CHAPTER ELEVEN

FAITH AND HOPE

In this discussion, I will elaborate on the meaning of religious faith and its relationship to religious experience, religious convictions and religious practices. Then, I will discuss the impact of critical rationalism on faith and how faith manifests in different types of religiousity.

Religious Faith

Religious faith, as I understand it, consists of believing in and becoming attached to someone, as well as trusting them, thinking well of them and loving them. In saying this, I have mainly defined faith in God, because God is the central axis of monotheistic belief systems. Faith cannot be equated with belief per se; not every instance of belief—even dogmatic belief—can be seen as an instance of faith, because in faith you not only have belief, but you also have trust, commitment, devotion, love, humility and submission. We have many beliefs which, while being matters of absolute certainty, are not described as matters of faith. For example, on the basis of our religious teachings, we have total conviction in the existence of Satan. But we certainly do not have faith in Satan, because we do not consider him worthy of our trust and see no virtue in him.

The same can be said of certain things that fall under the rubric of science and philosophy. It would be difficult to say that philosophers have faith in the principality/facticity of existence (esalat-e wujud) or in the principle of causality. Or that scientists have faith in atomic theory.

1 This article is from Soroush’s book: Akhlaq-e Khodayan. Some changes are made here to both its format and content by the author.

2 Prior to Sadr al-din Shirazi (c. 1571–1640), Muslim philosophers would think that quiddities are matters of fact and their existences are abstractions from their facticity. But according to Sadr al-din Shirazi it is the other way around. Rather than quiddities, existence is the real substrate of things and quiddities are mere abstractions. This is the theory of principality/facticity of existence (esalat-e wujud). [Ed.]
The reason for this does not lie in any lack of certitude or conviction in these theories; it is simply that other requirements and conditions must be met, alongside belief, for us to be able to use the word “faith” in any meaningful sense.

When religious faith—in the sense and with the conditions I have set out here—comes about in someone’s mind or heart, there is a complete transformation in their entire being. This transformation in one’s very being is different from any transformation that may occur merely in one’s mind. A believer surrenders their entire being to their faith. And, as some philosophers have put it, faith gives a person a whole new existence and life; it does not just plant a new piece of data in their minds. This devout existence is the very opposite of an a non-devout existence. A non-devout being is essentially bent on rejection, disobedience and denial, whereas a devout being is brimming with humility and surrender. If we turn to religious texts, we find evidence corroborating this interpretation. There is a verse in the Qur’an, for example, that states:

...those only are believers who, when God is mentioned, feel a tremor in their hearts, and when His Signs are recited to them, it increases them in faith, and in their Lord they put their trust. (8: 2)

The tremor in the heart is a sign of humility and surrender, and it is an indication of the relationship of love and submission between the faithful and the object of faith. It is also clear that trust is one of the other attributes of the faithful and, without entrusting oneself, faith is incomplete, such that the inclusion of trust in the definition of faith must be seen as an analytic inclusion, not as a necessary or incidental attribute. Or take the following verse:

Only those believe in Our Signs, who, when they are recited to them, fall down prostrate and proclaim the praise of their Lord, not waxing proud. Their sides shun their beds of sleep as they call on their Lord in fear and hope. (32: 15–16)

Here, too, prostrating oneself, humility, hope and trust have been depicted as signs of faith. Faith, as I have described it, admits of degree, just as love can grow and grow, and just as trust and commitment and devotion may abate or intensify. The discovery of the object of faith’s merits and goodness and beauty and majesty is a gradual process and can, therefore, strengthen a person’s faith. This is why the believer can