# Two Aspects of Faith and Its Relation to Human Free Will in Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī: A Philosophical Analysis*

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**Abstract**
The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between knowledge (*ʿilm* or *maʿrifa*) and faith (*īmān*), or intellect (*ʿaql*) and religious assent (*taṣdīq*), in the thought of Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī (d. 508-1115), the most distinguished theologian after the founding father of the Māturīdī school. Regrettably, the works of al-Nasafī and his school have not received the recognition they deserve in academic circles of the English-speaking world. This study aims to fill this gap and contribute to the studies already conducted in Turkish academia. The study distinguishes itself from other works in Turkish scholarship by exploring the philosophical reasoning behind the moral praiseworthiness of the act of faith in the Māturīdī tradition, as represented by al-Nasafī. To this end, the initial focus of this article involves conducting research on the essence of faith using al-Nasafī's corpus. It then explores the relationship established by al-Nasafī between knowledge and faith, or intellect and religious assent. This paper also examines the impact of God's intervention on human free will in the act of faith and whether this act should be viewed as a human or divine act. The findings of this study show that, according to al-Nasafī, the truth or legitimacy of a religious belief can only be established through knowledge or evidence (*dalīl*). Imitating the beliefs of forefathers (*taqlīd*), relying on intuition (*ilhām*), or trusting in the goodness of those beliefs cannot be a means of acquiring true knowledge of religions. Nevertheless, faith cannot be reduced to knowledge. Instead, faith is a special assent of the heart that is grounded in knowledge. With this voluntary assent, a person adopts the Islamic faith and its values as the most fundamental guiding principle of their life. The assent that al-Nasafī deems worthy of being called faith is a special kind of assent of this kind.

**Keywords:** Intellect, Religious Assent, Knowledge, Human Freedom, Divine Intervention, Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī, Māturīdism.

### Ebū'l-Muʿīn en-Nesefī'de İmanın İki Yönü ve İnsanın Özgür İradesiyle İlişkisi: Felsefi Bir Analiz
**Öz**
Bu makale, Māturīdī kelam geleneğinin kurucusundan sonraki en seçkin isimlerinden biri olan Ebū'l-Muʿīn en-Nesefī'nin (ö. 508/1115) düşüncesinde bilgi ve iman –diğer bir ifadeyle, akıl ve dinî tasdik– arasındaki ilişkiyi ve iman fiilinde insan hürriyetini ele almaktadır. En-Nesefī ve ekolünün çalışmaları, İngilizce konuşulan dünyadaki akademik

çevreler tarafından ne yazık ki henüz hak ettiği ilgiyi görememiştir. Bu çalışma, bu boşluğu doldurma ve Türk akademisinde hâlihazırda yapılmış çalışmalara katkı sağlama amacı taşımaktadır. En-Nesefî'nin temsil ettiği şekliyle Mâturîdî geleneğindeki iman fiilinin hem entelektüel hem de ahlaki açıdan övgüye değer olmasının ardındaki felsefi muhakemeye odaklanması, bu çalışmayı Türkçe literatürdeki diğer çalışmalardan ayırmaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, öncelikle en-Nesefî'nin külliyatında imanın doğası üzerine bir soruşturma yürütülecek, daha sonra en-Nesefî'nin bilgi ile iman veya akıl ile dinî tasdik arasında kurduğu ilişki üzerine odaklanılacaktır. Çalışmanın son bölümü, iman eyleminde Tanrı'nın insanın özgür iradesine olan etkisine ve iman eyleminin insani mi yoksa ilahi bir fiil mi olduğu hususuna odaklanacaktır. Bu çalışma, en-Nesefî'ye göre bir dinî inancın doğruluğunun veya meşruiyetinin ancak bilgi veya delille ortaya konulabileceğini ve kalpte bir dinin iyiliğine dair beliren hissin, ilhamın ve taklidin doğruyu bilmenin yolları olamayacağını göstermektedir. Fakat bilgiye yapılan bu güçlü vurguya rağmen, iman sadece bilmeye de indirgenemez. Bunun yerine 'iman, bilgiye dayanan kalbin özel bir tasdikidir' ifadesi, en-Nesefî'nin sahip olduğu iman yorumunu daha doğru yansıtmaktadır. İnsanın özgür iradesine dayanan bu özel tasdik ile kişi, İslam inancını ve değerlerini hayatının en ulvi yol gösterici ilkeleri olarak benimser. İşte en-Nesefî'de iman olarak adlandırılmaya layık olan tasdik, bu türden özel bir tasdiktir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Akıl, Dini Tasdik, İlim, İnsan Hürriyeti, İlahi Müdahale, Ebū'l-Muʿīn en-Nesefī, Māturīdiyye.

## Introduction

In Islamic theology (*kalām*), a great deal of intellectual effort has been dedicated to clarifying the relationship between reason and revelation (or intellect and religious assent). It is undeniable that Islamic revelation[1] has had a significant impact on shaping the interplay and rapport between these two domains. For, after accepting the idea that God had revealed to the Prophet and that the Prophet had thoroughly taught people what had been revealed to him, the mission of Islamic theologians, known as *mutakallimūn*, became to rationalise and defend the content of the Islamic faith. It is pertinent to note, however, that this should not be understood as solely a dogmatic approach —at least from the perspective of Islamic theologians. For they initially put forward, or at least strove to achieve, a well–grounded understanding of epistemology and ontology on which they

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[1] Initially, there is the Quran, followed by its commentary by the Prophet, known as *Sunna*, which includes his words, actions, and silent approvals on interpretation of what God has revealed for humanity.

would later build their apologia for what they believed. In other words, whatever they claimed had a solid epistemic grounding. Upon studying epistemology and ontology, and establishing their own paradigm, they declared that knowledge is within the realm of possibility —or that knowledge is accessible to human beings— and that God is the sole and unique cause of all existence. Based on the idea that God is the wisest and the most just, they inferred that God must have taught humanity the purpose of life on earth. They saw the Prophet as the Messenger, the one who was chosen by God to teach mankind the truth and to serve as a shining model of how to live in alignment with that truth. Then they produced a number of criteria to test the trustworthiness of the Prophet and of what he brought from God as divine revelation. After all these phases, they accepted the Islamic faith as the ultimate truth. They took care not to present a single Quranic verse or a single Hadith as evidence of their claim until they had completed all the stages of this process. In spite of all their initial intellectual efforts, it would be unjust if someone still attempted to define their approach as dogmatic.

For Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī, as one of the Islamic theologians who adopted the aforementioned approach, illuminating the relationship between intellect and religious assent was also one of the critical problems that needed to be addressed. This article aims to present al-Nasafī's position and ideas on the relationship between intellect (ʿaql) and religious assent (taṣdīq). In line with this purpose, we will first discuss the nature of faith, then the relationship between intellect and religious assent in al-Nasafī. The final discussion will concern the relationship between the free will of a servant and the grace of God, particularly in the act of faith. Let us now delve into exploring the concept of faith in al-Nasafī's writings.

## 1. In Search of True Faith: What is the Nature of Religious Faith?

Al-Nasafī begins his discussion of faith (īmān) in *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*, which many consider his masterpiece on Islamic theology, by noting that there was controversy surrounding the nature or real essence of faith among Islamic scholars.[2] Accordingly, there were those who claimed that faith consists of three parts: knowledge by the heart (*maʿrifa bi al-qalb*), confession or declaration by the tongue (*iqrār bi al-lisān*), and actions in accordance with the pillars of Islam (*ʿamal bi al-arkān*). Al-Nasafī reports that Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820),

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[2] Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 2:404.

and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) are considered to be among the leading scholars who hold this view.[3] Furthermore, some scholars believed that faith is a function of the heart and tongue (*maʿrifa bi al-qalb* and *iqrār bi al-lisān*), and that other organs have no role to play in the act of faith.[4] Al-Nasafī notes several variants of these three (*maʿrifa bi al-qalb, iqrār bi al-lisān, ʿamal bi al-arkān*) and how each school or individual adopted one of these variations as their definition of faith. In short, some accepted one alone, others combined two, and some took all three as the definition of faith.[5]

There is one group here that deserves particular attention, as their claim is closely related to the discussion at hand in this paper. Al-Nasafī reports that there were those who argued that faith is solely knowledge by the heart or knowledge that occurs in the heart (*maʿrifa bi al-qalb*).[6] The concept of *maʿrifa* here refers to knowledge by virtue of which the truthfulness of the teachings of the Islamic faith is proved or justified. This idea suggests that one should question at length and reflect on the articles (*ʿaqīda* pl. *ʿaqāʾid*) of the Islamic faith to test their truthfulness. Following this inquiry, one is able to reach a solid conclusion supported by evidence (*dalīl*) with regard to the authenticity of the religion of Islam. Faith, according to this understanding, refers to this specific knowledge that is formed in the heart that Islam is the true religion. Members of the Jahmiyya sect, who followed Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/745-46) and can be described as the rationalists of early Islam, can be cited as an example of those who adhered to this view. They appear to be the first group to solemnly deal with the question of what the internal structure of faith is.[7] It seems they excluded all other aspects of faith, whether internal, such as submission (*taslīm*), or external, such as confession by the tongue (*iqrār bi al-lisān*). According to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935-36)'s narrative, this group interpreted faith as merely knowledge.[8]

After summarising numerous views on the meaning of the notion *īmān*, he moves on to the widely accepted view within Ahl al-Sunna, which defines

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[3] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:404.

[4] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:404.

[5] For more detailed information on the followers of each view and their opinions, please refer to al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:404–15.

[6] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:405–06.

[7] Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Îmân and Islâm*, 82.

[8] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa-Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, 132–33. Al-Nasafī also characterises them as adhering to this view, see al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:406.

faith as the assent by the heart (*al-taṣdīq bi al-qalb*). He shows Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) and Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) as the pioneers of those who adopted this view.[9] Given al-Nasafī's position within the Māturīdī school, it can safely be assumed that he also adhered to this interpretation. Although he does not explicitly state his position in his most voluminous theological work, *Tabṣirat*, he dedicates a whole chapter in that same book to defending the view of Ahl al-Sunna on faith as the assent of the heart. Further to that, in *al-Tamhīd*, another theological treatise by al-Nasafī, he asserts that faith can be nothing but assent by the heart, by referring to the lexicographical or linguistic meaning of the concept of faith.[10] Considering al-Nasafī's overall approach and his role within the school, it can be argued that his primary goal was to provide a more comprehensive foundation for the views of Abū Ḥanīfa and Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī and present them to readers in a more expanded manner.

Now we can take a deeper look at al-Nasafī's justification for the view of Ahl al-Sunna.

