FAITH AND ACTION TRADES IN ISLAMIC THEOLOGY

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Abstract: *one of the significant issues in Ilm Kilam (literally science of discourse) which has an important role in religious thoughts and as a result in the manner of Muslims is the place of "Practical Ahkam", which is in direct relation with the topic of faith and disbelief. In this regard, we face various opinions ranges from "Khawarij" who had the extreme opinion and believed that doer of a capital sin is an infidel to a party named "Murji'ah" which took the least extremist attitude; they were taken the least strict stance and along with the policy of "belief without action" -brought up by Bani Ommayah- holds the idea of non existence of any relationship between faith and action; they ignored role of action and its interaction with having faith. Muʿtazila , between these two attitudes, accepted " منزله بين المنزلتين"; it means they neither regard a commitor of capital sins as a complete Kafir (infidel) nor a complete faithful person. This person was known as a فاسق . Shia was against all these three attitudes and was stepping outside of any realm filled with extremisms or politicization and (truly influenced by verses and traditions of infallible imams) welcomes the moderate attitude which emphasizes on the permanent accompany of faith and good deeds:*

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الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَصَدُّوا عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَضَلَّ أَعْمَالَهُمْ

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَآمَنُوا بِمَا نُزِّلَ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ كَفَّرَ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَأَصْلَحَ بَالَهُمْ ﴿٢﴾

Those who disbelieve and bar from the way of Allah, Allah will cause their deeds go astray. As for the believers who do good works and believe in what is sent down to Muhammad which is the truth from their Lord He will acquit them of their sins and repair their condition.(47: 1-2)

For Shia true faith is a combination of various factors of: a belief from inside, expressing that belief by tongue, knowing and practicing based on this knowledge. In another word, faith is placed in a hierarchical direction, a person can move towards the crest by doing more good deeds, and eventually the crest is salvation and prosperity. Discovering this relationship and the levels of good deed is what studied by the present article.

***Key words**: Faith, Kofr, good deed, Shia thinking, parties of ilm Kilam*

Introduction

Islam includes various teachings and is based on two principles of faith and practice. The list of principles of religion (or the most fundamental Islamic beliefs and the principles which are in common among all monotheistic religions) are: Tuhid (the Unity of God), Ma'ad (the Hereafter day) , and Nabbuwat (Prophethood). Except these three principles, Shia scholars add two more principles of Imamat and Justice to them. Some scholars of ilm Kilam know these principles as the principles of sect of religion (مذهب) not the principle of religion (دین). Any way, belief in principles of religion is called faith (ایمان) and the most important feature of it is this fact: in order to get to this belief, one should study and do research.

It is obligatory for each Muslim to learn about them and comprehend them and does not accept them only because others have accepted (it means blind obedience in this regard is disparaged). Besides these principles, we have secondary important principles which are generally counted to be ten: pray, fast, Hajj, Khoms,.. They are also called good deeds. Putting them into practice is also of religious musts. The most important feature of them is the point that there is not much necessity to comprehend them or to know whys and

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wisdoms of practicing them. In fact in Islam there is a series of guidelines which should only be followed (named secondary important principles). The goal of these rules are to teach obedience and submission. In contrast, there is a series of theoretical and belief-oriented issues about God and His attributes… (Principles of religion) which demand attention and time to be known. In these issues, the reasoning methods among Islamic scholars are different; Farabi, Ave Sina, Ibn Roshd and Khaje Nasir had Greek method while Mulla-Sadra's works are filled with Quranic traces, Nahj al-Balaghah and infallible imams' words footprints.

Now it should be studied what is the relationship between these two? In the present article, we are to clarify the place of faith and action and their roles in the intellectual system of scholars of ilm Kilam, and also to clarify what are the interpretations of this in modern time and as a result how it is manifested in the behavior of Muslims. The scholars of ilm Kilam answer this question "who is a faithful person?" differently. In the appearance of this bowl of opinions, sometimes, political factors were influential. By studying books written about ilm Kilam we conclude that besides issues of ilm Kilam like Tuhid and attributes of God, Jabr and Ikhtiyar, حدوث or قدم … also the issue of faith or disbelief were subjects of discussion.

The relationship between faith and action based on attitudes of parties of ilm Kilam

Historical background

From the most important parties of ilm Kilam which discussed about it we can refer to:

١. ***Extremes of excess attitude***: some sects like Khawarij regards action the base of faith and says a person who commits capital sin should be considered as a person who goes out of Islam and turns into a Kafir.

