hand.

Imam Ali continued that “patience has four branches (sub-categories) including enthusiasm, scare, piety and anticipation”. According to introduction, these subcategories are the factors aiding this motivation. Hope to benefit and fear of loss are the significant effective motivation factors expressed by the two interpretations of ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘scare’.

The more the man believes in the usefulness of doing something, the more he tries for. Benefit is also ranked from mundane interests to doom’s day rewards. He also added “man easily ignores world lusts through desire for resurrection rewards”.

Three enthusiastic states are defined: some shows appetite for reward promises and God bounty; some yearn for the beloved; and finally, the last, are the individuals always present before the lover; hence, they are thirsty lacking any enthusiasm (Panahi, 2008; 251).
Scare: it is opposite of enthusiasm meaning fear. Furthermore, it is also defined as greedy; which is along with compassion and kindness. It is repeated as much as twenty times in various meanings in “Nahj” (Gharashi banaei, 1998; 2-602).

Function of horror and hope in human evolution: fear and hope are two effective factors of human evolution frequently applied in Quran and Islamic traditions. Though, love and eagerness are much effective than fear and scare (compassion); the remarkable effect of fear putting human being in the right road of evolution may not be ignored.

The perfect man is like a climber climbing the peaks of glory and beauty of God. When he looks down, he is forced to step much firmly and cautiously forward due to the constant horror of falling down to the hell terrible valley; the more the one is higher and closer to peak, the more probable it may fall and hurt, on one side; seeking for perfection (peak) makes the man try harder as the hope of reaching may excite him, on the other side.

It should be noted that horror and hope are not opposite. The opposite of hope is despair of God mercy; and being fully secured of divine torment and punishment is opposite of horror. Imam Ali expresses that “the best is the equality between hope and horror to God” (Mohammadi Re Shahri, 2005; 4-1568).

Naraghi, in Jame Al-Sadat, refers asceticism as the opposite of worldliness. He adds “ascetic is the one who is not fascinated and dependent on the world; he just notices the world as much as he needs” (Naraghi, 2004; 1-399). Asceticism means lack of world attachment. It is God bounty to be appreciated; if it were not, the man was only supposed to be satisfied with what God sees fit. Thus, the third basic and sub-category is ‘asceticism’. Therefore, it means lack of interest and tendency toward mundane affairs and abstinence. Asceticism is the opposite of greed and despise and underestimation, insulting and quitting are the outcomes of this particular state.

Motahari, in defining ‘asceticism’, referred to Imam Ali words in Nahj al-Balagha and stated that Quran is summarized in to two statements “so that you will not be saddened for whatever does not come to you, nor be overjoyed in what has come to you. Allah does not love those who are proud and boastful” (Al-Hadid, 23). The one feels no sorrow to the past and upbeat to the future may obtain both dimensions of asceticism. Clearly, achieving to something that is a means rather than the ideal may never flourish the wishes such that obtaining or losing is no more cause of grief (6).

Ascetic life is actually avoiding prosperity, luxury and hedonism rather than merely thinking of material detachment. Ascetics are satisfied with the least enjoyment and taking the advantages of materialism. Imam Ali is an ascetic not only he was uninterested in the world, but also he refused pleasure and hedonism; in other word, he was hermit” (Motahari, 2000; 233).

The role of asceticism in human evolution

Asceticism embraces different philosophies. First, is to enjoy spiritual blessings. Motahari declares that the very little knowledge of spirituality reveals that the heart land may never be
prepared for growing pure and clean emotions unless the man is free from velocity, like an infant being weaned of the nature and material affairs are no more the goal rather than the means. That is why asceticism is the main prerequisite of the knowledge that is closely tightened to it. Worshiping the right, literally, means the passion and love in servicing Allah, being familiar with his name and enjoying the worship and always saying prayer. It is seriously inconsistent with narcissism, hedonism, and captivated in the glamour of materialities. Not only monotheism requires a typical asceticism, rather any love and worship of whether a homeland or belief and creed require asceticism and ignorance of material, worldly affairs. Thus, keeping the heart empty of worldly attachments and breaking the gold and silver idols are the requirements of spiritual perfection attainment and human real personality development (Motahari, 2000; 214).

