

QUR'ANIC FAITH AND REASON: AN EPISTEMIC COMPARISON WITH THE KĀLĀMA SUTTA

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Abstract

The Qur'an frequently abhors blind faith based on tradition in its arguments against non-believers. Nonetheless, the Qur'an repeatedly asks people to believe in its message. How does the Qur'an distinguish between both kinds of faith? This article investigates the type of epistemology the Qur'an expects from its audience. Linguistically, the Qur'anic concept of "*īmān*" may be compared to taking refuge in Buddhism, in that it is through experience and insight (*prajñā*), as portrayed in the Kālāma Sutta, and not zeal. The Qur'an differentiates between two types of conviction, that which is received through discernment and understanding, and that which is blind. The Qur'an shows cues of an attempt to harmonise faith and reason. It does not entertain non-believers in their request to have supernatural physical proofs, but frequently reminds them to use their reason and observation. This opens further avenues of interfaith dialogue between Buddhism and Islam.

Keywords

Buddhism, comparative philosophy, dogma, epistemology, Islam, rationalism

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose behind this article is to investigate the type of epistemology that the Qur'an expects from its audience and its relationship with faith, and comparing it with the Kālāma Sutta from the Pāli Canon. Many scriptures advocate for people to have faith in them. Nonetheless, some scriptures despise people who have blind faith in things, especially if

those things are contrary to the teachings of those scriptures. The Qur'an repeatedly loathes blind faith, when making arguments against those who do not believe in its message (e.g., Qur'an 43:22). Yet, it requests people to have faith in its own message. Would such faith in the Qur'anic message not be considered equally blind, or is the Qur'an inviting people to use some kind of epistemology to reach faith non-blindly?

This article carefully analyses the meaning of faith in the Qur'an and compares it with the Kālāma Sutta from the Pāli Canon of Buddhism. Although these traditions have developed independently, the reason this article compares the Qur'an with Buddhist scriptures is that both appear to abhor blind faith, while still inviting people to trust their message. This comparison may open ecumenical doors for inter-religious dialogue between Muslims and adherents of the Pāli Canon amongst Buddhists. This article does not focus on what Muslim and Buddhist philosophers argue in regards to epistemology in general, as they include further traditions beyond the specific scriptures being compared. As such, it should be highlighted that this study's main purpose is to compare the scriptures in question, and not generally the Islamic or Buddhist perspectives, when it comes to the epistemology of having faith.

For example, many medieval Muslim philosophers discussed the role of revelation and reason in epistemology that resulted in heated debates between different schools of theology (Ahmed 1998), such as the Mu'tazilīs (Kamal 2003; Hanan 2019) and the Ash'arīs (Kazi 2013), and much of the arguments were based on Islamic traditions and Islamized ancient Greek philosophy, which are beyond the Qur'anic scripture. John Walbridge has given an overview of the different views of epistemology through many centuries of Islamic history (Walbridge 2011).

Similarly, there are rich traditions and debates within Buddhism on the issue of epistemology in regards to faith, or more accurately, how to have confidence and trust in a certain path that could lead to the cessation of suffering (Hoffman 1987; Rotman 2009). As such, the focus of this article is also not on the entirety of the Pāli Canon, but particularly on the Kālāma Sutta and its epistemic approach for having confidence and trust in a path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

Many scholars study the philosophical comparisons between the Islamic or Buddhist philosophy with continental philosophy (Hoffman 1980; Ho 1995). There are also many scholars that compare Hindu and Buddhist philosophies (Hindrey 1978), as well as comparing them with other East Asian traditions (Glass 1998). Few scholars attempt to

compare Islamic and Buddhist philosophies directly.¹ Nonetheless, the few scholars who make such comparisons mostly discuss the discourses of medieval philosophers in these traditions and do not necessarily make a direct comparison of scriptural texts. In this study, a comparison of how the Qur'an and the Kālāma Sutta tackle the issue of faith, or more precisely, confidence and trust is done.

There is a long academic debate on the definition of "*saddhā*" (faith, trust, or confidence) in the Pāli Canon (Dutt 1940; Jayatilleke 1963:384–385; Saddhātissa 1978; Hoffman 1987; Findly 1992; Montalvo 1999; Rotman 2009:29; DuJardin 2019). However, the definition of "*īmān*" (faith or trust) in the Qur'an is not much debated. What is debated, within a Muslim context, however, is the difference between Muslim traditionalists and rationalists, in which the former restrict the ability to use objective human reason independent of divine revelation (Abrahamov 1998). While Erik Baldwin (2017), for example, shows that rational objectivism should not even be denied by Muslim traditionalists through philosophical argumentation, it is shown here that it is unnecessary to even philosophically debate the role of reason with Muslim traditionalists. Even if Muslim traditionalists would suggest that the Qur'an is the foremost guide to any human reasoning, it is the Qur'an, after all, that requires the use of human reason, even in matters such as having faith.