The primary argument that al-Nasafī puts forth to defend the viewpoint of Ahl al-Sunna is the manner in which philologists or lexicographers *(ahl al-lisān)* use the concept of *taṣdīq* and several others that are somewhat related to it. Al-Nasafī asserts that, as per the understanding of lexicologists, "faith" (*īmān*) is an antonym of "unbelief" (*kufr*).[11] And the word *kufr* means claiming something to be falsehood or untrue (*takdhīb*). Further, it also means to deny or disacknowledge (*juḥūd*) the truth content of something. According to al-Nasafī, if we examine the antonyms of the words *takdhīb* and *juḥūd*, we find the concept of *taṣdīq* (assent). Therefore, he argues that attributing any meaning to *īmān* other than the meaning of *taṣdīq* leads to, as lexicographers have stated, taking the concept of *īmān* out of its intended meaning, which cannot be accepted.[12] The gist of al-Nasafī's argument is that faith is the thing through which an individual abandons unbelief, and

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[9] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:406.
[10] al-Nasafī, *al-Tamhīd fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 99.
[11] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:406. As al-Nasafī has noted, the words "faith" and "unbelief" are frequently presented as antonyms in the Quran. For instance, "There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allāh has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allāh is Hearing and Knowing." See "The Quran: 2/al-Baqara:256," https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=2&verse=256. (23.02.2023.) (For all quotations from the Quran in this paper, I have used the International Sahih translation of the Quran, which can be accessed online at, https://corpus.quran.com.)
[12] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:406–08.

unbelief is the thing through which an individual abandons faith. In other words, faith is the means of leaving unbelief, and unbelief is the means of leaving faith. The use of these words as antonyms by lexicographers confirms that faith is equivalent to assent.

Al-Nasafī counters all the arguments and claims made by other groups and sects about faith, stating that faith can be nothing more than *taṣdīq*. According to him, all other views, except that of Ahl al-Sunna, must be refuted. Al-Nasafī, for example, criticises those who consider deeds to be an integral part of faith, by making reference to the views of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī on the subject.[13] Accordingly, he reports that al-Ashʿarī also accepted faith as an act of assent by the heart and criticised those groups that considered deeds or Islamic practices (*aʿmāl or afʿāl*) to be part of faith. For, attributing the absolute name of faith to the elements or components of Islamic law (*sharāʾiʿ al-Islām*), such as fasting and the five daily prayers, means broadening or extending (*tawassuʿ*) the meaning of the concept of faith. Thus, neither al-Nasafī nor al-Ashʿarī consider Islamic practices to be part of faith or an essential component of it. It is not the actions one performs that determine whether a person is an adherent of Islam, but the creed (*iʿtiqād or ʿaqīda*) one sincerely enunciates, or to be more precise, one truly holds in the heart.[14] Further, it is also possible for a person to follow Islamic practices without being sincerely committed to the creed of Islam. The Quran refers to these individuals as hypocrites, as they have not fully internalised Islamic values.[15] Several verses in the Quran describe the motivations and mental states of those who practice Islamic rituals in this manner, stating that they seek worldly gain, not the love of God.[16]

On the nature of faith, al-Nasafī further states that faith is a firm disposition or state present in the heart that neither increases (*lā yazīdu*) nor decreases (*wa lā yanquṣu*) in terms of its quantity.[17] In simpler terms, the articles of faith remain constant and unchanging over time and are not subject to alteration or revision, but rather are accepted as the ultimate truth since they are revealed by Almighty God. The steadfastness in these

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[13] One of al-Nasafī's noteworthy attitudes is his occasional use of the views of the Ashʿarī school, which is another major representative of Sunni theology, especially in discussions where there is consensus among Māturīdites and Ashʿarites. Al-Nasafī employs the views of al-Ashʿarī to critique those who believe that deeds are an integral part of faith.

[14] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:406.

[15] 4/al-Nisāʾ:140.

[16] 2/al-Baqara:8–9; 4/al-Nisāʾ:137, 143; 3/Ālu ʿImrān:167; 8/al-Anfāl:49; 33/al-Aḥzāb:12; 63/ al-Munāfiqūn:3.

[17] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:416.

articles of faith is essential for maintaining one's commitment to the belief system of Islam and preserving its integrity as a whole. Furthermore, a person cannot be in between faith and unbelief, they must choose one or the other, they either embrace faith or reject it. Faith is thus the assent of the heart reaching a place of firm decision and robust acknowledgement. According to al-Nasafī, the increase (*ziyāda*) and decrease (*nuqṣān*) in faith can only be accepted in terms of its light (*nūr*) or brightness (*ḍiyāʾ*), that is, in terms of its quality.[18] The light of faith increases with righteous deeds (*al-aʿmāl al-ṣāliḥa*) and decreases with sins and disobedience (*maʿāṣī*).[19] However, in terms of being assent per se, faith can be associated neither with increase nor decrease. If someone has attained the true essence of assent, their faith remains steadfast and unchanging.

Al-Nasafī's views on the issue of exception in faith (*istithnāʾ*) also yield valuable insight into the true nature of faith. According to al-Nasafī, once assent takes root in the heart, it is more appropriate for the servant to declare "I am truly a believer" or "I am a believer in reality", rather than saying "I am a believer if God wills", as the latter implies some degree of doubt.[20] If there is doubt, assent cannot be said to be truly acquired or firmly established in the heart. However, if the servant uses the latter statement because he wishes to be more humble before God, or because he does not know what the final outcome of his life will be, whether belief or unbelief, then there is no harm in using it.[21] Yet, in any case, al-Nasafī suggests that abandoning the use of the statement "if God wills" for describing one's status of belief is more appropriate, as using *istithnāʾ* in faith may give the impression of doubt.

In light of the discussion so far, we can say that, according to al-Nasafī, faith is a firm and unwavering assent (*taṣdīq*) by the heart, not subject to doubt or uncertainty, but a steadfast conviction deeply rooted within the servant's heart. Al-Nasafī believes that knowledge plays a central role in faith, but also argues that faith is a multi-faceted concept that cannot be reduced to mere knowledge alone. Defining faith as mere knowledge fails to take into account the internal and external aspects that contribute to the full spectrum of faith. In the following section, we will examine al-Nasafī's

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[18] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:416.
[19] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:416.
[20] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:423.
[21] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:423.

views on the relationship between intellect and religious assent, which will provide a deeper understanding of the true essence and complexity of faith.

## 2. Faith and Reason: Analysing the Relationship between Intellect and Religious Assent

According to al-Nasafī, true knowledge of a religion can only be attained by means of evidence (*dalīl*). He maintains that there is no other way to determine the veracity of religious claims. When someone is asked why they are drawn to one faith rather than another, al-Nasafī holds that the only convincing answer can be provided through evidence.[22] He uses the term "knowledge" (*ʿilm* or *maʿrifa*) interchangeably with evidence and asserts that, except for knowledge, there are no other means by which the trueness (*ṣiḥḥa*) or fallacy (*fasād*) of religions can be known.[23] He also refers to sources of knowledge as the way to determine the soundness of religions (*asbābu maʿrifati ṣiḥḥati al-adyān*).[24] He emphasises the importance of mental activities such as contemplation, reflection, meditation, and thinking deeply (*taʾammul* and *tafakkur*) in different parts of *Tabṣirat* to distinguish between true and false religions.[25] In this context, al-Nasafī also places a strong emphasis on the concepts of "reason" (*ʿaql*) and "sign" (*ʿalāma*) alongside evidence and knowledge. It would be appropriate first to briefly discuss these key concepts as an introduction to the discussion at hand.

Al-Nasafī reports that early Muslim theologians had varying opinions on the definition of knowledge.[26] He states that some theologians of his school define knowledge as follows: "Knowledge is an attribute that removes ignorance, suspicion, assumption and fallacy from one who is alive". (*Inna al-ʿilma ṣifatun yantafī bihā ʿan al-ḥayyi al-jahlu wa al-shakku wa al-ẓannu wa al-sahwu*).[27] Al-Nasafī believes that this is an influential definition with positive characteristics, but according to him, the most accurate definition was put forward by Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, the founder of the Māturīdī school, for whom al-Nasafī holds deep respect. Before presenting al-Māturīdī's definition, al-Nasafī notes that it is not a direct or identical copy

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[22] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:35.

[23] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:34.

[24] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:34–38.

[25] For instance, see al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:40.

[26] In his work, the author analyses and critiques the definitions of *ʿilm* put forth by prominent Muʿtazilite and Ashʿarite theologians, as well as those of other sects. For an overview of the various definitions of *ʿilm* that al-Nasafī presents from scholars of other *madhhab*(s), refer to al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:9–19.

[27] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:19.

of al-Māturīdī's original formulation.[28] Instead, it rather appears to be a combination of al-Māturīdī's statements and ideas on the subject as assembled by al-Nasafī. The definition that al-Nasafī attributes to al-Māturīdī is: "Knowledge is an attribute which reflects '*al-madhkūr*' [lit., the thing that is uttered; in this context, the object of knowledge] in the person who holds this attribute". (*Al-ʿilmu ṣifatun yatajallā bihā liman qāmat hiya bihī al-madhkūr*).[29] Al-Nasafī asserts that this definition is valid and strong enough to withstand all objections. Al-Nasafī does not explicitly state his own definition of knowledge in *Tabṣirat*, and no definition of his own concerning *ʿilm* could be located in *al-Tamhīd*. However, in his minor theological treatise, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, he cites a specific definition attributed to Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa and implies that he also adopts this definition, which is "to know the known as it is" *(maʿrifat al-maʿlūm ʿalā mā huwa bihī)*.[30] It appears that al-Nasafī does not restrict himself to only one definition of knowledge, but rather utilises multiple definitions that he finds useful. Lastly, it is pertinent to note that the definitions of knowledge referenced here apply to the knowledge possessed by all created beings, including man. The knowledge possessed by God falls outside the scope of these definitions, as God and all of His attributes, including Omniscience (*ʿĀlim*), are unique and infinite.[31]

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[28] "*Wa lam yaʾti bihādhihī al-ʿibāra ʿalā hādhā al-naẓm wa al-tartīb.*" See al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:19.

[29] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:19. An alternative phrasing of this definition, as proposed by Rosenthal, is: "Knowledge is an attribute through which the object mentioned (remembered?, *madhkūr*) becomes revealed to him in whom (that attribute) subsists." For more information, see Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, 59. Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī (d. 580/1184), another prominent figure of the later Māturīdī school, also attributes this definition to al-Māturīdī. He expresses admiration for the definition, similarly to al-Nasafī, and states that it is the most accurate among the definitions that have come to his attention. See Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī, *al-Kifāya fī al-Hidāya*, 45–48. A different rendering of the same definition by Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390) in his commentary on the *ʿAqāʾid of al-Nasafī* reads as follows: "Knowledge is an attribute of the knowing subject by means of which any object referred to becomes revealed (*yatajallā*) to him." He further adds the following comment: "... that is to say, it becomes clear and evident and capable of being described by words, and this regardless of whether that object is something existing (*mawjūd*) or something non-existing (*maʿdūm*)." See Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam: Saʿd al-Dīn al-Tāftāzānī on the Creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī*, 15. For further information and discussion on the definition of knowledge in al-Nasafī, please refer to the following articles: Adnan Bülent Baloğlu, "Doğru Bilgi Tanımına Ulaşma Çabası: Ebü'l-Muʿîn en-Nesefî Örneği [An Intellectual Struggle for a Sound Definition of Knowledge: A Case of Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī]," 3–20; Mustafa Yüce, "Kelamcıların Bilgi Tanımları ve Nesefi'nin Semantik Tahlili [The Definitions of Knowledge by Muslim Theologians and Semantic Analysis of al-Nasafī]," 111–126.