He continued that in misfortune, when neither fear nor hope is effective, the worldly attachment should be detached. World adversities are difficult when the man is attached to his beholding. Lack of attachment may lead to lack of grief on losing something; then, lack of attachment means no misfortune.

**Anticipation**

Patience last subcategory is ‘anticipation’ or ‘expectation’. It is repeated six times in Nahj al-Balagha. According to sermon 31, the one who anticipates death, is always in a hurry for charity (Gharshi banaei, 1998; 1-461).

Anticipation, here, indicates that the believer must always look forward the future and expect the realities supposed to occur in the future. What is important to man and considered as a turning point is death. Death turns the life taking us to the other world of lacking selection and authority from the world of authority and selection. Rewarding or compensating is no more possible. However, if the person is already prepared (the luggage is provided), this would be a journey releasing from a dirty, narrow, dark and stinky place to an open wide, happy and juicy place; otherwise, the contrary may happen.

Little care demonstrates that Imam Ali intended to clarify patience and resistance motivations; rather than the sub-categories. Strengthening the foundations of faith and certainty, in particular considering that God is the most merciful, kinder than anyone to its servants creates some unknown events to the benefits and interest of the believers may foster the patience spirit in man. Paying attention to great rewards of the subordinates and those quitted doing sins as well as the truth of God promises all make the man more determined in patience. Obviously, the more the man believes in God mercy and wisdom, the higher the patience is; to state the matter differently, he will find it much easier to bear the patience.

**Certainty**

It means to verify and to make clear (Tarihi, 1414; 6-331), which is the opposite of doubt. Certainty in the religion is regarded as the capital and the faith destined by it. Other sciences serve as its foliage and redemption may ever be achieved without certainty in afterlife. Now, according to traditions, high levels of faith are called ‘certainty’ (Makarem Shirazi, 1995; 27-
284). In literal meaning it is the firm belief consistent to the truth that may never decline or go astray (Tousi, 2003; 96).

There are different functions defined for certainty. Regarding customs, it relatively equals certain, deterministic knowledge; however, it is of particular place in the religious culture as a valuable notion. According to some narrations, nothing in the world is divided among people less than certainty (Majlesi, 1984; 67-136). Certainty, the faith second pillar, has four sub-classes including brilliant insight, realistic recognition and finding the origins, learn from life events and following the right way of antecedents.

**Discernment**

Literally, it refers to belief (by heart), knowledge, certainty, subtlety and byword (Ibn Manzor, 1414; 2-418). Imam Ali, on discernment individuals, states that “the discernment is the one who listens, thinks, looks and sees, takes lessons; then, he paves the clear road secured of falling down” (sermon 152).

According to the aforementioned tradition, insight, about human deeds, in particular individual and social deeds, is of highly significance lacking of which especially in critical life periods may lead human being fall down and go astray.

The second basis of certainty, according to Imam Ali, is the interpretation resulted from the proper rational principles and philosophy rather than any arbitrary interpretation. Then, it needs to find the weak and strong points and to take lessons, which demands a specific preparation.

**Wisdom**

It is a typical interoperation frequently highlighted in traditions and Quran. It is the state and a feature of perception and recognition by means of which the individual firmly and surely does. Hence, wisdom is a sensual mode. Some also expressed that wisdom is approaching to the right through knowledge and ration (Gharashi Banaei, 1998; 1-294). Further, Imam Ali, in Nahj al-Balagha, also necessitates wisdom for the faithful and introduces it as the believer’s missing (sermon 80).

Allameh Tabatabae, on the meaning of wisdom, clarifies that wisdom in syntax is building the type meaning fixing up or a firm doing that no weakness penetrates in. It is often used in real rational knowledge that is never invalid or false.