This work shows that the epistemic approaches to "*saddhā*" or "*īmān*" in the Kālāma Sutta and the Qur'an may not be too different after all, further opening doors of comparative philosophy and interfaith dialogue between the two traditions.

BLIND FAITH AND THE QUR'AN

How does a person have faith, according to the Qur'an? The Qur'an's main protagonist on faith is Abraham. The Qur'an repeatedly asks people to emulate and follow the faith of Abraham (e.g., Qur'an 2:130, 3:95, 4:125). Yet, in Abraham's story in the Qur'an, his faith was not the kind of blind and unquestioning faith. The Qur'an narrates that Abraham sought to know the truth, in regards to God to gain certainty and not blind

¹ Perreira (2010), for example, makes a comparison of the concept of death between Islamic and Buddhist philosophies. Besides the comparison between philosophies, a comparison between the neuropsychology of Muḥammad and Siddhārtha had also been attempted (Galadari 2019).

faith. Abraham did not seek miracles or supernatural phenomena, but observed nature itself, in order to realise truth.

⁷⁵ Thus did We show Abraham the dominion of the heavens and the earth, that he might be among those possessing certainty. ⁷⁶ When the night grew dark upon him, he saw a star. He said, "This is my Lord!" But when it set, he said, "I love not things that set." ⁷⁷ Then when he saw the moon rising he said, "This is my Lord!" But when it set, he said, "If my Lord does not guide me, I shall surely be among the people who are astray." ⁷⁸ Then when he saw the sun rising he said, "This is my Lord! This is greater!" But when it set, he said, "O my people! Truly I am quit of the partners you ascribe. ⁷⁹ Truly, as a *hanif*, I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and I am not of the idolaters." (Qur'an 6:75–79)

In the Qur'an, Abraham is also shown to question God even after having believed in God. This is to show that even after having trusted in God, it does not mean that Abraham is simply blindly following without further seeking certitude. For example,

And when Abraham said, "My Lord, show me how Thou givest life to the dead," He said, "Dost thou not believe?" He said, "Yea, indeed, but so that my heart may be at peace." He said, "Take four birds and make them be drawn to thee. Then place a piece of them on every mountain. Then call them: they will come to thee in haste. And know that God is Mighty, Wise." (Qur'an 2:260)

Maria M. Dakake (2009:195) notes, "Abraham's faith can hardly be considered a 'blind' faith, but is more accurately described as a faith that is not afraid to question, that is able to seek and find certitude, and that can arrive at the 'argument'—in the Qur'an, 'God's (own) argument'—for unswerving faith in the one God."

Dakake (2009:196) continues, "Abraham's rejection of his people's idolatry is [not] rooted in a certitude divinely granted, but granted through his faculties of observation and intelligence." Therefore, if Abraham is clearly the epitome of a faithful person, according to the Qur'an, then the Qur'an expects its audience to seek faith through natural signs and continue to question, even God.

The Qur'an frequently denounces non-believers for their faith in imitating what their forefathers have done (e.g., Qur'an 10:78, 11:62, 11:87, 21:53, 26:74-76, 31:21). Haque and Behrani (2004) state, "the Qur'an unequivocally rejects belief based upon blind faith."

¹⁷⁰ When it is said unto them, "Follow what God has sent down," they say, "Nay, we follow that which we found our fathers doing." What! Even though their fathers understood nothing, and were not rightly guided?

¹⁷¹ The parable of those who disbelieve is that of one who cries to that which hears only a call and a shout. Deaf, dumb, and blind, they do not understand. (Qur'an 2:170–171)²

And when it is said unto them, “Come unto that which God has sent down, and unto the Messenger,” they say, “Sufficient for us is that which we have found our fathers practicing.” What! Even if their fathers knew naught and were not rightly guided? (Qur'an 5:104)

²² Nay! They say, “We found our fathers upon a creed, and surely we are rightly guided in their footsteps.” ²³ Likewise, We sent no warner unto a town before thee, but that those living in luxury therein said, “We found our fathers upon a creed, and we are surely following in their footsteps.” ²⁴ He replied, “What! Though I bring you better guidance than that which you found your fathers following?” They said, “Truly we disbelieve in that wherewith you have been sent.” (Qur'an 43:22–24)

For example, in the story of Hūd, one of the early prophets' stories, when he asks his people to have faith in one God, they respond negatively as follows:

⁷⁰ They said, “Have you come unto us so that we may worship God alone, and leave aside what our fathers worshipped? Then bring upon us that wherewith you have threatened us, if you are truthful.” ⁷¹ He said, “Defilement and wrath have already come upon you from your Lord. Do you dispute with me over names that you have named—you and your fathers—for which God has sent down no authority (*sulṭān*)? Then wait! Truly I am waiting along with you.” (Qur'an 7:70–71)

In the above passage, Hūd's people seem to be more interested in imitating the worship of their forefathers. His argument against them is that they cannot ask about worshipping names which they and their fathers have named without clear authority from God. From here, it is understood that if people are to have faith, according to the Qur'an, they need to have faith in something that is clearly authorized by God. In the same Qur'anic chapter as the passage above, imitating the worship of forefathers cannot be used as an excuse for not having true faith:

¹⁷² And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins (*zuhūrihim*), their progeny and made them bear witness on³ themselves (*'ala anfusihim*), “Am I not your Lord?” they said, “Yea, we bear witness”—lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, “Truly of this we were

² All Qur'anic translations in this article are taken from Nasr (2015) unless otherwise noted. I do not necessarily agree with all word preferences in the translation. However, I will only critically assess the words that are important as related to this article, and change them if necessary.