[30] al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 61. (Arthur Jeffery has translated this short tractate of al-Nasafī into English, see Arthur Jeffery, *A Reader on Islam: Passages from Standard Arabic Writings Illustrative of the Beliefs and Practices of Muslims*, 89–124. Salem (New Hampshire): Ayer Company, 1962/1987.)

[31] al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 61–62.

Al-Nasafī asserts that the reality of the external world is undeniable and
that it is within the capabilities of human beings to acquire knowledge
about it. He states that we continuously perceive and understand the
existence of objects in the outside world through our senses. He expresses
his views on ontology and epistemology with the following laconic
statement: *"Ḥaqāʾiq al-ashyāʾi thābitatun wa al-ʿilmu bihā mutaḥaqqiqun"*,
which means, "The existence of things/objects is ontologically indisputable,
or an absolute reality (*thābita*); and gaining knowledge relevant to those
objects for human beings is within the bounds of possibility with absolute
certainty (*mutaḥaqqiq*)."[32] The understanding of knowledge reflected in al-
Nasafī's texts demonstrates a strong sense of realism. Knowledge of objects
is not dependent on the beliefs or assumptions of individuals. Things have
their own reality in the external world, separate from one's mind. In other
words, objects in the outside world possess an inherent reality that exists
independently of one's perception or understanding of them. For example,
if different individuals with sound minds and senses focus on a particular
object with the aim of understanding its reality, they will all arrive at the
same conclusion.[33] Further, al-Nasafī declares that it is within the realm of
possibility for man to obtain knowledge regarding both the physical and
metaphysical realms. As for the knowledge of God, however, one can know
God, but it is not possible to fully comprehend His reality or essence. To
adhere to al-Nasafī's own terminology, one can only use the verb "to know"
(*yaʿlamu* from the root *ʿilm*) not the verb "to comprehend" (*yudriku* from
the root *idrāk*) when referring to God. The word *idrāk* means to encompass
(*iḥāṭa*) something to the degree of knowing all its limits (*ḥudūd*) and its end
(*nihāyā*).[34] Therefore, the terms *idrāk* and *iḥāṭa* are not applicable to the
infinite and transcendent nature of God. In short, it is impossible for finite
minds to fully comprehend the Infinite Being, the Almighty God.

Reason or intellect (*ʿaql*) is again held in high esteem by al-Nasafī for its
capacity to assist individuals in reaching true knowledge of religions.
Rational beings (*ʿuqalāʾ*) tend to inherently choose the correct or
convenient side when making decisions. In such cases, for al-Nasafī, the
most reliable faculty that humans can consult is their faculty of reasoning,
which sets them apart from other creatures. By contemplating the nature
and mysteries of the human mind, one can understand that this faculty of

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[32] al-Nasafī, *al-Tamhīd*, 2; Cf. al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:20.
[33] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:23.
[34] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:15.

reasoning was placed in human nature by God. According to al-Nasafī, the very existence of this faculty, in and of itself, within the small universe (*al-ʿālam al-ṣughrā*)[35] serves as strong evidence and sign (*ʿalāma*) of the Creator's existence.[36]

Another concept that al-Nasafī draws attention to in this regard is the concept of *ʿālam* (universe), which is derived from the Arabic word *ʿalam* and encompasses everything that exists other than God. The word *ʿalam* has meanings such as "sign," "distinguishing mark," and "characteristic."[37] In al-Nasafī and Islamic tradition, the term *ʿālam* is used to refer to the entire cosmos, including every single part of it, as everything that is present in the realm of existence (*mawjūdāt*) demonstrates and points to the existence of its Creator (*Ṣāniʿ*).[38] Additionally, this understanding holds that the universe not only indicates God's existence, but also His fundamental attributes such as Omnipresent (*Ḥayy*), the All-Hearing (*Samīʿ*), the All-Seer (*Baṣīr*), Omniscient (*ʿAlīm*), and Omnipotent (*Qadīr*). Furthermore, according to al-Nasafī, this interpretation also allows us to deduce God's oneness and uniqueness; "there is nothing like Him" (*laysa kamithlihī shayʾ*) rationally from observations of the universe.[39] According to al-Nasafī, it is impossible to believe that the universe, with its intricate structure, beautiful appearance, and solid and perfect foundation, was created by a lifeless, ignorant, or powerless being. The fundamental principles of human reason make this point clear, leaving no room for doubt. Someone who suggests that an embroidered silk fabric, a grand palace, or a beautiful painting could come about by chance from a stone, or from a lifeless being without wisdom, would be considered foolish (*safīh*) or stubborn without hesitation by those with sound judgment.[40] The utilisation of knowledge, evidence,

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[35] In the Islamic tradition, the phrase "small universe" is often used to refer to human beings. This idea posits that human beings are a condensed representation of the universe and its workings. In simpler terms, man is thought to be the sum or essence of the universe. For this reason, it is said that "He who knows himself knows his Lord" (*man ʿarafa nafsahū faqad ʿarafa rabbahū*). Therefore, it is argued that self-knowledge leads to an understanding of the Divine, as the comprehension of one's own being is equated with an understanding of the universe and its Creator.

[36] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:29; al-Nasafī, *al-Tamhīd*, 4.

[37] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, s.v. "ع-ل-م" (ʿ-l-m)"; al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿArūs*, s.v. "ع-ل-م" (ʿ-l-m)"; Hans Wehr, s.v. "ع-ل-م" (ʿ-l-m)," in *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. http://ejtaal.net/aa/#hw4=756,ll=2227,ls=5,la=3082,sg=740,ha=507,br=660,pr=107,aan=430,mgf=619,vi=264,kz=1751,mr=448,mn=965,uqw=1121,umr=746,ums=632,umj=555,ulq=1241,uqa=303,uqq=251,bdw=612,amr=445,asb=675,auh=1099,dhq=384,mht=633,msb=169,tla=77,amj=547,ens=328,mis=1511. (08.11.2023.)

[38] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:62.

[39] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:62.

[40] al-Nasafī, *al-Tamhīd*, 21; al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:246–55.

reason, and signs present in the universe, for al-Nasafī, is the ultimate means to gain understanding of the Creator and discover the true religion or path to Him.

According to al-Nasafī, there is no other means of attaining true religion except through the methods outlined above. However, he reports that there was a group of people in his time arguing that one should hold onto or embrace a faith if there is a feeling or thought formed in their hearts regarding the goodness of that faith (*mā yaqaʿu fī al-qalbi ḥusnuhū*).[41] In other words, according to them, this feeling related to the goodness of that faith demonstrates the truth of it. Al-Nasafī states that accepting such feelings or assumptions formed in the faithful's heart as evidence is impossible. For, each one of those adherents, who follow different religious traditions, can claim that they have a feeling in their hearts through which they are aware of the trueness of their religion. However, religions are many and varied, and there are apparent contradictions between them in most of what they present as truth. Even within a single religion, there are numerous claims of truth. Consequently, individuals can only arrive at the truth through knowledge, as it is the sole means of disproving the claims of others.[42]

Intuition or inspiration (*ilhām*), which is again often claimed by certain groups as a way of justification, cannot be a sound basis for knowing the truth or falsehood of religions.[43] Therefore, just like the scenario discussed above, intuition cannot be a means of knowledge in determining the right religion. For, here too, disciples of every religion can boldly assert to be inspired by God regarding the truthfulness and legitimacy of their own faith. This requires the simultaneous acceptance of contradictory truth claims, which is also impossible (*muḥāl*), according to al-Nasafī.[44]

Last but not least, according to al-Nasafī, blind imitation or uncritical faith (*taqlīd*)[45] cannot be a method of determining the truth of religions for

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[41] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:34.
[42] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:27, 34.
[43] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:34–35.
[44] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:34–35.
[45] The term *taqlīd* refers to the absence of independent intellectual effort in faith-related matters. The person who performs *taqlīd* is known as *muqallid*. *Taqlīd* can be described as the act of conforming unjustifiably to the teachings of another, or the uncritical imitation of traditional religious interpretations put forward by the religious establishment in general. In other words, it involves blindly following the opinions of religious scholars without questioning or analysing them critically.

the imitator (*muqallid*).[46] When one is asked how they know that their religion is true, the only satisfying answer can be given through evidence. Therefore, adopting a faith without evidence is not an appropriate attitude in al-Nasafī's thought, and nothing can be a basis or be presented as ground for religious faith other than evidence.[47] Al-Nasafī's writings on *taqlīd* show the clear contradictoriness in the attitude of the imitator and these writings are one of the most striking examples of how the author applies the concepts of knowledge (*ʿilm* or *maʿrifa*), evidence (*dalīl*), reason (*ʿaql*), contemplation (*tafakkur*), and sign (*ʿalāma*) in determining truth of religions. Al-Nasafī presents a series of pieces of advice and suggestions for those who wish to walk securely on the path of faith.[48] He consistently criticises the imitator who accepts the doctrine of someone, such as a teacher (*ʿālim*), spiritual master, or father (*shaykh*), as truth without needing to confirm its truthfulness.[49]

It is worth mentioning here that al-Nasafī employs the concept of evidence in a broad sense.[50] Although he occasionally makes reference to concepts such as *ḥujja*, *istidlāl*, *burhān*, *taʾammul*, and *tafakkur*, the word he most frequently uses to denote evidence or proof is *dalīl*, which has literal meanings such as "sign", "indication", "proof", "evidence", and "guide".[51]

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[46] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:35.

[47] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:35.

[48] For instance, the imitator is advised to adopt their faith through the medium of a scholar or authority (*ʿālim*), who presents rational justifications or evidence to support their teachings. However, the imitator should evaluate the evidence presented by the authority to determine if it is sufficient. If the evidence is found to be rationally consistent, then the imitator's faith becomes legitimate, since, ultimately, both the authority and the imitator adhere to the same religion and believe in the same articles of faith. For further reading on this topic, see al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:36. Another piece of advice from al-Nasafī regarding this matter pertains to the *mutawātir* accounts of miracles attributed to the Islamic Prophet. He argues that it suffices for the imitator to embrace the Islamic faith on the basis of the miracles performed by the Prophet, as these miracles are considered reliable due to their transmission by a large number of trustworthy narrators. According to al-Nasafī's theory of knowledge, news that comes through the *mutawātir* route conveys necessary knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ḍarurī*), as he explains in more detail in his chapter on prophethood. Therefore, he concludes that one may acquire sufficient evidence and knowledge of their faith through the *mutawātir* accounts of miracles. See al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:37.

[49] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:35–36. Al-Nasafī's conception of religious faith, which largely revolves around the notion of sufficient evidence, brings to mind William Clifford's influential essay *The Ethics of Belief* in contemporary philosophy of religion. In this work, Clifford argues that it is morally wrong for an individual to hold a belief more firmly than the evidence warrants. He maintains that it is always unjustified to accept a belief that is not supported by sufficient evidence. For further reading, see William Kingdon Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," 177–211.

