

The Dynamic Range of Faith



Its Mystery and Its Certitude

æ ãÇ ßÇä Çááá áíØáÚßã Úái ÇáÛíÈ
*Nor will Allah disclose to you
The secrets of the unseen Mystery
(Quran 3: 179)*

Consider life for a moment as a river whose source and destination are not fully known. The river of life flows through a landscape that does not fully explain itself and it contains for mankind a geography of secrets thoughts and conflicting emotions that are never fully satisfied or resolved. We must become one with this river and fully integrated with the environment that the river serves, but we do not know how precisely. We must become like the river that flows inevitably within us, a river that irrigates near and distant lands but it never forgets its source. The question we must ask ourselves is this: What is the means to do this and how can this be accomplished?. Remember childhood then as a time of native innocence and a time of virgin faith. The infant soul still clings to the memory of its origin and source, as though it had unexpectedly fallen down from heaven without a clue to its whereabouts, and yet providentially without a care in the world. The mysteries of life suggest not only a promise but a reality for this care-free and irresponsible being. The limitless sky remembers heaven for the child and holds magical vistas of clouds and rainbows and stars. The field of tulips blowing in the wind brings joy to the infant soul as does the flight of the butterfly and the color of the rose. The whisper of the wind through the trees and the sound of the wave in a seashell creates a reality of ghosts and distant shores as clear and well-defined as a scientific theory. There was no mystery, no problem and no question that the child's mind could not resolve for itself through imagination and faith. Life was like a house with a wide-open door: It held the peace, security and contentment against this mysterious and miraculous universe.

Perhaps we should somehow prepare ourselves during the innocence of our childhood and youth, when the river of life is still fresh and still remembers its source, for the uncertainty and discontent that manifest themselves with the coming of maturity and adulthood. Perhaps we should keep telling ourselves as we grow older that we can never break through the illusions of this world and we will never be able to transcend the limitations of the human mentality unless we can maintain and preserve the virgin faith of infancy and childhood as an instinctive faith during the time of maturity and adulthood. Perhaps we will never know the meaning behind the face of the world and perhaps we will never achieve the certitude of mind and the serenity of heart that seems to be an instinctive desire of all men and women the world over. Perhaps if we could remember the poignancy and immediacy of childhood's imagination and faith, we would never let it go in maturity and adulthood. Perhaps...

Thus did I sometimes reflect upon my existential condition prior to my conversion to the Religion of Islam over twenty-two years ago, faced as I was with the confusion, isolation and uncertainties of what I thought to be the ruins of my young life. What saved me then, and what continues to save me now, was a fundamental faith embedded within my being, and still remembered from childhood, that had the power to lift me out of the turmoil within myself by virtue of a consciousness that still yearned for an experience and a reality beyond the reality of this world only. By the time I came of age in my early twenties and entered university, this lingering faith of childhood had weakened considerably. The spontaneity and instinctive imagination of my childhood and youth had vanished without a trace and I had no direction, no path and no destination in life.

Just prior to my conversion, my faith was a faith in search of a path, a faith without coloration or substance, and a faith without the support of a traditional and God-revealed religion that must carry with it the true knowledge of the Reality and the blessing and grace (*barakah*) that always

The Dynamic Range of Faith

accompanies a valid traditional religion. It was faith, nonetheless, though only a smoldering ember rather than a vivid spark, a faith that still had the power and potential to lead me in a direction I could not have conceived of solely within myself and “on my own”. This lingering faith was enough to set me apart from the multitude of my colleagues and friends, essentially drifting souls in pursuit of a purely secular existence, willing to live life without any other-worldly perspective and without the possibility of an inner spiritual life that could lead not only to fulfillment here on earth, but also to an evolution of soul rather than merely an evolution of body. They lived within a time frame and society whose culture supported a belief in a theory of evolution rather than a faith in the mystery of God, and trusted in a modern-day science that finds an answer for everything except the ‘one thing needful’.