Khawarij who are the group who revolted against Imam Ali after the battle of Seffin and Hakamiyat event, after their defeat in Nahravan battle formed a social, political, martial and theological trend based on their own judgment.[١] This sect says the relationship between faith and action has only two extremes and faith is located in the end where action is taken. They believe each shortcoming in each aspects of action is against being a believer and the doers of capital sins are Kafir and they are out of Islam. The believers in this attitude do not hesitate accusing anyone even imam Ali a kafir just because he accepted Hakamiyat. Imam Ali felt danger of this sect for the world of Islam, first he tried to remind them of the true path and finally had to fight them.[٢]

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٢. ***Extremes of deficiency***: Murji'ah party, in contrast, believes in a loose relationship between faith and practice. Faith by them is only believing by heart and expressing by tongue and religious practices are not regarded as a necessary part of faith. They know faith as an issue which is stable nor can be increased nor can be decreased.[٣]

This sect of Kilam, in contrast to extremes of excess holds by Khawarij, completely neglects the role of action in faith and believed faith is just a matter presents in heart and practice does not have any interaction with faith. The motivation of this sect of ilm kilam is political factor. This thought continuously was welcomed by corrupted tyrants. Bani Omayyeh was its advocate and Ahlul Bayt were its opponent. Imam Ali concerning the danger of this way of thinking said in *Nahj al-Balaghah* sermon 61: "the mindset of Omavis which is the source of appearance of *Murji'ah* is lower that the mindset of Khawarij." Two features have been regarded for this sect in history books: effectlessness of action on faith besides irrelatedness between that and faith and second its adherence to the cruel policies of Bani Omayyeh.

٣. **'Ashaere view point:** the founder of this school of thought – Abul-Hasan Ash'ari- knew faith what held by heart and expressed by tongue and putting principles into actions were considered as secondary principles of faith; they say anyone who confessed to the Unity of God and prophethood of prophets and whatever sent to them was faithful. They believed a commitor of a capital sin which dies before repenting should be judged by God and he does not deserve to stay in Hell forever like Koffar (unbelievers.)

٤. **Mu'tazila attitude**: the founder of this school of thought – Wasa'el ibn Ata – coined the term "منزلت بين المنزلتين for commitor of capital sins and called them فاسق . This person is neither a faithful person nor a kafir, but between them. This school of thought believes in an attitude between the extremes attitudes of Khawarij and *Murji'ah*.[٤]

٥. **Shia attitude**: before explanation of the attitude of Shia regarding the relationship between faith and action, we talk about the intellectual principles of Shia. Shia scholars in each topic attempted to find a middle point. This method is a comprehensive method devoid of any extremity because it lies on signs and proofs of God, which are logical or based on traditions. Shia school of thought knows the relationship between faith and action a permanent and strong relation. Shia, though, in taking a moderate approach is somehow similar to *Mu'tazila* but is directed by Quran and traditions; therefore it has its

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own approach in which it believed in originality of faith; in Islam true faith can not be separated from good deeds and these two have a tight relationship with each other in a way that one without the other is not accepted.° As Quran says in Surah Asr verse 3:

ان الانسان لفی خسر/ الا الذین آمنو و عملوا الصالحات

By the time of the afternoon! Surely, the human is in a (state of) loss,

Shia not only emphasizes on the strong and permanent tie between faith and good deed but also it claims levels for good deed, as it claims levels for faith. In Sura Fath verse 4 we read,

هو الذی انزل السکینه فی قلوب المومنین لیزدادوا ایمانا مع ایمانهم

"It was He who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the believers so that they might add belief upon belief. "

In the analysis of this verse, it can be said that the early faith can be increased by peace and tranquility given by God, which is of His secret helps.

The sources of Shia scholars of ilm Kilam are verses and traditions we refer to some here:

*ان الانسان لفی خسر*الا الذین آمنوا و عملوا الصالحات*

من عمل صالحا من ذکر و انثی و هو مومن فلنحیینه حیاه طیبه و لنجزینهم اجرهم باحسن ما کانوا یعملون (Nahl, 97)

All righteously believing male or female will be granted a blessed happy life and will receive their due reward and more.