[50] For a comprehensive analysis of the concept of evidence in Islamic theology, see Josef van Ess, "The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology," 238–71.

[51] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, s.v. "دلـل (d-l-l)"; al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿArūs*, s.v. "دلـل (d-l-l)"; Wehr, s.v. "دلـل (d-l-l)," in *The Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. http://ejtaal.net/aa/#hw4=348,ll=950,ls=5,la=1413,sg=389,ha=226,br=336,pr=57,aan=192,mgf=3

According to al-Nasafī, the most crucial aspect of evidence is that it should be correct by reason and strong enough to persuade the listener of the veracity of religion, rather than relying on sophisticated or complex reasoning. For al-Nasafī, before adopting any faith, it is important for the faithful to gain a true knowledge of religions, according to their capacity, through evidence that is either simple or complex, but accurate. This evidence may include detailed and sophisticated reasoning about the parts of the universe (*jism*, *jawhar* and *ʿaraḍ* ), the status of things (*ashyāʾ*) in terms of having a beginning in space-time (*ḥādith* or *muḥdath*), the unity of the Creator or Originator (*al-Muḥdith*) —who is the real cause (*sabab*) of everything that exists— and His divine attributes. However, contemplation and reflection (*taʾammul*, and *tafakkur*) on the notable examples of the esteemed prophets and their miracles can also serve this purpose, although it is simpler compared to the first method. Both methods require effort and fulfil an individual's responsibility as a rational soul. According to al-Nasafī, attaining faith through either method is equally praiseworthy and those who obtain faith in either way deserve to be rewarded by God.[52]

In al-Nasafī's perspective, one of the crucial points in the matter of faith is that one should strive to the best of their ability to attain evidence. One should patiently endure hardship (*mashaqqa*) and persevere through difficulties; only then will their faith be worthy of praise in the eyes of God. What al-Nasafī means by *mashaqqa* is to make an effort to dispel doubts through evidence and systematic reasoning, to the extent of one's ability.[53] Al-Nasafī remarks that the wise person engages in contemplation and reflection (*taʾammul* and *tafakkur*), devotes their heart and intellect to research, seeks the correct way of thinking (*baḥth*) and reasoning (*naẓar*), and takes refuge in God during times of hardship on the path of faith. On the other hand, foolish people direct themselves towards acquiring worldly pleasures instead of dedicating time and effort to the path of faith, and then embrace faith blindly without undertaking any hardship or burden for its sake. The act of faith should be considered meritorious in proportion to the *mashaqqa* and personal intellectual effort one has put into gaining knowledge and understanding on the road to faith. According to al-Nasafī,

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06,vi=148,kz=736,mr=231,mn=417,uqw=542,umr=370,ums=302,umj=252,ulq=722,uqa=135,uqq= 106,bdw=318,amr=227,asb=294,auh=572,dhq=181,mht=294,msb=83,tla=48,amj=244,ens=328,mis =668. (08.11.2023).

[52] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:39–40.

[53] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:39–40.

those who do not endure hardships on the path of faith will have no reward and will not be able to achieve the benefits of faith.[54]

For an act of faith to be deemed praiseworthy or meritorious from both Islamic and moral perspectives, it must be characterised by the quality of *taqarrub* (drawing closer to God) and must be devoid of any elements of *iḍṭirār* (necessity or oppression) in its essence.[55] The act of faith should be driven by the desire to draw closer to God and gain His love. This should be done voluntarily, without any external pressure or coercion. In other words, faith should be a personal choice, not a result of necessity (*iḍṭirār*). If one is coerced into believing, this faith is not regarded as a worthy deed in the presence of God. Furthermore, as outlined by al-Nasafī, according to Islamic teachings, the act of faith should not take place on one's deathbed. This is because, as a person approaches death, certain truths become clearer to them, and the divine trial or test arranged by God for human beings loses its significance.[56]

Achieving a genuine spiritual connection may be possible by blindly following the beliefs of others, but true comprehension, constant awareness of God, and self-realisation can only be gained through the use of one's own intellect in the act of faith. This way, one can evaluate and comprehend the evidence supporting their faith and reach true knowledge about what they believe. Therefore, while an imitator's faith may be considered authentic or valid as it serves the purpose of approaching God and is a deliberate choice to attain the love of God, they are still considered sinners as they do not use their intellect to learn and fully understand the principles of their religion.[57]

Al-Nasafī cites the story of Prophet Ibrāhīm told in the Quran as a remarkable example of implementing reasoning in a simple yet accurate way. According to the Quran, Prophet Ibrāhīm carefully observed the movements of celestial objects, including stars, the moon, and the sun, and through logical thinking and inference (*istidlāl*), deduced that there must be a higher power, namely God, controlling and orchestrating these celestial bodies as per His divine plan.[58] Al-Nasafī argues that every intelligent

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[54] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:40.

[55] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:39.

[56] As the story of the Pharaoh in the Quran illustrates, even the most powerful and feared rulers can come to realise their own mortality and embrace faith based on the truths they witness at the moment of death. Nonetheless, since the secrets of God's test for humanity become apparent at the time of death or in the throes of dying, such last-minute acceptance of faith is deemed invalid. See 10/Yūnus:90–91.

[57] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:41.

[58] 6/al-Anʿām:75–79.

person who has reached the age of responsibility or liability (*taklīf*) should use their reasoning to understand that the universe has a creator, as Prophet Ibrāhīm did through simple observations.[59]

The individual seeking true knowledge of religion should establish two points clearly: first, that these intellectual endeavours should provide sufficient evidence to convince the hearer that the person who claims to hold the true religion is trustworthy, and second, that there must be sufficient evidence to validate the objective truth of the message being presented by the claimer. In short, the trustworthiness (*ṣidq*) of the claimer is not enough on its own; evidence of the message's objective truth must also be presented. Only when both of these points are fully established can the trueness (*ṣiḥḥa*) or falseness (*fasād*) of religion be known. This knowledge can only be gained through the use of the intellect and by consulting other credible sources such as the senses and trustworthy news.[60]

Al-Nasafī systematically employs the aforementioned principles in the analysis of the Islamic Prophet's claim regarding his prophethood. He presents a detailed account of the reasons for accepting the veracity (*ṣiḥḥa*) of the Prophet's claim and makes a determined effort to show that the prophethood of Muhammad is an established fact in history.[61] When *taṣdīq* occurs in a person as an inner act, denial and hesitation regarding the matters or content of faith disappear. A person who has hesitation or pausing (*taraddud*) in faith is in a position where they neither deny nor confirm the articles of faith. Therefore, al-Nasafī states that faith, first and foremost, is not to deny the articles of faith and then to accept them without

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[59] al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 64–65. Al-Nasafī cites the story of Ahl al-Kahf (the Seven Sleepers or the Companions of the Cave) in the Quran as a further illustration of how one can attain knowledge of God through evidence, which implies that he takes evidence in its broad sense. See al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 82–83. Al-Nasafī presents an intriguing idea from the Muʿtazilite tradition. According to them, one does not need to employ reasoning in order to know God because the intellect (*ʿaql*) inherently knows God without requiring reasoning, as reported by al-Nasafī. "*Lā yajibu ʿalayhi an yastadilla bi al-ʿaqli, walākinna al-ʿaqla yūjibu ʿalayhi an yaʿrifa Allāha taʿāla.*" See al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 83. It may be worthwhile to explore as a focus of an independent study, whether the Muʿtazilites proposed something similar to Alvin Plantinga's idea that "belief in God is properly basic." See Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, 28.
[60] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:34.
[61] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:45. Al-Nasafī dedicates a highly extended chapter to investigate this issue in his *Tabṣirat*. For a detailed justification of Muhammad's prophethood through many arguments, see al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:45–106.

hesitation.[62] According to al-Nasafī, the attainment of absolute certainty in one's faith can only be achieved through strict adherence to the aforementioned principles. The faithful, only then, is so surrounded by evidence that they feel no legitimate fear for the attempts that are likely to be undertaken by an opponent with the aim of refuting their position.

Thus far, al-Nasafī has placed strong emphasis on the role of knowledge in matters of faith, which raises the question of how he differentiates knowledge from faith. To understand the subtle distinction between the two, it is essential to take a closer look at the relationship he established between intellect and religious assent. As mentioned earlier, to al-Nasafī, faith (*īmān*) is assent (*taṣdīq*) by the heart, acknowledging that something is true. To demonstrate that *īmān* is *taṣdīq*, not *maʿrifa*, al-Nasafī conducts a linguistic analysis of the concepts of *īmān*, *kufr*, *taṣdīq*, *jahāla*, *juḥūd* and *maʿrifa*. According to al-Nasafī's analysis, *īmān* and *kufr* are antonyms of each other. *Kufr* means to claim something to be false or untrue (*takdhīb*) and to deny or reject (*juḥūd*) its truth content. Knowledge (*maʿrifa*) has two possible antonyms: not to know or to have no knowledge (*al-nakura* or *al-nakāra*, and to be ignorant of something (*al-jahāla*).[63] In light of this linguistic analysis, al-Nasafī argues that *maʿrifa* cannot be equated with *taṣdīq* because the antonyms of *maʿrifa* are not the antonyms of *taṣdīq*. To put it simply, the concepts of *īmān* and *maʿrifa* are distinct because they have different antonyms, and therefore they cannot be used interchangeably or referred to as each other.

Furthermore, al-Nasafī claims that lack of knowledge on a certain subject does not inevitably mean one is denying its truthfulness. Additionally, it is also possible for someone to reject the truth of something even when they have a full understanding of its validity. Using a Quranic example, he illustrates the latter: "Those to whom We gave the Scripture know him as they know their own sons. But indeed, a party of them conceal the truth while they know [it]."[64] Al-Nasafī notes that faith cannot be spoken of here, as the group mentioned in the verse has no assent, despite possessing knowledge.[65] Therefore, in al-Nasafī's view, as he demonstrated through his linguistic analyses above, being ignorant of a matter (*jahāla*)

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[62] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:38. His master al-Māturīdī holds the same view, see Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 495.

[63] For the full discussion, see al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:406.

[64] 2/al-Baqara:146.

[65] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:415; Cf. al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 166.

and denying the truth of it (*takdhīb*) are two different attitudes. The first does not necessarily lead to the latter. And again, just as ignorance does not necessarily lead to disbelief (*kufr*), knowledge does not necessarily lead to assent (*taṣdīq*). In Islam, both disbelief (*inkār*) and faith (*īmān*) come after knowledge.[66] In the Islamic tradition represented by al-Nasafī, the ability to exercise free will still exists in the act of faith, even in the presence of knowledge, as we will discuss in further detail later.