My faith at that time was naive and innocent, yet shallow and undeveloped. I had no religion and no path, because I had abandoned the Christianity of my youth during my university years like an old-fashioned cloak and embrace what the Muslims call the “life of this world”, as opposed to the life of the other world or the hereafter. It wasn’t enough just to pretend to believe, without the support of a traditional path and without a genuine religion with its descent of knowledge through a revelation and a book, such as is found in the religion of Islam. I eventually came to the realization that my pretense to faith needed to give way to a faith built upon direction, desire, and action. I deeply felt the sense of isolation and restlessness that seems to overlay our 20th century existence, not to mention the discontent of soul that is felt everywhere today. I felt separated from all that should have been meaningful in existence and I felt that an invisible barrier existed somehow and somewhere that inevitably cut me off from real possibilities, leaving me with a sense of despair and doom. The river of my life had flown into a stagnant lagoon and I was no longer moving forward innerly within the stream of life.

Plato had an amazingly accurate perception reflective of a universal truth when he wrote several millennia ago: “It is not the eye that sees, it is the I that see.” In order to open my mind to the “I” consciousness mentioned by Plato, I needed to first close my physical eyes and turn them inward to the inner “I” which represents a consciousness of self, a consciousness most notably that sets humankind apart from the rest of the creation. I had to look far down into the depths of the inward self in order to ask: ‘How could I make the connection and bridge the eye of the contemporary “ego” with the “I” of the eternal self? How could I cross the chasm that exists between the “passionate and egoistic” soul (*al-nafs al-ammarah*) and the “soul which blames” (*al nafs al-lawwamah*), or the discriminating soul? How could I change from being a believer in myself only and a believer in the power of this world as a satisfactory reality? How could I become whole again and not just an insignificant fragment disconnected from the totality of the life experience? How could I transform myself into a conscious being in search *not* of myself and my own personal truth, but rather a conscious ‘self’ in search of truth’s truth? How could I become one again with the river of life that flowed within me? There was one final question that I did not directly ask, but later learned that the Quran asks for us: *Is it not to Allah that sincere devotion is due?* (39: 3)

These questions forced me to search for a knowledge that could effectively replace the ignorance at the heart of my understanding of myself and the world. These questions ultimately provided the framework for a profound desire that set me in search of a more meaningful approach to life. I was searching for something that could bridge the chasm that existed between my superficial understanding of the self-serving ego and the inward consciousness of the discriminating soul, and bridge the chasm that existed between the known world I saw before me with my eyes and the unknown world that I could sometimes feel with the inner “I” of consciousness. By the grace of God, I ultimately found myself at the crossroads of a new mindscape and on the threshold of a new heartland, through which flowed a river that encompassed both myself and the world.

I finally met this crossroads in the Middle East over two decades ago when I had the good fortune to meet a Muslim who not only introduced me to the Religion of Islam, but also symbolically led me by the hand into the unexplored territory of a new spiritual path and the possibility of a new

The Dynamic Range of Faith

spiritual experience contained within the religion. Through a subtle understanding of my needs and a compassionate patience for my confusion and ignorance, he was able to touch the faith already existing within me as a dormant and somnambulant possibility. Through his wisdom and guidance, I was awakened to the spiritual possibilities inherent within myself and within the universe generally, while the spiritual path of Islam provided the channel and the way of life for this new consciousness, since Islam was none other than a traditional religious path that proclaimed the nature of the true reality, with all of its orthodoxy, its spiritual practices, its earthly blessing and its paradisaal promise.

I have already written a book about my initial encounter with Islam and explored the mental, psychological and spiritual process that took place over two decades ago when I first became Muslim. I refer to my conversion here because it is important that the readership realize that these are the reflections of a Muslim convert and not the ideas of a person who was born into the religion. The dynamic range and extent of faith is in fact limitless and embraces countless possibilities. Men and women everywhere must find their own meaning and their own inner identity if they want to come to terms with the mystery that confronts them in this life. This is true for those with faith and those without faith, true for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. To simply profess a faith in God with words is never enough. It is not enough to *have* faith, the believer must also *live* faith's meaning and implications.

I have always been intrigued with the significance and implications of faith, partly because a fundamental faith made my initial interest in Islam possible, and partly because faith has played such a vital role in my life after my conversion to Islam, to the extent that I can honestly state that I am no longer the same individual that I was before becoming Muslim. Conversion is a clear choice that a person makes on his own and out of himself, free willingly and without compulsion, while the faith that impels this conversion is the ultimate affirmation and definitive "yes" to all that a person holds to be real and true at a given moment in time. Through conversion, the convert takes a stand and puts himself on the line so to speak. He does so because he wants to, and nothing can take from him the depth and profundity of that plain and simple desire and that bold assertion of mind and heart.