* و الذین آمنو و عملوا الصالحات و امنوا بما نزل علی محمد و هو الحق من ربهم کفر عنهم سیئاتهم و اصلح بالهم*

Therefore, when you meet the unbelievers smite their necks, then, when you have killed many of them, tie the bonds. Then, either free them by grace or ransom until war shall lay down its loads, in this way, it shall be. Had Allah willed, He would have been victorious over them; except that He might test you, the one by the means of others. As for those who are killed in the Way of Allah, He will not let their works to go astray.(47:4)

قالت الاعراب آمنا قل لم تومنوا و لکن قولوا اسلمنا

The believers are those who believe in Allah and His Messenger and have not doubted, and who struggled in His Way with their possessions and themselves. Such are those who are truthful. (49:15)

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* A tradition from imam Rida, “faith is approving by heart, confessing by heart and practicing by members of body.”[٦]

* A tradition from Imam Ali, “if faith was only expressing شهادتین by tongue, God does not make it obligatory for us to pray, fast and other religious practices.”[٧]

Evaluating the approaches:

١. The approach taken by Khawarij: the best evaluation is what imam Ali said in sermon 61 of *Nahj al-Balaghah*. Imam Ali traced this belief of them back to weakness of thought, unawareness of Prophet’s sunnah and of the truth of Quran. They are the ignorant religious men who stick fast to the surface of Islam and do not realize its essence. Imam Ali told, “Do not kill Khawarij after me; because the one who looks for rightness but goes through the wrong path is not the same as one who seeks ugliness and wrongness.”

"لا تقتلوا الخوارج بعدی فلیس من طلب الحق فاخطاه کمن طلب الباطل فادرکه"

٢. Murji'ah: this sect was aimed at the most important principle of religion, which is practicing religiously obligatory practices (واجبات). This approach, in fact, was knowingly looking for establishing a new version of Islam, which does not include any practices. They aimed at justifying negligence of Bani Omayyeh caliphs’ concerning secondary principles of Islam. Ashoura tragedy was an evident of danger of this approach for Muslims and was practical complaint of Ahlul Bayt towards this attitude which wanted “Islam without action”.

“The school of Irja was formed against extreme attitudes of Khawarij and its goal was to justify oppression of Bani Omayyeh. As Bani Omayyeh caliphs were not obliged to practice secondary principles, the 91 year old period of their rulership, people saw politics minus religion. This sect by spreading this thought that in Islam faith and practices are not related, tried to justify their rulership. Ashoura uprising was definitely a revolution against this Erja school of thought which triggered the essence of religion, i.e. practice. And the most important achievement of Ashoura tragedy was this revitalization of practical Islam which was manifested by the motto of Enjoining good and forbidding wrong (امر به معروف و نهی از منکر). The resistance of Imam Husain and his loyal companions against the idea of Islam minus practice could save Islam. Islam came into existence by Muhammad and survived by Husain. John Boyer Noss wrote that *Murji'ah* school of thought was formed when Bani Omayyeh reached power and to justify their oppression. In its opposition the other extremist school of thought was formed; Imam Husain aware of social and political effects of his mission started his mission. In his uprising, he wanted resistance against Irja and

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Mu'awiyah rulership which triggered the principles of religion (i.e.action.)

٣.Ash'arites approach: Ash'arites perceived Khawarij as "believers", they say anyone who confessed to the Unity of God and prophethood of prophets and whatever sent to them was faithful

٤. Muʿtazila approach: this approach from one hand is closer to the moderate ideas of Shia and from the other hand is different from it. The position they held for their opinion is somewhere between two extremes which is a vague position.

٥. An analysis of Shia scholars:

From one hand Shia scholars know faith as original and from the other hand are committed to its all aspects like good deeds and secondary principles.

Faith means a heart-based belief in religious teachings and in unseen worlds, which have a clear and definite relationship with some teachings like:

١. Gnosis of God; for example, faith is based on gnosis of God but having this gnosis necessarily does not lead to faith, such as Bani Israel tribe who had gnosis but not faith.

و جحدوا بهاو استيقنتها انفسهم ظلما و علوا (Nahl, 14)

٢. This faith is asserted by sound mind and both (faith and sound mind) are blessings of God. There is a religious law that says religious commands should be asserted by logic.

We have sent it down, an Arabic Koran, in order that you understand.(12:2)

And in a famous tradition from imam Kazim, we read,

ان للانسان حجتين : حجه ظاهره و حجه باطنه فاما الظاهره فالرسول و الانبياء و الائمه عليهم السلام و اما الباطنه فالعقول.

