



Chapter 2

Ways of Authenticating the Elements of the Creed

Religious Responsibility - Intellectual and Physical

Islam recognized that man has both an intellect and a body. He uses the former to think, to rationalize, and to understand facts, while he uses the latter to act, and to perform those duties that are required for his life to continue. It is thus, logical that religious responsibilities would be mandated accordingly. Religious responsibilities are either intellectual or physical. This can be clearly seen from the numerous verses which mentions both faith and good deeds as prerequisites for salvation and happiness. «Whoever does good whether male or female and he is a believer, We will most certainly make him live a happy life».[16:97]. «Surely (as for) those who believe and do good deeds, their place of entertainment shall be the gardens of paradise».[18:107]. «I swear by the time. Most surely man is in loss. Except those who believe and do good».[103:1-3]

Scholars refer to the intellectual religious responsibilities as the Creed or the Fundamentals of religion, while they refer to the physical responsibilities as the law or the secondaries.

The Lawmaker Established the Creed

God established the creed that people are asked to believe in. This is the way to happiness as intended by God for His creatures. Faith (Iman) is the absolute certitude in the truth of the

matter based on a clear, unambiguous, and unequivocal evidence.

Ways of Authenticating the Elements of the Creed

It is the scholars' consensus that absolute certitude and hence *iman* can be arrived at using rational thinking which is based on sound hypotheses and is supported by evidence of the senses or logic.

Many scholars are of the opinion that absolute certitude cannot be arrived at based on tradition alone. In defending this opinion, they said that traditions are open to varying and, at times, equally probable interpretations.

Some scholars are of the opinion that a second hand evidence may lead to absolute certitude, placed two caveats on their decision: one should be absolutely certain of the authenticity of the source, and the meaning of the evidence should be clear, unambiguous, and unequivocal. The authenticity of the source means that there should be no shred of a doubt that the evidence can be traced back to the prophet (mpbuh). The unambiguity of the meaning means that there should be no doubt, whatsoever, about what the evidence is intended to mean. From the Sunnah of the prophet, only the «Mutawater hadeeth» satisfies the first condition. The verses in the Quran which deal with the oneness of God, His message, the later day, and the other fundamentals of the religion do satisfy both conditions. «So know that there is no god but God», [47:19]. «Say: He, God is One. God is He on Whom all depend. He begets not, nor is He begotten. And none is like Him», [112:1-4]. «Say: Yes, by my Lord, you will certainly be resurrected», [64:7]. «Say: He will give life to them Who created them the first time!» [36:79].

«The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and so do the believers. Each of them believes in God, His angels, His Books, and His messengers», [2:285]. «It is not righteousness that you turn towards the east and the west , but righteousness is to believe in God, the later day, the angels, the Book, the prophets.....», [2:177].

It is incumbent on every Muslim to know what constitutes an element of the creed. Establishing the elements of the creed is a personal responsibility and is not a collective duty. It is the basis of the religion. It is absolutely essential for a Muslim to gain this knowledge. It is also, necessary that there would be complete consensus among the scholars on what constitutes the creed.

Criteria for Establishing the Elements of the Creed:

It thus clear, that only those elements which can be traced back to the prophet with absolute certitude and whose meaning is clear, unambiguous, and unequivocal can be considered elements of the creed. Elements which do not satisfy these two conditions are not considered elements of the Islamic creed. However, many of the elements which do not satisfy these conditions were discussed in earlier books on Islamic creed. These books were essentially discourses that were presented by scholars belonging to emerging philosophical groups. The scholars who initiated these groups used their independent reasoning to compose these discourses. The discourses lead to different decisions regarding what elements should be considered as integral parts of the creed.

Although, all these groups agreed on the basic criteria which should be used to decide whether an element is an integral part

of the creed or not, but they differed on some of these elements. The disagreement arose mainly as a result of the difference in their interpretations of some of the Quranic verses. Since, the additional elements discussed by these philosophical groups did not enjoy the consensus of the scholars at any one time, then these elements should not qualify for inclusion in the creed. These additional elements should not be confused with the essential elements of the creed which satisfy the agreed upon criteria. The difference in opinions regarding these additional elements should not be used as a basis for declaring a person to be a non Muslim or a sinner.