Initially, the meaning of this new faith was a profound mystery to me; its practical application had yet to unfold. The more I pursued faith's mysterious and elusive quality, however, the more I wanted to explore the inner meaning and the implications of faith for myself, for my own spiritual development, and for faith's place within the spectrum of life's experience. Why is it that one person is ready to believe in God and act upon that belief with all his mind and heart and another person refuses to believe and have faith in a Divine Being, but rather chooses to have faith and believe in the progress of a purely material form of existence and the evolution of the body. It is perhaps the greatest irony of the modern day world that the culture through which contemporary society expresses itself seems to deny the feasibility of a faith in a Divine Being. It has become a world-wide cultural phenomenon that expresses itself during these times as a purely secular point of view, a world-view that encourages the pursuit of a purely materialistic life experience, a world-view that assumes a hereditary affinity with the apes through the sacrosanct theory of evolution while aspiring paradoxically to a progressive development of the human race. It is a purely horizontal point of view and linear mode of thinking that refuses to engage the possibility of alternative worlds and other forms of thinking and experiencing the world.

In fact, in the contemporary world, we can safely assert with confidence that there is no such thing as a faithless person or a person without faith. There are those who exercise their spiritual instincts and believe in the force and power of a Divine Being who has created the human being out of mercy and love: "I was a Treasure but was not known. So I loved to be known, and I created the creatures and made Myself known to them" (*hadith*). Similarly, there are those who choose to believe in the concept of an evolutionary progression of man, denying the possibility that a Supreme Intelligence such as Allah has created the human being as an expression and reflection of the Divine Being, created this human being "as is" and "from nothing" (*ex nihilo*). The belief that man has advanced over the course of time from the nothingness of inorganic matter, and will somehow

The Dynamic Range of Faith

progress both mysteriously and miraculously into a superior form of being has become as sacred and religious as the faith found within the family of religions. Its exclusivity does not permit or tolerate any counter-argument. Yet what is the significance of such a faith and what are its implications? These questions I will leave for others who have the inclination and desire to speculate upon them, but in another *hadith* the Prophet of Islam has been quoted as saying: “God is veiled from intellects just as He is veiled from sight.”

Once I had gained a sense of conviction and adopted the path and the practice of the religion, faith was no longer a passive belief or an attitude of mind looking for a confirmation. It became the operative filter through which I was able to see through the inner “I” of the self and experience the world through a heightened consciousness that lent substance and meaning to everything I encountered. In adopting a spiritual identity through faith in a Divine Being, the world had become spiritualized and I had become a spiritual being once again as I had once been in the innocence of childhood when the spiritual instincts are still strong and the river of one’s life flows close to its source in proximity to Heaven. When I looked around myself through the “I” of faith, it was as if nature everywhere and the universe itself came to witness all that was real and true. *Everywhere you turn, there is the Face of God.* When I looked at the sun, I was able to see the Light of God, for *Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth*, and God is *Light upon Light* (24: 35). When I looked at the night sky, I no longer saw merely the accumulation of stars and galaxies, but rather I beheld the symbolic image of the city of God and in return my life began to steer itself by the fluid movement of the sun, moon and stars, whose harmony and synchronicity was a reflection of the Divinity. Everything in the world of nature became a “sign” (*ayat*) of God. Through faith in God, I was whole again and took part in the totality and the unity of the universe which is its supreme truth. I became once again a part of the river that draws upon and remembers the source, a river that moves through a landscape of miracle and wonder and leads once again to a destination with meaning and promise.



ĀYāā ŌŪĪ Çāāā ŌĪŅā āāĀŌáÇā Ýāæ Úāî äæŅ āā ŅĒā

*Is one whose heart Allah has opened to Islam
So that he has received enlightenment from Allah
(No better than one hard-hearted)? (39: 22)*

Needless to say, it is not easy to actively think about the meaning of faith, much less write about and explore through words and phrases an impression of faith that can clarify rather than obscure faith’s essential mystery and promise of certitude. It is an issue at once subtle, sensitive, and profoundly personal. There is nothing more precious or intimate than a human faith in a Divine Being, and perhaps nothing more fragile. It is the *mihrab* or inner precinct of the mind and heart and holy sanctuary of the spirit. Through faith, the believer puts him/herself on the line and identifies with a spiritual identity that places its trust in God. It is a sacred trust whose blessing permits the individual to transcend human limitations and escape the narrow and self-serving drive of the individual ego. Through faith, the believer can transcend his own humanity and lift the veil of the inward self in an act of self revelation that is outwardly human and inwardly spiritual. *On the earth are signs for those of assured faith, as also in your own selves: will you not then see* (51: 20)?