٣.This faith is a voluntary action which exists in all human beings and was given to them at the time of birth. This tendency may result in faith if it is leaded in correct path and if in incorrect way results in kofr. The proof of this claim is this verse

*قل الحق من ربكم فمن شاء فليومن و من شاء فليكفر *

Say: 'This is the truth from your Lord. Let whosoever will, believe, and whosoever will, disbelieve it. 'For the harmdoers, We have prepared a Fire, the pavilion of which encompasses them. When they cry out for relief, they shall be showered with water as hot as molten copper, which will scald their faces; how evil a drink, and how evil a resting place!(18:29)

We conclude from what has been said that the reality of faith is knowledge of something but when accompanied by inside belief, an acceptance, which is

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along with freedom, free will and sincerity. This truth is not mere knowledge nor mere action nor mere confession by tongue nor even combination of action and confession by tongue because hypocrites (منافقین) had these two.

Imam Ali tradition in this regard: "if faith was only expressing shahadatein (شهادتین) by tongue, religious practices like prayer, fast, etc. would not determined.

To conclude this part: from Shia scholars' point of view, though faith is the first, real faith should lead to good deeds and a faithful person does not commit capital sins one after the other one. Faith and good deeds are not separated from each other; actions are more effective on human being growth. Faith without action and action without faith are fruitless and in Quran faith without good deeds is similar to a mirage in a desert, and similar to ashes in storm. Some actions which are superficially good but are due to lack of true faith are likened to hypocrisy (نفاق) and duplicity (ریا).

The holy Quran states in Sura Ma'oon verse 6, *و هم یرائون* ***"who show off" (those who pray in front of people's eyes).*** To analyze the reason of why this practice is not accepted can be said that the practice of this person is either rooted in his ignorance which is a barrier to a true faith; or because of hypocrisy and duplicity which are severely reprimanded. A hypocrite has an obnoxious character in Islam, it is a person who does not have faith and does not dare to reveal his infidelity.

Faith as a source of all moral virtues can make worthy individual and social effects such as internal equilibrium: (Maede: 54); Islamic brotherhood: (Ale Imran: 103); pure life: (Nahl: 97) .

Deliberately -accepted theory:

In conclusion, about the reality of faith, we can say that: whatever we understand from the whole verses and traditions and Shia scholars of Kilam is knowledge of something should come hand in hand with the acknowledgment of it by heart, a kind of acceptance, which is with freedom, freewill and sincerity.

۱. Hypocrites claim their faith by their tongues only. (Expressional component)

۲. Bani Israel tribe had knowledge. (Knowledge component)

۳. The pretenders and insincere people show off in their practices.و هم یرائون

The theory of Shia scholars is the most comprehensive and the most accurate explanation of the relationship between faith and practice.

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As it has been said, faith was defined as *belief in the fivefold principle of religion, doing good deeds and commitment to the secondary important tenfold principles of religion*. Besides doing obligatory actions, the role of Mostahabbat (advised religious actions) should not be neglected as they are the continuation of obligatory actions. Doing mostahabbat, after doing obligatory actions can result in strengthening faith. Of course, it should be noted that obligatory actions in all situations are prior to Mostahabbat and they should not be neglected by the excuse of doing Mostahabbat. We read in a tradition,

لا قربه بالنوافل اذا اضر بالفرائض[٨]

For example, staying up at nights to pray if results in missing morning prayer is not approved. According to the verse ٢٣ from Sura Shora *الا الموده فی القربی* (مودت) friendship means " the love of the (Prophet's) relatives" and showing it in practice.

The mostahabat also are in different levels which in Islamic Irfan (mysticism) , Islamic ethics, and … they have been extensively explained. For example, in Islamic teachings, serving people and solving their problems are considered as the most highest level of Mostahabbat. Imam al-Sadiq said,

" والله لقضاء حاجه المومن خير من صيام شهر و اعتكافه"[٩]

I swear by God answering needs of a faithful person is better than a month of fasting and I'tikaf.[١٠] In another tradition from Imam Husain it has been narrated that,

" ان حوائج الناس اليكم من نعم الله عليكم فلاتملوا النعم".[١١]

In Islamic mysticism also one of the ways resulting in purification of the soul is to serve people. Therefore, good deeds have a hierarchical process: its lowest level is to do what is proper, the second level to do what is advised as mostahab and on the top obligatory actions. These affairs and keeping on doing them can strengthen faith. There are some issues which are barriers and ruin faith. Actions like: Kofr and Sherk, ignorance, some doubts, … .

Philosophical-Kilam based analysis of the relationship between faith and practice

Now it should be studies that if action is prerequisite for faith or is a part of the essence of faith? In other words, if action is at the same level of faith? Religious scholars knew good deed necessary for faith and knew it enough if one wants to be labeled as being faithful.[١٢] Some scholars of Kilam science like Khawarij knew action a part

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of faith so that they knew a person who commits capital sin as a kafir (infidel.)