³ *The Study Qur'an* translates “*'ala anfusihim*,” as “concerning themselves.” I opted to change it to “on themselves,” since the Arabic uses “*'ala*” instead of “*'an*.”

heedless,”¹⁷³ or lest you should say, “[It is] only that our fathers ascribed partners unto God beforehand, and we were their progeny after them. Wilt Thou destroy us for that which the falsifiers have done?”¹⁷⁴ Thus do We expound the signs (*al-āyāt*), that haply they may return.¹⁷⁵ And recite unto them the account of the one to whom We gave Our signs (*āyātīnā*), but he cast them off. So Satan made him his follower, and he became one of the deviant. (Qur’an 7:172–175)

The above passage makes it clear that even when a person may seem to have simply imitated their forefathers, they still are given signs (*āyāt*) that would point them to the true faith. However, Qur’an 7:172 may seem to be somewhat enigmatic. When did the Children of Adam bear witness on themselves? According to classical commentators, people’s souls existed before they were born, and it is at that time that they witnessed on themselves (al-Tabari [d. 310/923] 2000, 13:222–250). However, this notion has no Qur’anic basis. An alternative reading may associate this passage with the following:

⁵³ We shall show them Our signs (*āyātīnā*) upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. Does it not suffice that thy Lord is Witness over all things? ⁵⁴ Behold! They are in doubt regarding the meeting with their Lord. Behold! Truly He encompasses all things. (Qur’an 41:53–54).

The passage states that God will show people signs (*āyāt*) in the horizons and within themselves to understand the truth. In other words, the Qur’an tries to state that people should not imitate their forefathers, because that is not how faith is found, according to the Qur’an. Faith is found by examining signs (*āyāt*), and at the very least, the signs (*āyāt*) that are within themselves.

Qur’an 7:71, as discussed, rebukes non-believers for imitating their forefathers on names that were not authorized by God. The term used for authority is “*sulṭān*.” In another Qur’anic passage, which also reproaches non-believers for imitating their forefathers, the non-believers ask the alleged messengers (of God) to provide them with a clear authority (*sulṭān*) so that they may believe in them, but such an authority is not even given to them, as seen in the following:

¹⁰ Their messengers said, “Is there any doubt concerning God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth? He calls you that He might forgive some of your sins and grant you reprieve till a term appointed.” They said, “You are but human beings like us. You desire to turn us away from that which our fathers used to worship. So bring us a manifest authority (*sulṭān*)!”

¹¹ Their messengers said unto them, “We are but human beings like yourselves, but God is gracious unto whomsoever He will among His

servants. And it is not for us to bring you an authority (*bi-sultān*), save by God's Leave; so in God let the believers trust.¹² And why should we not trust in God, when He has guided us in our ways? And we shall surely endure patiently, however you may torment us. And let those who trust, trust in God." (Qur'an 14:10–12)

Reassessing the issue of faith, according to the Qur'an, requires careful examination. Imitation is unacceptable. Having faith without a divine authority (*sultān*) is also unacceptable. So, in the aforementioned passage, how are the non-believers supposed to have faith, if even a clear divine authority (*sultān*) is not given to them by messengers? The passage seems to clarify itself. The messengers are humans like themselves. As such, humans cannot provide such divine authority. What is the alternative? The alternative is to trust in God so that God may provide such authority, perhaps, directly to each person. How is it done? If we associate the above passage with the ones addressed earlier, then it is perhaps God's signs (*āyāt*) that God shows to people that provide proof and authority for people to have true faith. The above passage might be an argument that people should not even blindly believe in messengers, since they cannot provide a clear divine authority (*sultān*), as a divine authority is a prerequisite for true faith. Perhaps what the passage is trying to portray is that people should individually seek faith from the natural signs (*āyāt*) that surround them and within themselves and trust only in God, and in nothing else, not even in the messengers. The question now becomes: how does a person know whether or not they have true faith, if they believe that what they are doing is not only what their forefathers have done, but that God Itself has sanctioned, as stated in the following passage?