Central within the universe is the man of faith, Allah’s thinking creation within the hierarchy of being, whose perspective of belief serves as a bridge between the reality of this world and the world of the true reality. Central within mankind, however, must be a universe which is patterned through man’s faith in the Divine Being, a faith that proclaims that God exists as the supreme and absolute Being, a faith that expands with the passing of the days into a coloration of mind and a

The Dynamic Range of Faith

firmament of soul, a faith that represents a knowledge of God within one's being and a willingness to act upon that knowledge throughout the course of one's life.

Knowledge of the Divine Reality lies at the heart of the cosmic universe; the desire of realizing this knowledge within oneself remains the central aspiration of man's inner universe. The fact is, however, that man is veiled from direct knowledge of God and cannot cross this inseparable barrier on his own terms alone. The Prophet Mohammed, upon him blessings and peace, has said in a well-known *hadith*: "God has seventy thousand veils of light and darkness; were He to draw their curtain, then would the splendours of His Aspect (or Countenance or Face [*wajh*]) surely consume everyone who apprehended Him with his sight." Also, the archangel Gabriel (*Jibril*) has said: "Between me and Him are seventy thousand veils of light." The veil of veils in this context is reminiscent of the absolute barrier that exists in the modern world between the knowledge of God and the limited knowledge of man. This natural barrier that separates man by a veil from direct knowledge of the Reality has become during these times more like a steel shutter that effectively closes man off from the experience of the Reality through a human attitude that precludes any opening onto the spiritual world, much less to the Spirit of God as the one true Reality.

Faith unites the knowledge of the Divine with the human aspiration in order to realize that knowledge through action and through the power and force of human behavior. Faith is meaningless without the dual elements of knowledge and action, for knowledge and action are brothers, the Muslims say, in a sacred alliance. Through action, through behavior and through the very personality of the faithful person, an active faith nourishes and grows like a tree with deep roots, expanding, enlivening, and enriching the life experience of the individual believer with a view to the divine reality that lies at the heart of all experience. It grows solid and strong, rich and deep, and this is why the Quran refers to "levels" of faith within the human entity and emphasizes the importance of a faith that grows. *But Allah has endeared the Faith to you, and has made it beautiful in your hearts* (49: 7).

In fact, faith expresses a dynamic range within the human being that actually begins with mystery and ends with certitude. Paradoxically, faith begins as a mystery within the human mind and enters the ground of the human soul as a certitude. In the earthly sphere, man is confronted with a fundamental mystery at the heart of himself and his world. In addition to the perennial questions that confront the human being within the scope of this world--questions as to his origin, his meaning, his purpose and his end--there also exists within his conscious experience a fundamental mystery that is incomprehensible to the human mind on the one hand, and yet curiously accessible to the human heart on the other hand. We, as the most *human* of 'beings' in God's creation, know that the mystery exists and virtually underlies our conscious existence. No one questions this without questioning the basic nature of human experience. As such, it is instinctive within every individual to yearn for and pursue the meaning of this mystery within his or her life and to place it within both a reasonable and understandable context here on earth. After all, the longing for the Divinity is deeply engraved within human nature. Therefore, faith becomes the instinctive and primary response to all that is incomprehensible and unknowable within the world. Faith becomes the operative factor within man and the human resolution to life's ponderous and most valued secrets.

Faith addresses the mystery in life, but it carries with it no inaccessible secret. On the contrary, faith becomes the human confession once a person acknowledges that he/she is 'veiled' from the true nature of reality. Faith as a spiritual expression of the self is both individual as well as universal, individual as a personal response to a cosmic mystery and universal in so far as faith reaches across barriers that inhibit full realization of the mysteries and lifts the veil that separates man from the true nature of reality. Every man and woman, from the simplest peasant farmer to the most erudite of scholars, can enjoy the blessing and certitude of a simple faith in God precisely because faith is a personal and intimate aspiration as well as a universal force field of knowledge and desire. The human aspiration of faith draws upon the knowledge of God, while the forces within the

The Dynamic Range of Faith

field of truth reach down from the sublime to the terrestrial, from the Divine to the human, and touch both the simple peasant and erudite man and woman with wonder and awe. Faith lives within the individual as a field of vision whose horizon gives way to the certainty of the truth. If there is a secret associated with faith, it is a revelation rather than a mystery.