The wisdom used in Quran is the science and knowledge directing human to the truth such that no doubt may remain. Since all instructions indicated in Quran are consistent with human nature and the nature requirements embraces that part of knowledge and act supplying the real perfection and the true happiness. Therefore, it can be stated that religion corresponds with reality; the principles and rules that come with religion are indeed the messenger’s wisdom who is missioned to instruct public (Tabatabaei, 2003; 12-571).

The other pillar is taking lessons from other experiences and using as they are ours.
Byword (Lesson)

‘Ebar’ is passing from one mode to the other. ‘Crossing’ (Obour) is to pass the water whether by swimming or any means. ‘Ebarat’ is the statement moving in the air from the speaker’s (mouth) to the listener’s (ears). ‘Etebar’ and byword is a state of tangible to intangible knowledge (Gharashi Banaei, 1998; 2-296). This term is frequently used in Nahj al-Balagha. For instance, in preaching request, Imam Ali expresses “be not of ones who teach taking lessons, but never learnt lessons” (sermon 150).

Byword and taking lessons occurred due to particular happenings. In this mode, the man reaches to an intangible, inherent knowledge from a tangible and apparent issue. The outcome of such knowledge is a change in human conduct. The man itself plays the critical role in creating this mode; thus, taking lessons is considered as a self-educational method. The major source of byword (and taking lessons) is the world and human history. In addition, the main way is to know the world and the traditions governing human life over history. Imam Ali says that “if the world is found out according to destroyed cities and collapsed buildings, it would be figured out that the mundane world merely be a compassionate reminder and an eloquent preacher; and behaves as a kind companion grudges on human grief” (sermon 223).

And finally, the last pillar to achieve certainty is to use others’ experiences. We are supplied by an infinite source of others’ experiences naming the history of antecedents. Imam Ali, in the letter 31st Nahj al-Balagha, addressing Imam Hassan, declares that “however, I may not live up with ancestors, their history is as if I have lived with them; the experiences are transferred to me that now will be transferred to you”. So, the proper knowledge of antecedents may positively influence our conduct, which is a great trophy. If these four basics of enhanced certainty get together, a typical certainty would be obtained that may influence human conduct such that this behavior causes enhanced faith and guarding.

Conclusion

According to aforementioned descriptions, it is cleared out that faith demands the believer fulfilling its belief requirement; further, good deed and verbal confession also contribute to faith.

Faith is a hierarchical truth and is recommended by Islamic teachings to be increased by believers. Imam Ali introduced four major maxims for faith including patience, certainty, justice and jihad. These basics may enhance faith such that lack of any basics would result in feeble, leaned, and probably collapsed faith. Explaining the relationship between these basics, it stated that the four pillars of faith (declared by Imam Ali) are divided into two general classes of two individual and two social behavior fundamentals.

Patience and certainty, of these four components, are manifested in individual affairs rather than social life; whereas, justice and jihad contribute in social issues. ‘Patience’ refers to resisting against difficulties and different happenings; the opposite is ‘impatience’, i.e. to desist, quit and to surrender before difficulties. Patience’s elements are enthusiasm...
(eagerness, hope), scare (fear, horror, prudence, and anxiety), asceticism (reluctance, philosophy) and anticipation (looking forward to, expectation, and death-awareness) that may reinforce faith.

According to traditions, ‘certainty’ is the knowledge inspires a practical effect; thus, certainty is a matter of science (knowledge); however, any science is not necessarily certainty. The opposite of certainty is doubt and uncertainty. Achieving such science requires enhancing its foundations including brilliant insight, sagacity; wisely reception of facts; taking advices, learn from events; and taking the experiences, following the true way of ancestors. Accurate knowledge and observing of the aforementioned causes faith enhanced pillars and consequently it strengthens the faith. The strengthened faith leads the man entering into the pure divine life and prosperity.
References


Holy Quran