Al-Nasafī is careful to avoid establishing a direct causal relationship between *ma'rifa* and *īmān*.[67] Nevertheless, he does recognise a close relationship between the two, despite denying their causal relationship in the sense of necessity. Al-Nasafī sees *ma'rifa* as a cause (*sabab*)[68] that can lead to *īmān*, just as ignorance can lead to *inkār*. This is the function that al-Nasafī assigns to *ma'rifa* in the act of faith. However, *ma'rifa* alone is not a sufficient reason for *īmān* since *īmān* requires assent of the heart. In other words, the essential factor in the act of faith is the movement of the heart, which is how *īmān* occurs (*… al-īmān yakūnu bi al-qalbi …, … al-īmān huwa al-taṣdīq …, … bi al-qalbi yakūnu al-tasdīq*).[69] Now, it appears that the key to finding the answer we are looking for lies in examining al-Nasafī's emphasis on the concept of heart (*qalb*) and its relation to the concept of *taṣdīq* in his account of faith. Let us take a deeper look at the concept of heart.

Al-Nasafī's emphasis on characterising *taṣdīq* as a movement of the heart and his rejection of a causal relationship between *ma'rifa* and *īmān* suggest that he assigns a dual meaning to the notion of *taṣdīq*. In the first sense, *taṣdīq* refers to the cognitive recognition of a belief. When it comes to *taṣdīq* in this sense, it is not a matter of one's free will since knowledge inevitably leads to cognition. With regards to knowledge or cognition, free will only comes into play before acquiring knowledge, in the sense of

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[66] See 2/al-Baqara:146; 6/al-An'ām:20; 9/al-Tawba:74; 18/al-Kahf:29; 27/al-Naml:14.

[67] In one modern discussion of religious faith, it is argued that the presence of knowledge eliminates the need for human will, as one must accept the truth of something regardless of their intentions. In other words, knowledge necessarily leads to assent. For further reading, see Frederick Tennant, *Philosophical Theology: The Soul and Its Faculties*, 301. Although al-Nasafī acknowledges that the will may be inoperative or limited when knowledge is concerned, he argues that voluntary action is still necessary to accept the truth content of knowledge and to live according to it. Thus, his view of human will extends beyond the mere confirmation of truth that arises from knowledge in the act of faith. Further elaboration on this point will be provided in subsequent paragraphs.

[68] The Arabic word *sabab* refers to cause, occasion, or motive, while *musabbab* refers to something that has been caused and *musabbib* to a causer or originator. However, these terms can also be used in a non-causal sense, as al-Nasafī demonstrates in his work *Baḥr al-Kalām*. For further discussion of this, see al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 67.

[69] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:415.

choosing to strive for it. However, once cognition is attained, the agent necessarily gives their assent to its truth or truth content. This is the first meaning of *taṣdīq*, which occurs through cognition, and it is mostly related to knowledge. Therefore, the term *qalb* here refers to the human mind through which we acquire cognition and abstract understanding of the reality.

According to al-Nasafī, once an individual attains knowledge or cognition on the path of faith, they are still free to choose whether to adopt the moral doctrines of that faith within their life and accept its teachings as the guiding principle of their life wholeheartedly. This is the second meaning of *taṣdīq*, which serves as a controlling, commanding, and guiding power. This form of *taṣdīq* is achieved through an individual's faculty of choice and is considered the most deserving of being called faith.[70]. When *taṣdīq* is related to this kind, the term *qalb* refers to the faculty of free will. Al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390)'s remarks in his *Sharḥ al-ʿAqāʾid*, a commentary on Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142)'s Creed (*ʿAqāʾid*), reinforce this understanding of *taṣdīq* among Māturīdite theologians.[71] Faith is the name of the second *taṣdīq* rather than the first because the first *taṣdīq* is mostly related to *maʿrifa*. The following quotation illustrates how Māturīdite theologians view faith as a voluntary act:

> ... there is a distinct difference between the cognition of the judgments and deciding that they are true on the one hand, and the assent to them and conviction about them on the other. So it is sound to call the second kind Belief [*īmān*] in distinction from the first. ... Some of the Early Theologians mention the suggestion that assent is an expression for binding the heart to that which is known of the narratives given by the Narrator; and it is something acquired (*kasbī*), established by the choice of the one who assents. Therefore it is to be rewarded and considered the chief of religious duties (*al-ʿibādāt*) rather than cognition which sometimes occurs without any acquisition, as when one's glance falls on some body and there results to him knowledge that it is a wall or a stone. ... [A]ssent means that by your choice you

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[70] As has been noted on many occasions, al-Nasafī was a devoted follower of al-Māturīdī, and his understanding of *taṣdīq* aligns with that of his master. Both scholars view *taṣdīq* as having a dual meaning. I am indebted to Meric Pessagno's study of the notion of *taṣdīq* in al-Māturīdī for the analysis presented here. For further insight into the meaning of *taṣdīq* in al-Māturīdī's thought, see Pessagno's article, Meric Pessagno, "Intellect and Religious Assent," 18–27.

[71] See al-Taftāzānī, *Creed of Islam*, 122–23.

ascribe veracity to the Narrator. Thus, if it were to occur in the heart without choice, it would not be assent, even though it were cognition.[72]

If we analyse this understanding in detail, it appears that both of these *taṣdīq*(s) are carried out by the heart in al-Nasafī's philosophy. In the first *taṣdīq*, one recognises through the heart that the Messenger is trustworthy, and therefore the message he conveys is true. The mind plays a crucial role in this first *taṣdīq*, as it is only through the mind that one can distinguish truth from falsehood. It is important to note that during al-Nasafī's time in the Islamic tradition, there was no clear distinction between the concepts of "heart" and "mind". The term *qalb* was used interchangeably with the human mind during that period. Thus, it is more accurate to understand the term *qalb* as referring to the rational soul of man, which is the source of all knowledge, reasoning, and intuitive actions. As for the second *taṣdīq*, it involves the act of practising what was learned in the first *taṣdīq* by accepting it as the most fundamental guiding principle in one's life. The mind plays no role in this second *taṣdīq*, which is solely a matter of the heart (*... al-īmān yakūnu bi al-qalbi ...*).[73] In this context, the term *qalb* refers to the faculty of choice rather than the human mind.[74] Through the second *taṣdīq*, one goes beyond the intellectual apprehension gained from the first *taṣdīq* and fully commits themselves to the truth of that first *taṣdīq*. Al-Nasafī's description of faith as a light in the heart (*nūr fī al-qalb*) emphasises the voluntaristic aspect of the second *taṣdīq*, where one embraces this light as their primary principle and guides their life accordingly.[75]

This subtle nuance between the two meanings of the concept of *taṣdīq* reveals what is meant by the phrase "faith is assent by the heart." It is not a requirement to have commitment in the initial *taṣdīq*, and as such, it cannot be considered faith. However, faith is not completely isolated from the first *taṣdīq* either. That is, faith is not based on unfounded or groundless assumptions, nor is it simply an intellectual recognition or acknowledgment of truth with sufficient evidence. Instead, faith encompasses both *taṣdīq*(s): first, the acquisition of knowledge or cognition of truth, and then, the voluntary adoption of that truth into one's life. These two *taṣdīq*(s) are

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[72] al-Taftāzānī, *Creed of Islam*, 123.
[73] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:415.
[74] al-Nasafī uses the word *bāl* to refer to the mind, particularly when he needs to differentiate between the mind and the heart. For instance, he employs the phrase *khaṭara bibālihī* to denote thoughts that arise in the mind. See al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 164–65.
[75] al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 67.

essential for faith to be considered praiseworthy in al-Nasafī, and both are carried out by the heart.

With the two distinct interpretations of *taṣdīq* in mind, it becomes clear why al-Nasafī does not endorse the idea that *īmān* can be called *maʿrifa*. Instead, "*īmān* is *taṣdīq* with *maʿrifa*" appears to be a more appropriate expression of al-Nasafī's interpretation of religious faith. In his perspective, only when *maʿrifa* –the initial form of *taṣdīq*– is accompanied by the second *taṣdīq* can it truly be called *īmān*. Al-Nasafī acknowledges a strong bond between knowledge and religious assent, characterising faith as the light, or illumination, of knowledge in the heart (*nūr al-maʿrifa*).[76] Intellect prepares one for the path of faith by eliminating obstacles and doubts through the acquisition of knowledge and evidence, which are all outcomes of the rational soul of man. Evidence, reasoning, and signs are privileged notions in al-Nasafī's understanding of faith. He emphasises repeatedly that one should never blindly follow beliefs about which they have no knowledge. Faith that lacks a rational basis is not deserving of praise. According to al-Nasafī, it is impossible for intellect and assent to be at odds with each other because they are both blessings from God. His works include extensive discussions of intellect (*ʿaql*) and its defence, highlighting the importance of employing reasoning in matters of faith.[77]

True faith necessitates a foundation of knowledge. In other words, faith should be justified through knowledge or evidence. Therefore, knowledge is a prerequisite or necessary condition. In philosophical terms, when we talk about necessary conditions, we mean that a certain factor or element must be present for a particular phenomenon to occur. For al-Nasafī, knowledge is the necessary condition that must be present for the phenomenon of faith to occur. One must possess some level of knowledge or awareness about the object (Allāh) and articles (*ʿaqīda* pl. *ʿaqāʾid*) of the faith they hold. A person who believes in something they do not know, as in the case of *muqallid*, fails to meet this necessary condition. Consequently, their faith is not regarded as praiseworthy, from both philosophical and ethical perspectives.

However, this necessary condition or initial reason, referred to as the first assent, is insufficient by itself to bring about faith. In addition to this prerequisite, there must be a sufficient reason or cause, namely the second assent, that triggers the emergence of faith. The concept of sufficiency is

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[76] al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 67.
[77] See, for example, al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:27–33; al-Nasafī, *al-Tamhīd*, 4; al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 61.

crucial to our discussion. In philosophy, when we speak of something as the sufficient cause, we mean that it must coexist with the necessary cause to ensure the occurrence of the phenomenon in question. Applying this principle to our discussion on faith implies that knowledge, while indispensable as a necessary condition, is not enough on its own to occur faith. In addition to this necessary condition, which is the first assent grounded in knowledge, we must also hold the sufficient reason —the second assent, which entails a sincere commitment to lead a moral life in harmony with the truth content of the first assent. The components of this second assent transcend the realm of pure knowledge. In essence, faith, by its very nature, requires both the necessary and sufficient conditions.

Nonetheless, the fact that knowledge alone is insufficient to give rise to faith should not lead to the conclusion that it is irrelevant to the act of having faith. Al-Nasafī, much like his teacher al-Māturīdī,[78] does not overlook the significance of knowledge in the act of faith. In fact, what they both aim to demonstrate is that there is no inherent causal relationship between knowledge and faith. They reject the idea of a deterministic connection between knowledge and faith. In their interpretation, faith is not an automatic consequence of knowledge.[79] While knowledge can provide a foundation for faith, it does not guarantee its existence.

The example of Satan, often mentioned in Abrahamic religions, illustrate this point. Satan is traditionally seen as a being who had knowledge of God but did not believe or have faith in Him. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to claim that every individual unequivocally affirms or assents to what they possess knowledge of, just as it would be erroneous to assert that every person categorically denies what they lack knowledge of. What al-Nasafī and al-Māturīdī are trying to clarify is that knowledge often tends to engender faith, while ignorance often leads to denial.[80] Faith, as elaborated earlier, encompasses dimensions beyond mere cognition; it entails a deliberate and heartfelt dedication to the ethical implications of that belief. People may possess knowledge of a subject but still not act in accordance with that knowledge.