Faith is the affirmation plain and simple of the Divine Mystery at the heart of man and his world, a mystery that finds its resolution in the knowledge of the Divine Being, because *Allah embraces all things in His knowledge* (7: 89) and *Such is He, the knower of all things hidden and open, the Exalted (in power), the Merciful* (32: 6). This affirmation is made powerfully explicit in the *shahadah* (*la ilaha illa 'Llah*), or the great Witnessing in Islam, usually translated as *There is no god but the one God*, or can alternatively be expressed as *There is no reality but the one Reality*. The mystery embedded within this sacred formula provides faith with its own sufficient reason. In other words, faith exists as a fundamental human impulse, a spiritual instinct if you will, because a fundamental mystery exists within the creation that a person needs a lifetime to explore. In return, faith resolves this mystery for mankind when the believer simply accepts in principle all that the mystery implies and all that the mystery has to offer. Faith permits the believer to absorb as it were the unknowable essence of the mystery without necessarily comprehending it in any measurable way. The mystery becomes for the believer an "intuition" of all that is possible or probable within the individual and within the world, while faith makes possible the practical experience of a life lived within the shadow and reflection of the Divine Mystery.

Man seeks God and establishes the impulse of faith in the Divine Being precisely because there is this fundamental mystery at the heart of human existence. Man has faith and through faith unknown worlds emerge and become accessible to him. Perhaps this is why one often refers to faith as having the capacity to "move mountains". The believer is able to communicate with the Divinity precisely because God is the Divine Mystery of which all other temporal mysteries are the manifested earthly prototype. Everything, from our human origins, the origin of the earth, the laws of the universe and the magnitude of Nature, represent what is called within the Islamic perspective the secret (*as-sirr*) and what the Quran repeatedly refers to as the unseen (*al-ghaib*).

We are a mystery unto ourselves and therefore need God to substantiate for us the knowledge of our individual reality as well as the Ultimate Reality. Without faith in the Divine Being, the human being would be adrift amid a conflicting multitude of uncertainties concerning himself, his world, and the world. We have faith, we pray, we fast, we perform good works, in short, we attempt to spiritualize our existence and lift ourselves out of the mundane manner of our living through a faith in the Divinity, through a faith in Allah as the Supreme One, in order to cope with the inevitable mystery that pervades every aspect of life. It is as if the mysterious and the secret realms of the universe are necessary pre-requisites to faith that permit man to explore the true nature of his own being and the true nature of the world in which he finds himself as a mystery. Faith makes possible the lifting of the supreme veil that exists between the world of man and the world of the Spirit.

Faith exists because the Divine Mystery exists; elements of the mysterious form the source of faith's initial spark. Mankind is veiled in this plane of existence from direct and immediate knowledge of the Divine Being because this is the nature of human experience. The mystery is the divine challenge; faith is the human response. If it were otherwise, man would not be human and man would not be man. The Divine Mystery is actually the Cosmic Secret of the universe. This is no more fittingly prefigured than in the night sky with its canopy of stars, a miraculous panorama that has been called the "city of God". Its infinity of space and eternity of time reaches down nightly to remind mankind of his other self. Human beings both men and women have the potential for faith just as the blue sky has the potential to become the landscape of God and a symbolic image of other worlds. This faith then becomes the human secret that makes the meeting between the human and the Divine possible, a secret that is embedded within the Divine Mystery as a knowledge and actualized within the human being as an aspiration to meet that Mystery through faith.