²⁸ When they commit an indecency, they say, "We found our fathers practicing it, and God has commanded us thus." Say, "Truly God commands not indecency. Do you say of God that which you know not?"²⁹ Say, "My Lord has commanded justice. So set your faces [toward Him] at every place of prayer, and call upon Him, devoting religion entirely to Him. Just as He originated you, so shall you return." (Qur'an 7:28–29)

In the above passage, the non-believers state that not only are they doing what their forefathers did, but also that God commanded it. One might assume that their forefathers are the ones who claimed that it was God who commanded these things and their progeny simply believed that they have been commanded by God. It seems that the Qur'an also opposes people believing blindly in things even if someone claimed that those things are from God. This might shed light on Qur'an 14:10–12 that even the messengers should not be blindly trusted, but God alone.

QUR'ANIC FAITH (*ĪMĀN*) AND REASON

The Qur'an mostly, though not always, abhors zeal (*ẓann*) (e.g., Qur'an 10:36, 49:12) (Galadari 2018a). It also dismisses believing in things through imitation, as those who imitate what their forefathers have been doing or believing (Riḍa [d. 1354/1935] 1990, 1:91, 95; Abu Elkheir 2001; Mermer 2005; Islam and Khan 2011; Galadari 2015; Islam 2018). The question is then to understand how the Qur'an wants people to have trust and refuge (*īmān*) in its message, God, and prophet.

The Qur'an frequently asks people to ponder upon natural signs, which it calls "*āyāt*" (e.g., Qur'an 2:164; 13:4; 16:12, 67; 22:46; 30:24, 28; 45:5). The Qur'an typically asks people to look (e.g., Qur'an 6:99, 10:101), to ponder upon creation and diversity (e.g., Qur'an 30:22, 46; 41:37, 39), to listen (e.g., Qur'an 30:23), etc. In these passages, the Qur'an usually invites people to ponder and to think. Dakake (2009:196) notes on Abraham's narrative in the Qur'an in regards to faith, "Moreover, Abraham's faith in the existence of one unseen God does not depend upon a suspension of the natural order, but rather an intelligent appreciation of it." Therefore, the Qur'an seems to be asking people to use their minds and resort to reason in its arguments, as also seen in the following passages:

³¹ Say, "Who provides for you from heaven⁴ and earth? Who has power over hearing and sight? And who brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living, and who directs the affair?" They will say, "God." So say, "Will you not, then, be reverent?" ³² That is God, your true (*al-ḥaqq*) Lord. What is there beyond truth (*al-ḥaqq*) but error? How, then, are you turned away? ³³ Thus the Word of thy Lord came due (*ḥaqqat*) for those who are iniquitous: truly they believe (*yu'minūn*) not. ³⁴ Say, "Is there, among your partners, one who originates creation and then brings it back?" Say, "God originates creation, then brings it back. How, then, are you perverted?" ³⁵ Say, "Is there any among your partners who guides unto Truth (*al-ḥaqq*)?" Say, "God guides unto Truth (*al-ḥaqq*). Is one who guides unto Truth (*al-ḥaqq*) worthier (*aḥaqq*) to be followed, or one who cannot guide unless he be guided? What ails you? How do you judge?" ³⁶ And most of them follow naught but zeal (*ẓannan*). Truly zeal (*al-ẓann*) does not avail against the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) in the least. Truly God knows what they do. (Qur'an 10:31–36)⁵

⁴ *TSQ* uses uppercase for heaven.

⁵ Consistent with this article's definition of "*ẓann*," it is being translated as "zeal" and not "conjecture," as it is in *The Study Quran*.

Along with the passages where the Qur'an requests its audience to ponder upon natural signs (*āyāt*) and use their reason, this passage shows that truth comes through God, and it gives its audience what appears to be logical arguments based on their own understanding of God. Perhaps the Qur'an advises its audience that if they were to ponder upon the natural signs (*āyāt*), they would realize God, and so if they wanted to know the truth (whatever the Qur'an defines as "*al-ḥaqq*" in this passage), then it is God alone who guides to it. Besides, other Qur'anic passages appear to equate "*al-ḥaqq*" with God (e.g., Qur'an 22:6, 22:62; 31:30). Therefore, if God is "*al-ḥaqq*," according to the Qur'an, then the only way to seek "*al-ḥaqq*" is through "*al-ḥaqq*" (God). This might be the logic that the Qur'an attempts to use in the above passage. Other Qur'anic passages, as described earlier, request that people resort to reason and ponder upon signs (*āyāt*). Consequently, it may be inferred that the Qur'an asks its audience to seek "*al-ḥaqq*" from God alone, and that the method for this is by pondering upon God's signs (*āyāt*) and using the power of reason.

The Qur'an sometimes speaks of stories of past prophets. Moses is an example of one to whom God has given signs (*āyāt*) for Pharaoh, who disbelieved them (e.g., Qur'an 7:103, 10:75, 17:101, 27:12, 43:46). These signs, apparently are supernatural signs or as some might consider miracles. Pharaoh considered such signs (*āyāt*) as acts of sorcery. Although the Qur'an narrates this story, it does not request its own audience to have faith in the same type of signs (*āyāt*) as those Moses showed Pharaoh. On the contrary, the Qur'an refuses to indulge its audience with supernatural signs or any sort of miracle.

