

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

What is Īmān?

The Linguistic Meaning of Īmān

The root of Īmān is: أ-م-ن (A-M-N). Meaning: to affirm, confirm, feel safe, or to trust.

Ibn Fāris (d. 395H) said: “The root al-Hamza, al-Mīm, and al-Nūn indicates safety and trust, from it is al-Īmān which is tasdīq (affirmation).”¹



But tasdīq alone is insufficient (as clarified by the Salaf). The shar‘ī definition goes beyond mere affirmation.

Shar‘ī (Technical) Definition:

According to Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamā‘ah, as explained by the Salaf: “Īmān is: belief in the heart, speech of the tongue, and actions of the limbs. It increases with obedience to Allah and decreases with sin (or obedience to shaytan).”

This definition was agreed upon by the Salaf and carried forward by scholars like Ibn Bāz, al-Fawzān, and al-Albānī.

Qur’anic Proofs:

Īmān includes the heart, tongue, and limbs:

وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضِيعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ

¹ Maqāyīs al-Lughah 1/141

"And Allāh would not let your īmān go to waste."²

According to Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنهما, this “īmān” refers to: “Your ṣalāh (prayer) facing Bayt al-Maqdis before the Qiblah was changed.”³

This proves Īmān includes actions (ṣalāh), not just belief.

Īmān includes actions and grows:

لِيُزَادُوا إِيمَانًا مَعَ إِيمَانِهِمْ

“...So that they may increase in Īmān along with their Īmān.”⁴

This Ayah clearly proves that Īmān increases, so it must be more than just a static belief.

Sunnah Proofs:

The ḥadīth of Jibrīl عليه السلام: “Īmān is: to believe in Allāh, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Last Day, and Qadar – its good and its evil.”⁵

This is belief of the heart, which is one essential part of īmān — not the whole definition.

Also, the ḥadīth: “Īmān has over seventy branches. The highest of which is the statement: Lā ilāha illa Allāh. The lowest is removing harm from the path. And modesty is a branch of Īmān.”⁶

This clearly shows: 1). Tongue: saying Lā ilāha illa Allāh. 2). Limb(s): removing harm from the road. 3). Heart: modesty (ḥayā’).

Statements of the Salaf:

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110H) said: “Īmān is not by hope or beautification. Īmān is what settles in the heart and is proven by actions.”⁷

² Surah al-Baqarah 2:143

³ Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī 3/173)

⁴ Surah al-Faṭḥ 48:4

⁵ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 8

⁶ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 35

⁷ Ibn Baṭṭah in al-Ibānah al-Kubrā 1/338

Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241H) said: “Īmān is speech and action, it increases and decreases.”⁸

Imām al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204H): “Īmān is speech, action, and intention. None of these are sufficient without the others.”⁹

Imām al-Bukhārī (d. 256H): Named a chapter in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: “Chapter: Īmān is speech and action; it increases and decreases.” And he listed: Proofs for each element e.g., Sahābah saying "Our Īmān increases" and that actions like Jihad, Salāh, Hajj being parts of Īmān.

Refutation of the Murji’ah and Others:

The Murji’ah claimed: “Īmān is only tasdīq (affirmation in the heart), actions do not matter.”

The Salaf unanimously refuted this. Imām al-Awzā‘ī (d. 157H) said: “We used to say, while the Tābi‘īn were many, that Īmān is sayings, actions, and intentions. It increases and decreases. And the Murji‘ah opposes us.”¹⁰

Imām al-Barbahārī said: “Whoever says that Īmān is only speech without action is a Murji‘ī, and whoever says it is only speech and action without intention is a Qadarī, and whoever says it is only speech, action, and intention without increase or decrease is a Mu‘tazilī.”¹¹

Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله said: “The consensus of the Salaf is that Īmān is: belief of the heart, speech of the tongue, and actions of the limbs. It increases and decreases.”¹²

Shaykh al-Albānī رحمه الله said: “The correct ‘Aqīdah of the Salaf is that Īmān is composed of three elements... this is established in the Qur’ān, Sunnah, and consensus of the Companions and the early Imāms.”¹³

⁸ Uṣūl as-Sunnah, Imām Aḥmad

⁹ Sharḥ Uṣūl I‘tiqād Ahl al-Sunnah, al-Lālakā‘ī 5/956

¹⁰ al-Lālakā‘ī 5/897

¹¹ Sharḥ al-Sunnah

¹² Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā 7/209

¹³ al-Maqālāt 1/382

Shaykh Ibn Bāz رحمه الله said: “Īmān is belief in the heart, statement on the tongue, and action with the limbs. It increases with obedience and decreases with sin — this is the belief of Ahlus-Sunnah.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Fatāwā Ibn Bāz 1/66