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[78] See al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 65–66, 178, 190.

[79] Just as knowledge can lead one to have faith, ignorance can also lead one to disbelief, but this is not the default. One may not believe even though they know, and one may claim to have faith without knowing, as in the case of the *muqallid*. See al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 478–79.

[80] al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 478.

If we carry on with the same line of reasoning and follow in the footsteps of al-Nasafī and al-Māturīdī, who relied on linguistic analysis, in order to understand the aspect of faith that goes beyond mere knowledge, we must look into the meaning of its opposite, *kufr*. In Arabic, the word *kufr* (disbelief) is associated with concealing or obscuring the truth, much like how a farmer covers the soil. Disbelief, in this context, is regarded as an act of hiding the truth. If disbelief signifies the act of veiling the truth, then faith, by logical extension of this linguistic analyses, signifies the act of unveiling and exposing the truth. The most effective way to demonstrate or unveil the truth to others is by leading a life that aligns with it, essentially becoming a living embodiment and exemplar of that truth. Therefore, for knowledge to genuinely transform into faith, it requires more than just intellectual understanding; it necessitates a deep connection of the heart and emotions to the truth.[81] The heart must firmly embrace the truth, and

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[81] In reviewing the writings of Abū Zayd al-Dabūsī (d. 430/1039), a devoted follower of al-Māturīdī in theological matters and a renowned figure within the Ḥanafite school of Islamic jurisprudence, we come across a similar linguistic analysis. Al-Dabūsī's eminence within the Ḥanafite tradition, stemming from his reputation and scholarly prestige, led to his recognition as one of the distinguished "seven judges" (*al-quḍāt al-sabʿa*), signifying his authority and influence in Islamic jurisprudence. See Ahmet Akgündüz, "Debûsî," *DİA*, 9:66. His linguistic examinations revolve around the concept of *iʿtiqād*, at times used interchangeably with *īmān*. Al-Dabūsī's analysis can be succinctly summarised as follows: The root of *iʿtiqād* is *ʿ-q-d*, signifying the meaning of "to tie" or "to bind," similar to the act of securing a rope to an object. Just as the act of tying a rope involves three essential elements or components (the person doing the tying, the rope itself, and the object to which the rope is tied, such as a pole), the realm of faith also encompasses three elements. In the act of faith, the believer serves as the one who ties, their heart as the rope, and God as the object to which the heart is tied. This binding process necessitates a prior understanding, recognition, or awareness of the object, for "man binds his heart only to what he knows/understands," according to al-Dabūsī. When one encounters the sublime essence of God through knowledge/first assent, a profound sense of love and admiration arises. However, this is not always the case, as some people may remain indifferent or apathetic to this experience due to their ego-driven desires, bodily inclinations, or preoccupation with worldly concerns and distractions. According to al-Dabūsī, faith is this latter phase in which one experiences a strong feeling of love and admiration towards God. The love of God here emanates from the immense pleasure (*ladhdha*) of understanding (*fahm*) what one knows. When one truly understands what they know, his knowledge turns into deeper insight (*fiqh*). The individual derives immense joy and satisfaction from their comprehension and knowledge of God, and this deeper insight and love for God becomes a wellspring of immense pleasure (*ladhdha*) and contentment in their life. Furthermore, this profound insight leads to the realization and awareness of how seamlessly this knowledge aligns with their nature as intelligent beings. The pleasure (*ladhdha*) and contentment in question actually stem from the recognition of this harmony or congruence. Just as sensory experiences are inherently suitable for animals and bring them joy, rationality is similarly naturally suited for human beings and brings joy to their souls. There exists a parallel between the appropriateness and inherent appeal of sensory experiences for animals and the appropriateness and inherent appeal of intelligible things (*maʿqūl*, pl. *maʿqūlāt*) for the human intellect. Faith is not a blind or irrational leap but, rather, a moral disposition that emerges when individuals turn toward, cherish, and become attached to God in a manner that permits rational knowledge and understanding. Al-Dabūsī's linguistic analysis of the word *iʿtiqād* offers another way of understanding the part of faith that goes beyond mere knowledge. Here, the heart symbolises the innermost core of an individual's consciousness, and the

what the mind comprehends, the heart must sincerely integrate into one's way of life.

Lastly, Māturīdite perspective firmly opposes the idea that individuals who claim to possess faith by imitating their forefathers, despite their ignorance or lack of knowledge, can validate their stance by referencing those who possess knowledge but do not believe. To put it simply, presenting cases of individuals who know the truth but do not hold faith cannot serve as a legitimate justification for embracing faith without knowledge. The attitude of individuals who refuse to accept or assent, particularly in its second sense, to what they already know to be true is an ungrateful position. In other words, the behaviour of someone who does not firmly bind themselves to the truth, adhere to it with strong dedication and commitment, is disagreeable and signifies a state of ingratitude. However, the alternative to this ungrateful attitude is not to praise ignorance (*jahl*) by blindly following others (*taqlīd*) without truly understanding or having authentic knowledge.[82] Both are extremes and problematic: the stubborn refusal to accept what is known and the blind imitation of forefathers. From a Quranic perspective, it is not only those who doggedly deny what they know but also those who zealously and blindly pursue what they do not know are described as being in a state of moral frailty.

Thus far, al-Nasafī has repeatedly implied that faith is an act that individuals acquire on their own. This raises questions about the extent of individual agency, particularly in matters of faith, given that in Islam it is held that everything is created by God, and He is the only one who has the power and privilege to create. Therefore, it is worth exploring how faith can be perceived as an individual acquisition in al-Nasafī's understanding.

### 3. The Act of Faith: Is it Guided by God or Acquired by the Servant?

Islamic revelation declares that everything has been created by God and is under His control: "That is Allāh, your Lord! there is no god but He, the Creator of all things: then worship ye Him: and He hath power to dispose of

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act of binding the heart to God represents both an emotional and cognitive connection, along with a sincere commitment to leading a moral life rooted in love for God. According to al-Dabūsī, a genuine connection with God and a sincere commitment to leading a moral life that aligns with the former cannot flourish without knowledge and understanding. For al-Dabūsī's detailed analysis, see Engin Erdem, "Hanefî-Mâtürîdî Gelenekte Bilgi ve İman [Knowledge and Faith in the Hanafi-Maturidi Tradation]," 73–74.

[82] Erdem, "Bilgi ve İman," 74.

all affairs."[83] "… He doth regulate all affairs."[84] Upon accepting this declaration, it becomes clear that both faith and infidelity (or unbelief) were created by God. If God is truly Omnipotent and Omniscient on the one hand, and Most Just and Most Merciful on the other, why did He choose for some to go to heaven and others to be sent to hell? If both faith and unbelief are created, how can it be said or justified that God will reward those who believe and punish those who do not? Would this not compromise or adversely affect His attributes of Most Just and Most Merciful?

Al-Nasafī focuses on finding a solution that does not compromise the two central tenets of the Islamic faith: first, that God is the Almighty and Omnipotent Creator of everything, including the actions of people, and therefore all creation must be attributed to Him; and second, that all people are responsible for their actions and deserve to be punished or rewarded accordingly. The Sunnī Māturīdī tradition, represented by al-Nasafī, will not tolerate any attempts to undermine these fundamental principles. Al-Nasafī believes that the issue should be settled by avoiding explanations and implications that could harm these two core beliefs. Before investigating al-Nasafī's proposed solution, it would be useful to review the responses to this matter from other theological circles in the Islamic world.

When addressing the task of balancing man's free will and God's divine attributes, there are three possible paths: first, to assert that man has no free will since God is the only one with the power to create —the fatalistic or deterministic attitude, which damages man's moral responsibility while affirming God's divine attributes, namely, omnipotence (*qadīr*) and omniscience (*ʿalīm*); second, to assert that man is solely responsible for their actions because they have the power to create their own actions —the indeterministic or libertarian attitude, which subsequently damages the aforementioned divine attributes of God while affirming man's moral responsibility; and third, to assert that a middle ground can be maintained by preserving both man's freedom and God's divine attributes.

The first path was associated with al-Jabriyya, who argued that faith is a blessing from God to the servant *(min Allāhi taʿāla ilā al-ʿabdi)*, as such, it is created (*makhlūq*). The servant is bound or obligated to believe and deny *(al-ʿabdu majbūrun ʿalā al-īmāni wa al-kufri)*, as all events and actions have already been predetermined and created by God at the beginning.[85] This

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[83] 6/al-Anʿām:102.
[84] 13/al-Raʿd:2.
[85] al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 66.

means that the ultimate fate of an individual's soul has already been predetermined by God, and therefore, an individual's efforts have no impact on their final salvation. The second viewpoint was commonly associated with the Muʿtazilites, who argued that faith is solely the result of the servant's own efforts.[86] They believed that all human actions, including the act of faith, are not created *(ghayr makhlūq)*. The servant has the potential or power *(quwwa)* to act independently and does not need God's assistance *(ʿawn)* in performing their actions. According to proponents of this viewpoint, if a creator must be mentioned at all, it is the individual themselves who holds the potential to perform their actions independently on their own.[87] The third option, embraced by the majority of Ahl al-Sunna with slight variations, including both Ashʿarites and Māturīdites, holds that faith is neither created nor uncreated. Rather, it is the result of the servant's own work, guided by God. *(al-imān fiʿlu al-ʿabdi bi hidāyati al-Rabbi)*.[88] According to al-Nasafī, who represents the Sunnī tradition and unfailingly expresses his commitment to the principles of the revealed religion on every occasion, faith involves the servant's confession with their tongue and assent by their heart, as well as God's guidance *(hidāya)* and success *(tawfīq)*. *(min al-ʿabdi al-iqrār bi al-lisān wa al-taṣdīq bi al-qalb, wa min Allāhi taʿāla al- hidāya wa al-tawfīq)*.[89] In other words, God reveals the truth to the servants through His divine guidance, and the servant accepts it freely through their own will.

As has been evident from the course of the discussion so far, the issue is closely tied to the theory of free will held by the aforementioned schools. The first group, al-Jabriyya, has not made any intellectual contributions to the problem due to their initial adoption of a passive stance towards the

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[86] In the Islamic tradition, in fact, the idea that humans possess free will and are responsible for their own actions can be traced back to al-Qadariyya movement. As the pioneers of this notion, they maintained that faith is solely the result of the servant's own efforts. Nevertheless, over time, due to similarities and parallels between their beliefs and those of the Muʿtazilites, al-Qadariyya eventually merged with the Muʿtazilite movement, which further developed and propagated the notion of free will and moral responsibility in Islamic theology.

[87] If a literal translation is required, it could be rendered as "The servants have the capacity or power to perform their actions on their own before the action is actually executed." *(al-ʿabdu mustaṭīʿun likasbi nafsihī linafsihī qabla al-fiʿli.)*, see al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 66.

[88] al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 65.