⁹⁰ And they say, "We shall not believe in you till you make a spring gush forth for us from the earth, ⁹¹ or till you have a garden of date palms and grapevines, and you make streams gush forth in the midst of it, ⁹² or till you make the sky fall upon us in pieces, as you have claimed, or you bring God and the angels before us, ⁹³ or till you have a house of gold ornament, or you ascend to Heaven. And we shall not believe in your ascension till you bring down unto us a book we can read." Say, "Glory be to my Lord! Am I aught but a human being, a messenger?" ⁹⁴ And nothing hindered people⁶ from believing when guidance came unto them, save that they said, "Has God sent a human being as a messenger?" ⁹⁵ Say, "Were there angels walking about upon the earth in peace, We would have sent down upon them an angel from Heaven as a messenger." (Qur'an 17:90–95)

⁶ I elected to use the term "people" as a translation for "*al-nās*," contrary to the translation in *The Study Quran*.

The Qur'an seems less concerned with supernatural engagement with its audience. The signs (*āyāt*) that it refers to require the use of the mind; the Qur'an frequently uses the terms “*ya'qilūn*,” “*yatafakkarūn*,” and “*ulu-l-albāb*” to refer to those who use their minds. As such, the Qur'an asks its audience to use reason. It urges its audience to be rational in their thought, instead of delving into tradition (i.e., what their forefathers have been doing). The Qur'an does not specify a certain epistemological method. It seems to consider natural phenomena as signs (*āyāt*). Perhaps the signs of natural phenomena are used to point to God (e.g., Qur'an 29:61, 63; 31:25; 39:38; 43:87). On trusting the Qur'an, the Qur'an appears to require some sort of verbal reasoning, such as intertextual polysemy, by enforcing the importance of its language (e.g., Qur'an 12:2) (Galadari 2013a, 2013b, 2018b). This is the main reason this article looks into the Qur'anic usage of terms more closely, since it requires individuals, who would like to understand it, to use verbal reasoning as an epistemic exercise.

Therefore, Qur'anic epistemology requires rationality and the use of mental exercises of signs (*āyāt*) to arrive at trusting and taking refuge (*īmān*). Calling these signs, “*āyāt*,” is important, as a closer look at the meaning of this word may shed some insight not only on how to understand the term “*āyāt*,” but also on how to understand the term “*īmān*.”

The possible root of “*āyah*” is “*a-w-y*” (Ibn Manẓūr [d. 711/1311] 1994, 14:61). The root “*a-w-y*” means to return (Ibn Manẓūr [d. 711/1311] 1994, 14:51). The form “*ma'wa*,” from the same root, means a place where one dwells. The Qur'an uses this definition, in which heaven and hell are both called a dwelling place or a place where one returns to (*ma'wa*) (e.g., Qur'an 79:39, 41). The term “*āyah*” means sign or mark (Ibn Manẓūr [d. 711/1311] 1994, 14:61–62). Its root could also be “*a-y-y*” or “*a-y-h*” (Ibn Manẓūr [d. 711/1311] 1994, 14:63). The root “*a-y-y*” could mean to wait.

The term “*ōt*,” from the root “*a-w-h*” (Botterweck, Ringgren, and Fabry 2011, 1:134–135) is the Hebrew cognate of the Arabic “*āyah*” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1977:16–17). The plural form (*ōtōt*) is used in Genesis 1:14 to show that natural phenomena are signs, which the Qur'an also uses in a similar manner. The root “*a-w-h*” means desire, and can also mean a dwelling place or region (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1977:15–16), similar to the Arabic root “*a-w-y*,” as discussed. The *TDOT*⁷ considers the Hebrew meaning “to devote oneself to” or “to stay

⁷ *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*

and dwell,” in addition to its meaning “to agree” (Botterweck, Ringgren, and Fabry 2011, 1:134–135). Nonetheless, the *TDOT* ascribes the highest meaning of the term as desire (Botterweck, Ringgren, and Fabry 2011, 1:135). How the root “*a-w-h*” evolved to mean sign or if the term “*āyah*” has a different root cannot be ascertained. Yet, the Qur’an uses the root “*a-w-y*” in different parts to mean a dwelling place or place of refuge, and in one instance uses perhaps a wordplay with the term “*āyah*”:

⁹ Dost thou reckon that the Companions of the Cave and the Inscription are a marvel among Our signs (*āyāt*)? ¹⁰ When the youths took refuge (*awa*) in the cave, they said, “Our Lord! Grant us mercy from Thy Presence, and make us incline to sound judgment concerning our affair” (Qur’an 18:9–10).

There is a possibility that a dwelling place is a place of desire. This brings into question what the Qur’an means when using the term “*āyah*,” which is used to mean sign. Are the signs (*āyāt*) of God Its desires or are they Its refuge, a place where people are to return and dwell upon? However, if “*īmān*” comes after pondering on the “*āyāt*” (signs) and “*īmān*” means taking refuge, then the “*āyāt*” (signs) are perhaps what they are taking refuge on.