To reject the second and to confirm the first approach we can say: The nature of faith is an acknowledgment by heart and confessing by tongue and if action was supposed to be limited to internal faith, numerous verses of Quran which relate good deeds to faith were meaningless. Like the verse 124 sura Nisa:

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَى وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ نَقِيرًا

But whosoever does good works of righteousness, whether they be a believing male or female, shall enter Paradise, and not be wronged a pit mark of a date stone.

But the second approach: it says though action is not similar and in the same level as having faith but is of its necessities, and it can bring salvation for human being. This strong connection between faith and action is what which absorbs quite a few number of scholars of kilam science to know action a part of faith. Good deeds cause advancement of faith and reach human being to pure life (حیات طیبه).

These two are not separated from each other and to be a true believer *practice is a necessary factor*. The role of action is more in advancing human being in spirituality. Faith without action is "هباء منثورا and action without faith is " شجر بلا ثمر".

Conclusion

It can be concluded from whole approaches towards kilam science that there is no unity in defining faith. For example, some know it as logical cognition, and some confession by tongue. The reason for this is what has been mentioned in verse 14 sura Naml. Some know it as acknowledgment by heart due to the verse 14 sura hojurat. Some know it as practice but in two extremes of excess and deficiency.

And some have broader look and know faith a compound of heart belief, confession by heart, and action.

To clarify this discussion more we should say that each apparently good action in Islam is not valuable and there is a distinction between being valued and being good. In Islam, the condition to accept an action is to have good intention and proper motivation and according to the verses of Quran concerning good deeds, those good deeds which do not have any root in faith and are not as a result of obedience of God are not accepted. Quran says about hypocrites:

و هم یرائون

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Nowadays two improper and incorrect opinions exist in Islamic societies, which aim at attacking the true relationship between faith and good deeds.

١. Muslims who are Muslim in names but not in actions in fact do not have practical faith in Islam.

٢. In the opposite, those who stick to the surface of Islam to take advantage of it to reach money, wealth or power have a wrong understanding of Islam as they neglect the reality of Islam.

In sura Baqarah, there are about 13 verses about hypocrites and their characteristics. Therefore, it can be concluded that not every action can be accepted by Quran; the action which is for God and not for your own benefit is accepted.

As the holy Quran says,

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَسَرَابٍ بِقِيعَةٍ يَحْسَبُهُ الظَّمْآنُ مَاءً حَتَّى إِذَا جَاءَهُ لَمْ يَجِدْهُ شَيْئًا وَوَجَدَ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ فَوَفَّاهُ حِسَابَهُ وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ﴿٣٩﴾

As for the unbelievers, their works are like a mirage in the wilderness. The thirsty person thinks it is water, but when he comes near he finds that it is nothing. He finds Allah there, who pays him his account in full. Allah is Swift in reckoning.

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَرَمَادٍ اشْتَدَّتْ بِهِ الرِّيحُ فِي يَوْمٍ عَاصِفٍ لَا يَقْدِرُونَ مِمَّا كَسَبُوا عَلَى شَيْءٍ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الضَّلَالُ الْبَعِيدُ ﴿١٨﴾

As for the likeness of those who disbelieve in their Lord, their works are like ashes which a strong wind scatters on a stormy day; they are powerless over that they have earned; that is the far error.

Based on what have read, we can infer that a firm relationship can be seen between faith and practice and kofr can erase good deed and not every good action is accepted.

End Notes

[1] Tarikh Tabari, 1409, vol.4: 541)
[2] Mas'udi, 1409, vol.2, 415/ Ya'qubi, vol.2, 1960, 195
[3] Ibid:103
[4] Abdul Jabbar Mu'tazila , Sharh Usul Khamseh, 138
[5] Muttaqi Hendi, Kanzul 'Ummal, p.59
[6] Saduq, 1404, vol.1, 226
[7] Kulayni, 1401 Ah. 33
[8] Bihar al-Anwar, Majlisi, vol.31: 84
[9] ibid, vol.71:285
[1] I'tikaf[1] is an Islamic practice consisting of a period of staying in a mosque for a certain number of days, devoting oneself to ibadah during these days and staying away from worldly affairs.[1][2] Muttaqi Hendi, vol.3:295
[11] Majlisi, vol.71:318
[12] Muttaqi Hendi, vol.3:295

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