[89] al-Nasafī has already clarified that faith is assent by the heart. However, because the public proclamation of one's faith within society requires external expression in words, al-Nasafī sometimes adds the expression "declaration by the tongue" *(iqrār bi al-lisān)* to his definition when discussing other dimensions of faith, rather than its essence. Nevertheless, when discussing the true essence of faith, "assent by the heart" *(taṣdīq bi al-qalb)* remains al-Nasafī's preferred notion. See al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 65; al-Nasafī, *al-Tamhīd*, 99; al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:404–15.

issue. The discussion on man's freedom of choice has mainly taken place between the Muʿtazilites and Ahl al-Sunna. The Muʿtazilites believe that man is the creator of all their actions, whether good or evil. They argue that God does not decree evil *(lā yuqaddiru al-sharr)*, perform evil *(lā yaqḍī bi al-sharr)*, or will evil *(lā yashāʾu al-sharr)*. If the idea were to be accepted that God's power *(qudra)* determines a person's actions, whether good or evil, and that they will be punished for their evil actions, it would mean that this viewpoint attributes injustice *(ẓulm)* and outrage or tyranny *(jawr)* to Him. However, this is not possible as God is far removed from such actions.[90]

As for al-Nasafī, there is no difference between him and the Muʿtazilites in their acceptance of man's power to choose freely, referred to by al-Nasafī as "faculty" or "capability" *(istiṭāʿa)*. Both sides advocate for man's free will *(al-ʿabdu mukhayyarun mustaṭīʿun)*.[91] However, their interpretations of this idea differ greatly from each other. According to al-Nasafī, the concept of *istiṭāʿa* is divided into two parts: the faultlessness and soundness of the causes and tools involved in making a choice *(salāmatu al-asbābi wa al-ālāti)*, and the soundness of the body's organs and limbs (*ṣiḥḥatu al-jawāriḥi wa al-aʿḍāʾ*). In simpler terms, the first aspect of *istiṭāʿa* refers to having the appropriate conditions and environment to perform the act. Al-Nasafī cites the verse "… Pilgrimage thereto is a duty men owe to Allāh, — those who can afford the journey (*man istaṭāʿa sabīlan*) …"[92] as an example of the first type of *istiṭāʿa*. Here, *istiṭāʿa* refers to the means such as food, transportation, and a healthy body that must be available for the servant before the action, not the actual power needed to perform the pilgrimage. The second aspect of *istiṭāʿa*, according to al-Nasafī, is an accident (*ʿaraḍ*) created by God in man at the time of action, which is the actual power or faculty (*al-qudra al-ḥaqīqiyya*) through which voluntary actions are performed or acquired (from the root *iktisāb*) by the servants. Al-Nasafī references the verse "… Did I not say that with me you would never be able to (*lan tastaṭīʿa*) have patience?"[93] to illustrate this second type of *istiṭāʿa*. He argues that this is the true power that enables the servant to choose freely, and that this type of *istiṭāʿa* is not a pre-existing potential but is

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[90] al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 69.
[91] al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 69. Al-Nasafī states that terms such as *istiṭāʿa*, *ṭāqa*, *qudra*, and *quwwa* are synonymous in the terminology of *mutakallimūn*. In their theory of human action, these terms are used interchangeably to refer to the capacity or power that an individual must possess in order to perform an action. See al-Nasafī, *al-Tamhīd*, 53; Cf. al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:113.
[92] 3/Ālu ʿImrān:97.
[93] 18/al-Kahf:72.

created by God each time the servant wills to use it. Thus, man does not create, but only acquires his or her actions.[94]

It is evident that al-Nasafī holds the belief that God is the ultimate cause of all existence, including human actions, be they good or evil. According to al-Nasafī, nothing can come into existence without God's will and power. Yet accepting this reality does not mean that God determines a person's actions and causes them to sin or perform good deeds. Al-Nasafī uses the analogy of a master telling his slave, "If you enter the house, you are free," to illustrate this point. In this analogy, the state of being free is realised only if the slave enters the house, but this does not mean that the master's words compel the slave to do so.[95] In other words, the act of being free here is realised through the slave's own free will, not the master's words, which may serve only as a source of motivation, because the slave still has the choice not to enter the house. In a similar manner, God's influence on human actions does not mean that people are forced to carry out those actions. To put it simply, al-Nasafī believes that the true cause of a person's actions lies within their own free will and not in God's influence on them.

If we turn back to the relationship between free will and God's influence (or intervention) in the act of faith, according to al-Nasafī, who is highly devoted to the idea of revealed religion, both the positions of al-Jabriyya and the Muʿtazilite are incorrect. The Muʿtazilites sacrifice God's divine omnipotence (*qudra*) for the sake of human moral responsibility, while al-Jabriyya eliminates human agency in actions, thereby compromising or jeopardising human moral responsibility. Al-Nasafī believes that both God's divine attributes and human moral responsibility should be upheld in the interpretation of religious faith. Accordingly, faith is an action that a person performs or attains through the guidance of God. Manifesting or revealing (*taʿrīf*) His existence through countless signs is accomplished by God Himself, but recognising those signs and having knowledge (*maʿrifa* or *taʿarruf*) of the existence of that Supreme Being is the responsibility of the servant. To give guidance (*hidāya*) is by God, but to seek that guidance (*ihtidāʾ*) and accept it (*istihdāʾ*) is by the servant. To bring success (*tawfīq*) to the servant is through God, but the firm intention (*ʿazm*), aspiration (*qaṣd*) to faith, and striving earnestly or making every effort (*jadd*) for it are through the servant. God is the One who grants the servant peace and

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[94] al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:115, 223; al-Nasafī, *al-Tamhīd*, 53–54.
[95] al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 69–70, 78–79.

tranquillity alongside faith, but it is the responsibility of the servant to seek and ask (or supplicate) for that peace and tranquillity. Lastly, giving generously (*ikrām*), granting, and bestowing blessings (*iʿṭāʾ*) comes from God, but it is the responsibility of the servant to accept or receive (*qabūl*) those blessings.[96]

Regarding the nature of faith, if it needs to be stated whether faith is created or uncreated, al-Nasafī asserts that, among the actions cited above, actions ascribed to God are uncreated (*ghayr makhlūq*), while those ascribed to the servant are created (*makhlūq*). The characteristic of being created cannot be attributed to the essence or attributes of God in any way at all, but the servants, in their entirety, including both their essence and attributes, are created. According to al-Nasafī, those who do not distinguish between God's and the servant's attributes have strayed from the revealed religion by introducing something new.[97]

So far, al-Nasafī's views on the nature of faith (*īmān*), the relation of reason (*ʿaql*) to religious assent (*taṣdīq*), and the role of man's free will in the act of faith have been methodically analysed. Now, this inquiry might raise the question of what his thoughts signify in the context of today's mainstream intellectual trends, or in other words, how al-Nasafī's ideas relate to current philosophical discussions. Additionally, it is also worth exploring al-Nasafī's place in the broader context of Islamic theology, as well as his position within the Māturīdī tradition, to which he belongs. Let us proceed with our investigation by first examining the relevance of al-Nasafī's thought in contemporary discourse.

Given the diverse range of religious beliefs present in the modern world, it seems that rational arguments or cogent justifications, which al-Nasafī has repeatedly emphasised as the sole basis for faith throughout the discussion, are becoming increasingly crucial for individuals to ground their religious beliefs. The presence of conflicting articles of faith across different traditions, and sometimes even within the same religion's various sects, necessitates the use of rational arguments to explain why certain beliefs are preferred over others. Reason is the only way to discern truth from falsehood, and therefore it may provide assurance that one is holding onto the truth. Nevertheless, this approach should not be seen only as a defensive posture or merely an apologetic attitude. Instead, it appears that

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[96] al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 66–67.
[97] al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 67.

such an attitude is necessary for the believer to remain committed to their faith in an environment where the dynamics of life are constantly changing. Keeping this in mind, in modern discussions of faith, we see that there has been a growing emphasis on the importance of rational justifications for faith. Some scholars argue that before accepting any religious convictions, they should be grounded in rational arguments and historical knowledge. For instance, Kenny asserts the necessity of demonstrating God's existence and divine revelation through rational means, stating the following:

> … [F]aith is not, as theologians have claimed, a virtue, but a vice, unless a number of conditions can be fulfilled. One of them is that the existence of God can be rationally justified outside faith. Secondly, whatever are the historical events which are pointed to as constituting the divine revelation must be independently established as historically certain with the degree of commitment which one can have in the pieces of historical knowledge of the kind I have mentioned.[98]

Penelhum argues that the praiseworthiness of faith should not be linked to the absence of conclusive evidence, as is the case in some Christian interpretations of religious faith.[99] According to Penelhum, faith and knowledge are not mutually exclusive and should not be seen as such:

> … Aquinas, and a great many other thinkers who follow him, are mistaken in holding that the voluntariness, and hence the merit, of faith depends upon the inconclusiveness of the grounds for it. Perhaps acceptance can be given voluntarily even though the grounds are conclusive. If this seems absurd, let us reflect first that there are two ways in which one can accept what is proved to one: one can be reluctant to accept it, as Thomas's devils are, or one can be glad to accept it. Perhaps the man of faith has merit because he is glad to accept the truths of faith when the devil is not. Perhaps what makes faith voluntary is not that its grounds are inconclusive, but that even if they are conclusive, men are free to deceive themselves and refuse to admit that they are. Faith would be the outcome of a willingness to admit this, and faith and knowledge need not then be exclusive at all. … Faith might be, or include, supposed knowledge.[100]

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[98] Anthony Kenny, *What is Faith? Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, 57.

[99] The foundations of this view were laid by Augustine and further developed by his successor Aquinas, and eventually became a widely accepted understanding in the Christian world, forming the philosophical basis for numerous theological discussions. For a detailed discussion of the Christian understanding of faith within the context of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas, see Muhammet Saygı, "The Predominant Christian Interpretation of Religious Faith in the Middle Ages: Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas," 211–42.

[100] Terence Penelhum, "The Analysis of Faith in St Thomas Aquinas," 152–53.

The limitations of this study prevent us from delving deeper into this particular discussion. Nevertheless, even with this limited discussion, one thing remains true: al-Nasafī's endorsement of reason and knowledge as the sole criteria for determining truth in matters of faith is an attitude fiercely defended by many contemporary thinkers. Therefore, his views on this issue will undoubtedly provide valuable insights for ongoing discussions and future studies.

