



How Certain Are You?

By Imam Muhammad Magid with Samuel Ross

Let us take a moment to assess our level of certainty in Islam. Are our hearts full of love for Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) and the Prophet Muhammad (salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam)? Do we experience Allah in our daily life, influencing everything around us, now matter how seemingly insignificant, and showering us with rainstorms of His mercy? Do we worship Allah as if we see Him, and if not, as if He sees us? When we hold His book in our hands, do we think of it as the speech of the One whose Mercy is beyond our comprehension, Who created us and therefore knows us better than we know our own selves? When looking at our surroundings, from the trees to the air to our own bodies, as testifying to His existence?

In this age of doubt, when atheism and agnosticism have become commonplace and when media outlets have become saturated with attacks on Islam, the Prophet (salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam), and the Qur'an, many of us can find it hard to achieve the highest levels of certainty. Instead, we can find our convictions lapsing into mere propositions that don't actively inform our lives. We assent to the shahadah in our salaah and doubt through the listlessness of our actions. We move our finger in prayer but our heart slouches un-phased.

Unshakable yaqeen in Allah, His Messenger, the Qur'an, and the Hereafter must be the basis of our Islam. If we have it, we will always want to act in a manner pleasing to Allah. What exactly then is yaqeen, its nature, its benefits, and its methods of cultivation?

Many of us are like the person in Imam al-Ghazali's beautiful parable: If we were sitting in a room and a young child shouted: "Watch out, there's a spider on your neck!" what would we do? Most of us would jump up, fumble with our shirts, and try to brush off the spider. Yet simply because we cannot see Allah, we ignore the Prophet's call, despite the fact that His message is infinitely more serious.

Life's Two Paths

In our short time allotted on Earth, we must strive to become conscious of Allah, even though He remains unseen. If we do not do this, we will be shocked in the Hereafter. Our earthly journey to yaqeen takes us down two parallel and intertwining paths captured in the ayat: "On Earth are signs for those of assured faith, as also in your own selves. Will you not then see?" (51:20-21). The first is the intellectual path; the second is the spiritual path. We will consider each in turn.

The intellectual path is like a series of interconnected prayer beads. The first bead is certainty in Allah. In Surah Ibrahim, Allah provides a beautiful debate between the Prophets and the unbelievers. The Prophets ask: "Is there a doubt about Allah, the Creator of the heavens and Earth?" (14:10). This verse urges us to examine creation itself and to regard it as proof of God's existence. By contemplating creation, we can get to know Him and increase our certainty in Him. We can see the human body's remarkable design, from its DNA to its veins, the beauty of the evening sky, and the interconnectedness of the living environment. Eventually, we will recognize that nothing in the universe moves without His knowledge, and that He is the Ultimate Controller and Knower of all things.

The second bead, following fast upon the first, is developing *yaqeen* in His book, for as Allah tells us, "this is the book without doubt" (2:2). Only Allah can claim to have written such a book, for all human efforts would necessarily fail. Indeed, He even challenged humanity to do so: "Do they say: 'He fabricated the [Message]?' Nay, they have no faith! Let them then produce a recital like unto it, if they speak the truth!" (52:33-34).

We must strive to expand this certainty to its utmost reaches – the knowledge and conviction that every word in His book was deliberately chosen by Him, is positioned in the best of all possible ways, and carries wisdom. When we do, our lives are transformed. We will know that everything we read is true. We will benefit directly from His message, knowing that it was sent so "that He may forgive your sins and give you respite for a term appointed" (14:10). Our reading will be suffused with sweetness, softness, and enthusiasm.

The third bead is developing *yaqeen* in the Hereafter. This is an essential theme of the Qur'an. When we realize the Day's imminence, we restore a missing dimension to our lives, one that makes us want to obey. Consider the example of a speeding motorist: Many people speed while driving because they doubt that the police will catch them. If they knew that the police would catch them, they would obey the speed limit. But Allah is not so limited; He is al-'Alim, the All Knowing, and "not a word does humanity utter but there is a vigilant guardian" (50:18). When we come to truly believe that He sees all and will hold us accountable, we act in steadfast obedience.

Following the Prophet

The spiritual path takes us in the footsteps of its greatest practitioner, the Prophet Muhammad (salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam), an expert in the art of *dhikr* and *du'a*, the one who taught us to say "la ilaha illa Allah." If we do this regularly, we will reach our goal. A quick survey of the hadith literature reveals that his prayers were suffused with *dhikr* in both *ruku'* and *sajdah*. We must strive to incorporate these into our lives. When we do, we will initiate a chain reaction: achieving discipline over our tongues so that it will utter only praises of Him. Our hearts will be swayed, and our devotion to Allah will increase.

The Prophet also surrounded himself with people who had strong faith in Allah and who recalled His name often. There is a deep wisdom in this, for we all are social beings who are unconsciously influenced by those around us. Consider the people around us. Do they remember Allah often? Do they have a salubrious effect on our 'ibadah? When Imam Malik's heart grew hard, he would visit Muhammad ibn al-Munkader. Do we have an Ibn al-Munkader in your life?

In these difficult times, when so much doubt prevails and when people actively misrepresent Islam, we must strive to achieve the highest levels of yaqeen, for we carry the honorable and noble message sent by Allah for humanity. Despite all allegations to the contrary, it remains a message of peace and tolerance that contains the seeds for a just society, one in which all live in respect for one another. In the box below, is a place to commence our journey.

May Allah guide us and help us increase our level of yaqeen.

We look forward to incorporating your feedback and questions into our future columns. Please send all correspondence to: foodforthespirit@isna.net. Please also visit us at our website where you can download this and previous columns at: <http://www.isna.net/foodforthespirit>

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Below are four exercises we can practice to cultivate our yaqeen:

- Ⓒ Contemplate verses 6:74-79 and look at our life's journey. In which areas do we have doubt or uncertainty? What causes them?
- Ⓒ Use Ibrahim's story as a model for our life.
- Ⓒ Remember the Hereafter and visit cemeteries.
- Ⓒ Perform du'a and `istighfaar by seeking refuge in Allah; renouncing that which is causing doubt; saying "Aamantu bi Allah wa Rasulihi" (I have believed in Allah and his Messenger"); and reciting: "Huwa al-Awwalu wa al-Aakhiru, wa adh-Dhaahir wa al-Baatin, wa huwa bi kulli Shay'in 'Aleem (He is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Hidden, and He knows all things" [57:3]).