Qur’an 28:32 calls two signs (*āyah*) given to Moses for Pharaoh as “*burhān*.” This might suggest that the Qur’an considers the terms “*āyah*” and “*burhān*” to be synonymous. The Arabic definition of “*burhān*” appears to have evolved to mean evidence (Ibn Manẓūr [d. 711/1311] 1994, 13:51). Its closest possible Hebrew cognate is the root “*b-r-h*,” which means to bind or to make a covenant (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1977:136–137). In other words, it might have come to mean evidence as it is a contract or an agreement. This might link the term “*āyah*” with the Hebrew and Aramaic root “*a-w-h*,” which can also mean to agree, as stated previously in the *TDOT*. Hence, if “*āyah*” is linked to taking refuge (*īmān*), whether it is to be understood as God’s agreement (*āyah*) for people in taking refuge (*īmān*) or God’s desire (*āyah*) for people in taking refuge (*īmān*), is philologically uncertain.

What is certain is that the Qur’an abhors zeal and blind faith in favour of taking refuge (*īmān*) through the use of the power of reason by the mind. It requires some form of epistemology that is not dependent on tradition or hearsay. When the Qur’an expects to be obeyed or followed, the audience is usually those who have already believed, or in other words, those who have already taken refuge, as it addresses them as “*alladhīna āmanū*” (those who have taken refuge) (e.g., Qur’an 3:120–132; 4:59; 5:90–92; 8:1, 8:20, 8:46) or to the very least, the People of

the Book, who are supposedly already taking refuge in God and their scripture (e.g., Qur'an 3:19–33). However, those who have not yet taken refuge are expected to use experiential knowledge or reason through observation in order that it may lead them to take refuge (*īmān*). It is a person's reasoning and rationality that the Qur'an attempts to engage with. The Qur'an asks people to observe, investigate, and use rationality in order to qualify to have faith.

KĀLĀMA SUTTA AND FAITH

There is much debate on the role of faith (*saddhā*) in the Kālāma Sutta with some even arguing that “*saddhā*” is not faith at all, but confidence and trust born out of conviction (Saddhātissa 1978). However, it appears that such debates are mostly focused on the definition of terms. After all, even the term “faith” is not just believing in something, because “faith” actually means trusting and having confidence, as well, and this is its etymological root of the term from the Latin “*fido*” or “*fidere*” (McKaughan 2017). Even the argument over whether it is correct to etymologize “faith” or simply use the word as it is mostly understood by people today would fail to realize that much of the debate over the term “*saddhā*” may only be done through etymologizing of a language that has long been fixed in history. Therefore, one needs to be consistent in their methodological approach to such an issue. Faith in the English language never necessarily meant to believe in something *without* evidence or conviction. It simply means to trust or to be confident about something. Whether this trust and confidence is with or without evidence is not inherent in the word “faith.” As such, people add substantive attributes if they specifically want to mean “blind faith” or “knowledgeable faith.” Gregory W. Dawes states,

The idea that religions depend on faith is commonplace. Critics of religion often regard faith as a simple matter of believing something without any evidence in its support ... It seems, however, that no normally functioning person could believe something without any kind of evidence, or at least what he or she takes to be evidence. And it seems nonsensical to speak of believing what you know to be false. So faith must mean something more than this. (Dawes 2016:127)

Andy Rotman describes “*saddhā*” as, “... the meaning of the term is still ambiguous in Sanskrit, with a long and complicated history in Indian literature” (Rotman 2009:29). It is necessary to be reminded that

the Sanskrit root, “*śraddhā*” is not only used in Buddhism, but also in Hinduism. As such, one needs not to only read the term from a Buddhist definition, but from its ancient Indian background. In Vedic literature, for example, “*śraddhā*” means a belief in the existence of gods or the usefulness of rituals (Das Gupta 1930:318–320). In the general Hindu context, it means what the heart spiritually aspires for or having confidence or knowledge in some path to reach a goal (Rao 1974:178). The definition of “*saddhā*” in Buddhaghosācariya’s *Visuddhimagga*, dated between the fourth and the fifth century, makes it highly polysemous, as “*saddhā*” is described as the path to have “*saddhā*,” (*Visuddhimagga* xiv, 140) meaning it is both the path to reach confidence, as well as the confidence itself. Therefore, when assessing the Kālāma Sutta, the definition of “faith” as confidence for “*saddhā*” is kept intact without the need to necessarily change the term. A further discussion on the definition of the term is made later.

According to Majjhima Nikāya 26,⁸ Siddhārtha went out in search of enlightenment. At first, he went to a teacher known as Ālāra Kālāma and asked to be his disciple. The sutta narrates that Siddhārtha realized by himself his teacher’s doctrine. It narrates that in terms of lip-service in the teachings that others were doing as well, Siddhārtha was very knowledgeable in the doctrine of his teacher. However, he said that his teacher must have realized this teaching not through faith alone, but through direct knowledge. When Siddhārtha questioned Ālāra Kālāma how he realized the knowledge he attained, his teacher answered, “the sphere of nothingness (*akiñcaañña-āyatana*).”⁹ However, though Siddhārtha was able to attain it and was placed as a peer alongside his teacher, he was not convinced that this doctrine is the path to the cessation of suffering. As such, he rejected it and left the community.