As for al-Nasafī's position within the Islamic tradition, he was a dedicated follower of the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī school on major theological issues. As an example, with regards to religious faith, which is the focus of the present study, he believed that faith is the assent of the heart, following the footsteps of Abū Ḥanīfa and Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, whom he held in high esteem.[101] He extensively criticised the Muʿtazilites and Murjiʾa, as well as numerous sub-sects that fall under the latter school, such as the Jahmiyya and Ṣāliḥiyya.[102] Within these groups, there were individuals who held differing views on the nature of faith. For example, some representatives of the Murjiʾa school attributed other characteristics to *īmān* beyond its sole association with knowledge, emphasising the importance of personal experience with God and trust in Him. Again, Yūnus al-Samarī or Namīrī (d. ?) and his followers, another Murjiʾa group, posited that faith encompasses the knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of God, submission and obedience to Him (*khudūʿ*), renunciation of all forms of arrogance and pride (*istikbār*) towards Him, and love for Him.[103] Abū Shimr (d. ?), another Murjiʾa scholar who was active in the 2nd and the early 3rd/7th and 8th centuries, identified four essential elements of faith: knowledge of God, confession by the tongue, love for God, and honouring or respecting God.[104] Ghaylān al-Qadarī (d. ?), a scholar again linked to the Murjiʾa school, provided a further explanation regarding the concept of knowledge in the act of faith. He categorised knowledge into two parts: *al-maʿrifa al-ʾūlā* and *al-maʿrifa al-thānī*, and then argued that only the latter can be considered true faith, as the former is necessary knowledge and one has no role in

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[101] Abū Ḥanīfa, "Kitāb al-Waṣiyya," 87; al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 473, 476–78. This view was also adopted by the later figures of the school. See, for example, Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī, *Mâtürîdiyye Akaidi [al-Bidāya fī Uṣūl- al-Dīn]*, 171–72.

[102] al-Ashʿarī states in his *Maqālāt* that the Murjiʾa could be classified into 12 subgroups based on their views on the issue of *īmān*. See, al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 132.

[103] See, ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, 191; Abū al-Fatḥ al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 260.

[104] al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, 193; al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 1:273.

acquiring it.[105] As for the Muʿtazilites, the dominant view was that faith is knowledge by the heart, confession by the tongue, and deeds by the limbs.[106] In addition, some Muʿtazila scholars such as Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. 235/859) claimed that *īmān* refers to obedience or submission to the authority (of God), particularly in the context of religious or moral obligations (*ṭāʿa*). In other words, in addition to being the knowledge of God, *īmān* involves obedience to God and adherence to Islamic law.[107]

Al-Nasafī's criticism of these groups has the characteristics of the Ahl al-Sunnah and is sometimes based on the views of Abū Ḥanīfa, al-Māturīdī, and even al-Ashʿarī.[108] Yet, although al-Nasafī was influenced by the views of the aforementioned thinkers, he sometimes diverged from them or systematised and improved their views to a greater extent. For instance, although they agree with al-Ashʿarī on the definition of *īmān*,[109] al-Ashʿarī distinguished between the concepts of *īmān* and *islām*. He believed that while *īmān* is the acceptance of certain beliefs, *islām* is a more comprehensive concept that encompasses not only beliefs but also the performance of certain religious practices and adherence to Islamic law.[110] On the other hand, al-Nasafī and Ḥanafī-Māturīdī tradition opposed this distinction between *īmān* and *islām*. They believed that *īmān* and *islām* are inseparable and that one cannot be a true believer (*muʾmin*) without also being a Muslim, and vice versa. On this and many other issues, al-Nasafī organised and synthesised the views of his predecessors, defending them against other sects by maintaining the distinctive features of the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī tradition.[111]

Al-Nasafī methodically and systematically conveyed Māturīdī's ideas to later generations of the Māturīdite school, thus greatly influencing the

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[105] al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, 193.

[106] See, Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. al-Murtaḍā, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazila*, 132–39.

[107] al-Shahristānī, a*l-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 42–43; al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-ʿUṣūl al-Khamsa*, 471–74.

[108] For instance, it seems that the way in which linguistic scholars have used the word *īmān* has influenced both scholars' views on accepting faith as the assent of the heart. See, al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 154–55; al-Nasafī, *al-Tamhīd*, 99; al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2:406. Again, as we saw in the first part of this study, he frequently used al-Ashʿarī's ideas to defend the view that deeds are not a part of faith.

[109] al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 154. The same definition is also adopted by al-Nasafī's contemporary al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī, as well as by later Ashʿarī scholars. See, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī , *ʾIḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, 1:89, 104–5; Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-ʿIrshād*, 158; Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 389–90.

[110] al-Ashʿarī, *al-Ibāna ʿan ʿUṣūl al-Diyāna*, 11–13.

[111] See, for the alliance between al-Nasafī's and al-Māturīdī's positions on the concept of *īmān*, al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 393–394; al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 1:425.

establishment and dissemination of Māturīdism.[112] The most notable aspect that distinguishes him within both the Islamic tradition and the Māturīdite school is his approach to problem-solving, characterised by a distinct methodology. Prior to discussing a problem, al-Nasafī provides comprehensive explanations of relevant concepts and employs techniques that resemble the semantic methods of modern times.[113] He then systematically presents opposing views and critiques them one by one. Next, he expresses his own opinion and justifies it using detailed *ʿaqlī* (rational evidence or logical reasoning) and *naqlī* (textual evidence from the Quran or Hadith) pieces of evidence.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, according to al-Nasafī, faith consists of holding two assents. The first assent (*taṣdīq*) is related to knowledge (*maʿrifa*), and free will does not play a role in this assent since knowledge naturally and necessarily leads to holding assent. Within the realm of knowledge, free will is only applicable before the actual act of knowing an object. This pertains to the decision of whether or not to engage with the object to gain cognition about it. Once the mind engages with the object, free will no longer plays a role, as cognition is inevitably realised by the human mind after such engagement. Therefore, this first assent cannot be called faith, since there is no free will involved in this type of human action. Faith can only be present when the truth content of the first assent is voluntarily accepted as a guiding force for one's life through a second assent. Faith cannot be reduced to *maʿrifa* because it is not an intrinsically inevitable conclusion that emerges from reasoning or an intellectual argument. Faith (*īmān*), occasionally defined as *iʿtiqād*, can be seen as the conscious act of tying or tethering (*ʿaqd*) one's innermost being to the Divine. Faith represents a sincere and deliberate commitment to living a virtuous life grounded in knowledge and an unwavering love for God. This act of binding (*ʿaqd*) or

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[112] The fact that Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī's treatise, *ʿAqāʾid al-Nasafiyya*, appears to be an index of the *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*, and the similarity between the language used in both works, indicates the influence of al-Nasafī's thoughts on the later scholars of the Māturīdī school. See, Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, "Akāidü'n-Nesefī," *DİA*, 2:217-19. Again, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Samarqandī informs that the commentary he wrote on al-Māturīdī's *Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān* actually consists of the explanations given in the lessons of his teacher, al-Nasafī, which he collected in a book called *Sharḥ Taʾwīlat al-Qurʾān* to prevent them from being lost. See, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Samarqandī , *Sharḥ Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān*, fol. 1ᵇ. This shows that al-Nasafī had an impact by improving and sometimes expanding upon his master al-Māturīdī's views and conveying them to his students, which led to al-Māturīdī's views becoming prominent in Central Asia.

[113] Hüseyin Sabri Erdem, *Tabsire'ye Semantik Yaklaşım*, 74.

establishing a genuine connection with the Divine necessitates a prior state of knowledge, understanding, or consciousness of the Divine. For, "man binds his heart only to what he knows/understands." Thus, faith in this context is not an arbitrary or irrational leap but rather a moral attitude that emerges when individuals consciously turn towards God based on knowledge. This is al-Nasafī's definition of faith, and such faith is not limited to or peculiar to the intellectually privileged few. This is because al-Nasafī does not use the concept of evidence to refer solely to professional philosophical arguments, as illustrated earlier. Even though al-Nasafī disapproves of reducing faith to *ma'rifa*, he makes it clear that there is no conflict between intellect and religious assent. The intellect prepares a person for faith and eases the transition from the first assent (in the sense of cognition) to the second (in the sense of voluntary commitment and acceptance). Religious faith can only be justified by knowledge or conclusive evidence. This is the only ground that al-Nasafī deems sufficient for an individual to accept a religious faith. Imitation (*taqlīd*), inspiration, or intuition (*ilhām*) cannot be means of acquiring true knowledge of religion. Thus, in al-Nasafī's view, holding a religious faith that is not based on knowledge is problematic both from an epistemological and moral perspective. There is no other way to explain why one believes in a certain object (such as a divine God) or religion, rather than something else, other than reason (*'aql*) and knowledge (*'ilm*).

As for the relationship between free will and God's influence or intervention in the act of faith, according to al-Nasafī, who is strongly committed to the idea of revealed religion, both the positions of the Jabarites and the Mu'tazilites are incorrect. The Mu'tazilites prioritise human moral responsibility, even at the cost of diminishing God's divine omnipotence, asserting that humans are the ultimate creators of their actions. The Jabarites adhere to the belief that human beings lack control or agency over their actions. Their perspective asserts that every human action is entirely predetermined or compelled by God, leaving humans with no influence or responsibility over their deeds. Consequently, they argue that individuals cannot be morally accountable for their actions, as they are viewed as mere puppets or instruments of Divine Will, operating under God's absolute control. Meanwhile, the Ash'arites deny the influence (*ta'thīr*) of human power (*qudra* or *istiṭā'a*) on their actions. They argue that humans do not possess *qudra* before the act. Instead, the temporarily created power (*al-qudra al-ḥāditha*) by God is granted only at the moment

of action and dissipates afterward. In contrast, al-Nasafī introduces another possible perspective, asserting that both human and divine power can exert influence (*taʾthīr*) on human acts. The influence of divine power manifests itself in the sense of creating human actions ex nihilo and imbuing them with their essential nature (*shayʾiyya* or *māhiya*), whereas the influence of human power manifests itself in the sense of acquisition (*kasb*). Al-Nasafī's idea that human power can influence their actions aligns with certain aspects of Muʿtazilite thought. Simultaneously, this idea distinguishes al-Nasafī from the Ashʿarite doctrine, which diminishes or even eliminates the role of human power in human actions. Al-Nasafī's recognition of human influence on their actions emphasises the idea that humans bear responsibility for their deeds. These key distinctions are what differentiate al-Nasafī's interpretation of human actions from that of other schools of Islamic theology.

According to al-Nasafī, the act of divine creation extends to every aspect of human existence, including their actions and their capacity for free will. God creates humans and their capacity for free will in a unique manner such that this special act of creation in fact enables genuine freedom of choice. Consequently, individuals are held responsible for their decisions, whether they choose faith or disbelief, and faith can only be considered praiseworthy when it is acquired through one's free will. In short, according to al-Nasafī, faith is acquired (*kasbī*) by the servant and created by God, all while respecting both God's divine attributes and the individual's free will and endeavours.

Al-Nasafī played a key role within the Māturīdite tradition and has been regarded by many contemporary researchers as the most prominent figure after al-Māturīdī, the founder of the school. His privileged position within the school is marked by the fact that the school was once called *Nasafiyya* by later scholars. Thanks to al-Nasafī, the thought of Māturīdī became more systematic. Given his influential role in the school, his writings are likely to provide valuable insight into the path that future Māturīdite studies should pursue. There is much more to say about al-Nasafī and the later representatives of the school. Therefore, the Māturīdite School of theology deserves more attention than it has received to date. In order to reveal the legacy of Māturīdism in its entirety, it seems essential to uncover the scholarly activities of major figures who came after the school's formative period. Given al-Nasafī's influence on the later representatives of the school, he had a significant impact on shaping modern Islamic thought. Therefore,

without a profound understanding of al-Nasafī and the Māturīdī heritage, modern Islamic thought may remain partially obscure.

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