The Dynamic Range of Faith



*Worship Allah as if you actually saw Him,
For even if you do not see Him,
Nevertheless He sees you.
(hadith)*

Faith is central to man's spirituality; without faith, there can be no spirituality, no virtue, and no spiritual evolution. Faith acts as a filter of the mind and casts shades of perception and insight across the field of human vision that continually shift and change our perception of the nature of reality and of the experience of that reality. Sometimes our faith is strong; Allah is near and we feel His Presence through a heightened quality of faith. Other times our faith is weak, Allah is infinitely far and we feel at once the distance that exists between our insignificant selves and the Supreme Self. Faith fluctuates between nearness and distance, between strength and weakness, depending upon the believer's attitude and state of mind at any given moment. Faith expands when we act on behalf of that which we believe. The spiritual practices, for example, such as prayer and fasting, can only increase faith. We pray and fast and perform good works (*salihan*) because we believe and have faith, and in return our prayer and our self denial through fasting and our self offering through the charity of the good deed all increase faith and heighten its intensity. Faith contracts when we do not act on behalf of that which we believe. Every act of forgetfulness, every turning away from the Divine Order and Will, every false intention and every evil action that reflects the satanic underside of life diminishes faith, weakens the human intention to lift the veil, and strengthens the illusions of this world.

If allowed to fulfill its function within man, faith will form the absolute bedrock of all human spirituality and will firmly establish within man's mind and heart a true understanding of himself and the world in which he must live. Faith then underlies all knowledge and all action within the human mentality. Its most fundamental premise lies imbedded within the well known and oft-quoted *hadith* noted above, that the believers should worship Allah *as if* they could actually see Him. This is the supreme existential condition for the human being here on earth, a conditional that is firmly embedded within the two simple words *as if*. By living one's life *as if* Allah actually exists, a person professes a belief in a knowledge that he cannot actually see with his own eyes, and a willingness to act upon that knowledge with a consciousness that has the power to change the course of his life.

Faith requires a leap of mind through the conditional "as if" in order to see with the inner eye and thus to understand that which cannot be seen with the external eyes. The human being will not see God with his eyes any more than God sees the human being with a physical "eye". We have earlier written of a truth that everyone already knows, namely, that a barrier or veil exists that separates man from a direct knowledge and vision of God. This veil is both opaque and transparent, opaque because "man is his own veil" in so far as he is not willing to cross the chasm that separates him from the true reality, and transparent because "man is his own revelation" who, because of his faith, can actually lift the veil that separates him from the unseen mystery and permits him a glimpse in terms of knowledge and presence of God that will verify and confirm for him what his faith proposes to be true. If God is a mystery, then man is expected to live the mystery of God through the mystery of faith. This is made possible through the conditional affirmation implicit in worshipping Allah *as if* He exists, for indeed his faith proclaims that Allah does exist, just as surely as man himself exists, and his experience will verify his faith in unexpected ways..

The denial of a faith in God or faith's logical alternative demands that we live *as if* Allah does not exist. This amounts to a kind of "faith in reverse" so prevalent now during the life of our time. The spirit of contemporary society, through the collective mentality of the mass population and through the

The Dynamic Range of Faith

life-style and behavior of the majority of contemporary individuals today, do not encourage a belief in a Supreme Being. Modern and contemporary man is making the same mistake that has been made down through sacred history, namely by establishing a “divinity” beside the One Divinity, thus a reality in addition to the real Reality.. Modern man therefore lives *as if* Allah and His Reality does not exist. He does not want the accountability that comes with a belief in a Divine Being, and he does not accept the truth that the gift of human consciousness brings with it certain obligations and consequences.

What the modern and contemporary man does not seem to realize, however, is the truth that in denying a faith in a Supreme Being, he is replacing the traditional and sacred beliefs with a contemporary and more secularized belief. It amounts to being a kind of faith in reverse. It is in the nature of the human mentality to frame one’s active perception with a faith that permits the human mind to come to terms with the fundamental mystery. Ordinary logic demands that if a person does not have faith in one thing, then he must have faith in another. The spiritual perspective raises logic to a higher level of perception through which the man/woman of faith sees things in terms of God rather than in terms of this world only. In this way, the believer is able to lift himself out of the ordinary experience of the world through a belief that itself has an element of mystery which connects him directly with the Divine Mystery.

It is true that the modern and sophisticated person of our time laughs at the faith of the simple believer. To him faith is a way of understanding the world that is actually nothing more than a psychological need and a sentimental emotion that is childish and naive. Modern man deceives himself into thinking that he has grown up and abandoned his inner needs for a more realistic perspective. He thinks that he can escape the demands of faith by denying faith’s possibility, when in fact he merely falls into the trap of living an alternative faith in a secular world view that during these times is predominantly, evolutionist, progressivist and materialist. Modern man believes fundamentally that he has evolved from lower and simpler life forms in a “natural” process of development that conforms to a purely physical means of development and confirms his scientific view of the world. He/she holds to the view that the human being is progressing from lower forms to higher forms as if this were actually desirable, through primates, Neanderthals, Cro-magnon to *Homo Sapiens*. He/she holds the expectation of an eventual progress in human evolution to higher and more progressive forms of human expression, as prototyped perhaps in the imaginary man as superman, even though nothing within life today even remotely suggests such a possibility or such an advance.