Majjhima Nikāya 26 continues to narrate that Siddhārtha sought another teacher, Uddaka Rāmaputta. As with his earlier teacher, when it comes to lip-service, Siddhārtha was as knowledgeable of the doctrine as others. However, Uddaka, did not devise or find this teaching on his own, but through the teaching of Rāma, who is assumed to be his father.

⁸ Majjhima Nikāya is a Buddhist scripture that is part of the Tipiṭaka.

⁹ The sutta does not provide any further insight on what this teaching really means. It can be extrapolated from one of Ālāra Kālāma’s pupils, who later became the Buddha’s disciple, that the teaching is of concentrated meditation in some form of yoga (Dīgha Nikāya 16.2.27). See Schumann (2004, 48). According to the Pāli tradition, the teachings are the seven attainments of serenity meditation (*samatha bhāvanā*), ending in the sphere of nothingness. See Chakma (2015, 4).

Siddhārtha realized that Rāma was not speaking from faith alone, but must have had direct knowledge of the doctrine. When he asked Uddaka about attaining this knowledge, Uddaka answered, “the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.” Yet again, though he was able to attain it, Siddhārtha found this teaching to be lacking, as it does not lead to the cessation of suffering. Uddaka found Siddhārtha to be more knowledgeable than himself, as he was able to attain Rāma’s state of knowledge. Consequently, Siddhārtha was still dissatisfied and left the community, even though Uddaka offered him leadership of the school rather than simply become a peer.

Clearly, the Majjhima Nikāya portrays Siddhārtha as gaining knowledge not through lip-service and understanding the teachings, but through experience. However, even this experiential knowledge attained by Siddhārtha was not enough, as such knowledge did not lead to the cessation of suffering. In comparison, Qur’an 2:8 states, “Among people are those who say, ‘We believe (*āmannā* / take refuge) in God and in the Last Day,’ though they do not believe (*bi-mu`minīn* / do not take refuge).”¹⁰ Here we also see that the Qur’an is not very fond of lip-service. This is also seen in several places in the Qur’an, when it shows some people saying with their mouths (*afwāhihim*) what is not in their hearts (e.g., Qur’an 3:118, 167; 5:41; 9:8).

In Siddhārtha’s journey, he was sceptical and did not always take things at face value or believe in things just because he heard it from someone or based on tradition. This might be the reason why the Kālāma Sutta illustrates Siddhārtha as someone who is against blind faith, or as some scholars suggest that Siddhārtha was teaching an attitude instead of affiliation (Khong 2003). Some traditional Buddhist scholars even question the Kālāma Sutta that it should be understood within its own context, as it was a teaching for a specific group of people with a distinct experience, and that the teaching should not be generalized (Deegalle 2018).

The Kālāmas complained to Siddhārtha that they were confused when they heard contradicting teachings from some monks, brahmins, and venerable ones who had passed through their town. They complained that these teachers expound and explain only their doctrines, while they despise, revile, and pull to pieces the doctrines of others. This created doubt in their minds about who of these teachers speak the truth and who speak falsehood. Siddhārtha answered the following:

¹⁰ I translate “*al-nās*” as “people” instead of “mankind” used by *The Study Quran*.

It is enough, Kālāmas, for you to be doubting (*vicikicchitum*) and uncertain (*kaṅkhitum*). Doubt (*vicikicchā*) has come up in you about an uncertain matter (*kaṅkhanīyeva*). Please, Kālāmas, don't go by oral transmission (*mā anussavena*), don't go by lineage (*mā paramparāya*), don't go by testament (*mā itikirāya*), don't go by canonical authority (*mā piṭakasampadānena*), don't rely on logic (*mā takkaheṭṭu*), don't rely on inference (*mā nayahetu*), don't go by reasoned contemplation (*mā ākāraparivitakkena*), don't go by the acceptance of a view after consideration (*mā diṭṭhinijjhānakkhantiya*), don't go by the appearance of competence (*mā bhabbarūpatāya*), and don't think "The ascetic is our respected teacher (*mā samaṇo no garūti*)."
But when you know for yourselves: "These things are unskillful, blame-worthy, criticized by sensible people, and when you undertake them, they lead to harm and suffering", then you should give them up. (Kālāma Sutta)¹¹

Siddhārtha asked them not to believe anything simply by hearsay, which the Qur'an also concurs (e.g., Qur'an 49:6). He also asked them not to believe in traditions regardless of how old they were or how many generations and places had handed them down. This is also similar to the Qur'an's argument against the non-believers, who only imitate what their forefathers have been doing, as described earlier. Siddhārtha also asked not to believe in anything based on oral transmission, lineage, or testament. He also asked them not to believe in scripture. He also asked not to believe in anything purely due to logical reasoning, deduction, or inference. Here, Siddhārtha appears to consider the limitations of logic and reason. He also asked them not to be impressed by anyone thinking that such a person must be trustworthy. He also asked them not to believe in anything just because a presumption is in its favour or that it is a tradition. He also asked them to refrain from believing in anything simply by the authority of their teachers and priests, which the Qur'an also echoes against the Jews and Christians (e.g., Qur'an 9:31).