To summarize, an element which constitutes an integral component of the Islamic creed has to satisfy the following criteria:

1. We should be able to trace the element back to the prophet with absolute certitude
2. Its meaning should be clear, unambiguous, and unequivocal.
3. It should enjoy the consensus of all the scholars.

The Quran as a Source for the Creed:

All the verses of the Quran satisfy the first and third criteria, as has been discussed in the previous section. There is no doubt that the Quran that we have today is the same Quran that has been dictated by prophet Muhammad (mpbuh) to his companions. All Muslim scholars share this consensus, as well.

Some of the verses of the Quran have clear, unambiguous, and unequivocal meaning. These are the verses that deal with the concept of the oneness of God, and the other elements of the creed. These verses are the only way to establish the elements of the Islamic creed.

Other verses of the Quran may allow several interpretations. These verses should not be used as evidence to establish the elements of the creed. Examples of these verses are the verses that some scholars used to substantiate their claim that the believers will be able to see God in the Hereafter.

«For those who have done good is the best (reward) and even more», [10:26]. They interpreted «even more» to be the sight of God. «Verily, the pious will be in bliss, on thrones, looking» [83:22-23]. «Some faces that Day shall be radiant, looking at their Lord». [75:22-23]. Thus, a Muslim that does not believe that we will be able to see God on the day of judgment should not be considered an unbeliever or a sinner.

The Tradition (Sunnah) of the Prophet as a Source for Establishing the Creed:

Criteria for Absolute Certitude of the Tradition:

A tradition of the prophet may be classified according to two criteria. First, the ability to trace back the tradition to the prophet with absolute certitude. Second, the clarity, the unambiguity, and the unequivocalness of the meaning. A traditions may fall into one of three categories: a tradition that satisfies the first criteria (absolute certitude that the prophet is the source) but not the second, a tradition that satisfies the second criteria (the clarity, the unambiguity, and the unequivocalness of the meaning) but not the first criteria, a tradition that satisfies both criteria. The traditions that belong to the last category that can be described as having absolute certitude regarding its source and its meaning. Only traditions belonging to this category can be used to establish the elements of the creed.

The Muttawater and the Singly Narrated Tradition:

The Muttawater tradition is a tradition that has been received by a group of people from the prophet and they transmitted it to another group of people who consequently transmitted it to another group and so on until it reaches us. These groups of narrators must consist each of a large number of people such that it would be impossible for any of these groups to have fabricated the tradition. In the language of some of the scholars of the fundamentals of the religion, the Muttawater tradition is a tradition that has been taken directly from the prophet by a large group of honest people and has been consequently transmitted to similarly large groups of honest people. The number and kind of people that transmitted the tradition guarantees that the tradition has not been fabricated or changed through the process. Examples for the Muttawater tradition are the Quran, and the traditions which describe the way to perform prayers and the amount of poor dues.

The singly narrated tradition is a tradition which does not satisfy the criterion of the Muttawater tradition. So if at any stage of transmission [the group which narrated the tradition consisted of a single person or a small number of persons, the tradition is categorized as singly narrated.] Many of the Muslim scholars, including the four Imams: Maalik, Aboo Haneefah, Ash-Shaafiee, and Ahmad, agreed that tracing a singly narrated tradition to the prophet (Mpbuh) cannot be ascertained without a shred of a doubt.

Many of the Muslim scholars are of the opinion that the Muttawater hadeeth are very few. However, this is a point of disagreement. Some of the scholars even doubt that any of the

traditions cited in the well known books of Hadeeth can be considered as Muttawater. It should be noted that a written tradition has to be mentioned in ALL the well authenticated books of Hadeeth. Furthermore, each of these books should produce a chain of narration different from the others. Then and only then can a written Hadeeth qualify to be included in the category of Muttawater.

Consensus of the Scholars as a Source for Establishing the Elements of the Creed:

Definition of the Consensus of the Scholars:

The definition of consensus has been a point of disagreement between the scholars. Some defined the consensus as «the agreement of all Muslim scholars, who are contemporaneous and are qualified for undertaking independent reasoning, on a certain decree». Several other definitions do exist. These differ in the how many and who are the scholars who can participate in arriving at a consensus.

This leads us to the conclusion that consensus of the scholars cannot be considered an evidence that can be used to establish an element of the creed.