At this point, and within the limitations of this short article, we can only ask: What is more believable on simple, fundamental and obvious levels without all the arguments of either science or religion: Are we the creation, indeed the inspiration and miracle, of a divine and merciful Being who is the Beloved, the All-Mighty, the Sublime, or are we the creation of a miraculous series of chance and essentially mindless accidents that “happened” fortuitously during primeval time when suddenly a one-celled being with “potential” advanced out of the primordial slime on its momentous journey through time? Did the Spirit and Command of a Superior Intelligence bring about the absolute transition from nothing to something and from unconscious to conscious experience or was it indeed a blind force reminiscent of the blind faith of yore? The question is as absolute as the answer is necessary, and touches directly upon the mystery at the heart of human and cosmic universes. Every man inevitably answers the question by living the answer, the simple believer as well as the modern sophisticate, and this answer becomes the secret through which the human being links himself with his center and source beyond the horizon of himself and his world.



æ ÅĐÇ ÞÑÃÊ ÇáÞÑÁÇä ÌÚááÇ Èíáß æÈíá ÇáĐíá áÇ íÃääæä ÈÇáÃÎÑÉ ÎÇ ÈÇ ãÓÊæÑ
When thou dost recite the Quran,

The Dynamic Range of Faith

We put between thee and those who believe not in the Hereafter, a veil invisible.
(17: 45)

We began these reflections by associating faith's original inspiration and *raison d'être* with the fundamental mystery that confronts mankind in this life. We will conclude these reflections with a final comment concerning faith's certitude. We have already suggested that faith is required of the human mind because of its confrontation with the fundamental mystery at the heart of the self and the known world. Thereafter, faith begins to grow within the mind and heart of the believer who takes part in a life of spirituality and follows the path of an orthodox and God-revealed religion such as the religion of Islam. Eventually, the full range of faith's influence invades the inner world of the believer like a starburst from heaven and enters the ground of the human soul as a certitude and a certainty. The mystery that inspired faith into an action becomes a certitude that actually certifies within the soul the knowledge that is already there in faith's initial assent.

Faith is at first grounded in the completely mysterious as a single ray of light amid the total darkness of the unknown. It is based, of course, on the knowledge of God, but it would go nowhere without the human desire to believe. It becomes a kind of illumination through a great and generous leap of mind in which vast chasms are crossed and monumental heights are scaled and the believer arrives upon a field of vision whose plane expands the inner horizon of the mind and heart beyond all human reckoning.

Faith is based upon an essential knowledge and a fundamental desire. Its knowledge is based on the knowledge of God, that He exists, is One, that He creates, shapes, defines and sustains the Reality, that He encompasses all Truth, that He is the Beloved One and Sustainer of all life. Faith's desire is based on a free will that is purely human, without any echoes of the other timely or the other worldly, but like all human desire, is founded on a knowledge of the Divinity. As such, faith is of the earthly realm, temporal and pristine, purely personal and humanly intimate, the meeting of the human with the Divine. Faith's desire is strictly of this world in the sense that it actualizes the here and now, the present moment, thus making the eternal moment humanly real. It represents the sheer human desire to turn toward God and believe in Him in thought, word and deed. Like the roar of the lion and the cry of the peacock, faith's voice emerges from the human depths to reach beyond the solitude and isolation of the human entity as the voice of a single soul, purely human and humanly pure, alone in an unexplained world and on his own with this simple yet sacred spiritual response.

Faith belongs to man and as such it remains his summative statement of what he thinks to be true and what he is willing to act upon. It is his personal inspiration and his active choice through which he desires to understand and experience the world. Genuine faith is expressed through the human entity totally, in thought, through action, and by sentiment, emotion, and spiritual aspiration. It provides the inner structure and framework for the pursuit of the spiritual way and the pursuit of a life of spirituality.

Without an abiding belief in God, there can be no real knowledge, no holiness, no salvation and above all no certitude. Faith opens the inward "I" of the human consciousness which is a truth-giving window into the true nature of the one Reality.

Through faith, the believer can resolve all of the enigmas, the uncertainties, in short the mysteries that make up the fabric of this world. Life, the world and human existence all show themselves to be a weft and warp of apparent certainties and compelling uncertainties. We live in a world of shifting sands and our lives rarely exhibit any consistency or continuity. Without the vision of an abiding faith, our outer and inner worlds are a bundle of conflicting feelings and emotions that ultimately manifest themselves through isolation, doubt and existential loneliness that would be intolerable without the spiritual perspective of faith. We are nothing if we believe in nothing. We are everything if we follow our true nature and place our trust in God.

Through faith, the enigmas, mysteries and uncertainties of this world can be transformed into feelings of certainty and certitude that always accompany any genuine faith in the Divine Being. The essential knowledge brings with it a desire for faith; with a desire for faith comes experience of faith ;

The Dynamic Range of Faith

with experience of faith comes realization through faith; with realization through faith comes certitude. Finally, certitude brings with it its own compensation and its own ambience. Faith's certitude manifests itself as a compensation for the mind and heart because the certitude of faith only increases faith's desire. Faith's certitude thereafter manifests itself as an ambience through tranquillity of soul and a calm serenity of the peaceful spirit, this element of serenity and peace being the very essence of what the word *islam* has come to mean and promise: *It is He Who sent down Tranquillity into the hearts of the believers, that they may add faith to their faith* (48: 4). It amounts to a circle of spirituality that moves from knowledge to desire to faith to experience to realization to certitude and back again full circle to a faith fortified by experience.

The human being is essentially a reflection of the Divine Being. Man is loving because Allah is the Loving (*al-wadud*); man is merciful and just because Allah is the Merciful (*al-rahman*) and the Just (*al-muqsit*). Man expands and contracts through his sentiments and emotions because Allah is the One who expands (*al-basit*) and the One who contracts (*al-qabidh*). Man manifests an outer, physical being and an inner essence of soul and spirit because Allah is called the Outer (*al-zhahir*) and the Inner (*al-batin*). Man is generous and kind because Allah is the All-Giving (*al-karim*) and the Gentle One (*al-latif*). Everything about the human being reflects in some way the qualities and attributes of the Divine Being, except the noble sentiment of his faith and that is his alone, and the most human expression of the human self.

Within the hierarchy of being, only man has faith and expresses his faith as a sacred sentiment and as an active participation in the Divinity throughout the course of his life. Man's faith sets him apart from the angels, the jinn, the animals and plants in the kingdom of God, all of whom enjoy a knowledge of God and/or respond through their spiritual instincts on fundamental, supra-natural levels of expression. The angels execute the Divine Command, the jinn surrender to the Divine Being, the animals *pray and praise*, as the Quran tells us, even plants turn their faces to the light of the sun in praise of the Divine One. But only man actively chooses the Divinity with his mind and heart through the profession of a faith in God. Only man chooses God, and because of that, his faith is the spiritual expression *par excellence* of his most 'human' being.

Faith commences as a mystery and comes to fruition as a certitude. It commences as a subjective inspiration of the human mind in order to deal with the fundamental mystery, uncertainty and doubt that confront the human entity in this world. With time, faith grows into an outward expression of spiritual virtue that actually shapes the ambience of the mind and provides the coloration of man's inner being, his way of thinking and his way of feeling. Through the excellence of spiritual virtue, ordinary faith finally develops into an inward certitude that takes part in the objective Reality of God. Through the power of faith, the human subject is able to experience, if not actually see, the mysterious presence of God, and this experience alone objectifies the Reality of the Divine Being and encourages him to worship and *fear the Most Gracious Who is unseen* (50: 33).

The meaning of faith is embedded within the mystery of the knowledge of God and this is symbolized through the image of the veil and actualized here on earth as a divine mystery. The certitude of faith and its very object is the doctrine of the unity and omnipotence of God, and of eternal life for the aspiring soul, who saw and experienced with the spiritual "I" what could not be seen with the human "eye".

æ ÇÚÈĬ ÑÈß ÍÊi íÃÊíß ÇáíÞrã

Worship your Lord until there comes the Certainty. (15: 99)