Siddhārtha asked the Kālāmas to only believe in a thing after a thorough investigation and consideration regarding what agrees with reason and experience and leads to goodness that will benefit one and all, and the whole world. Siddhārtha's request to resort to reason is perhaps similar to the type of faith required by the Qur'an: one that is devoid of tradition or hearsay. Nonetheless, Siddhārtha also warns against the limitations of one's logic and reasoning, as well. As such, one might consider that there is more emphasis on experiential knowledge, which is what Siddhārtha sought during his journey towards enlightenment. The Kālāma Sutta continues:

¹¹ Translation of the Kālāma Sutta throughout used is by Bhante Sujato.

Please, Kālāmas, don't go by oral transmission (*mā anussavena*), don't go by lineage (*mā paramparāya*), don't go by testament (*mā itikirāya*), don't go by canonical authority (*mā piṭakasampadānena*), don't rely on logic (*mā takkaḥetu*), don't rely on inference (*mā nayāhetu*), don't go by reasoned contemplation (*mā ākāraparivitakkena*), don't go by the acceptance of a view after consideration (*mā dīṭṭhijjhānakkhantiya*), don't go by the appearance of competence (*mā bhabbarūpatāya*), and don't think "The ascetic is our respected teacher (*ma samaṇo no garūti*).” But when you know for yourselves: "These things are skillful, blameless, praised by sensible people, and when you undertake them, they lead to welfare and happiness”, then you should acquire them and keep them. (Kālāma Sutta)

The limitations of logic and reason, while having a quest for experiential knowledge, is not a contradiction. It is an epistemic approach that is not solely dependent on reason and logic. Actually, it may seem contradictory when Siddhārtha speaks highly of a doctrine which is praised by the wise, while condemning the belief in a doctrine because a teacher or a monk had simply said it. However, Siddhārtha appears to provide an epistemic approach that can be verified through various dimensions, including one's own experiential knowledge. This epistemic approach is emphasized where the Kālāma Sutta states, "undertaken and carried out.” In comparison, the Qur'an may be seen to require experiential knowledge, when it asks its audience to look and to listen.

The Kālāma Sutta ends by narrating a response by the Kālāmas, who enjoyed Siddhārtha's teachings, and speak of taking refuge (*saraṇaṃ*) in him, his teachings, and the community (*saṅgha*) of monks:

Excellent, sir! Excellent! ... We go for refuge (*saraṇaṃ*) to Master Gotama, to the teaching (*dhamma*), and to the mendicant Saṅgha (community of *bhikkhus* [monks]). From this day forth, may the Buddha remember us as lay followers who have gone for refuge for life. (Kālāma Sutta)

The ending conclusion of the Kālāmas points to the Three Jewels or Triple Gem: taking refuge (*saraṇaṃ*) in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. The root Sanskrit term "*śaraṇá*" means to protect, to guard, or to defend (Monier [1899] 1960:1057). It is, thus, used to mean shelter, refuge, or protection (Monier [1899] 1960:1057). The use of the term "*saraṇa*" in the Kālāma Sutta is clearly within the same meaning of the root "*a-m-n*" in Arabic, which means safety and security that the term "*īmān*" springs from. Therefore, one might say that the "*saraṇa*" of the Kālāma Sutta and the "*īmān*" of the Qur'an may be considered analogous.

Scholars seem to debate the role of faith (*saddhā*) and reason in Buddhism, especially since "*saddhā*" is more closely related to confidence

and trust. Louis de la Vallée Poussin (1924), for example, sees that Buddhism is a faith and creed, meaning to believe in certain doctrines, after having closely studied Buddhist works from the Pāli Canon and the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit texts. Having looked only in the Pāli Nikāya, Edith Ludowyk-Gyomroi (1947:37) also understands the term “*saddhā*” as faith with its similar connotation as in any other religion. She understands faith as trust and confidence in the teacher and teachings (Ludowyk-Gyomroi 1947:35). However, she considers faith in the teachings insufficient for salvation or the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, although faith is essential in the path to attain *nirvāṇa* (Ludowyk-Gyomroi 1947:35). She also states that faith is not usually praised, but that wisdom and knowledge are (Ludowyk-Gyomroi 1947:40). As an example, Sāriputta, one of the two main disciples of Siddhārtha, is praised for his wisdom, while the faithful Vakkali, who was attached to the person of Siddhārtha, is asked not to be attached, and instead focus on the *dhamma*. Vakkali’s zealous faith prevented him from attaining *nirvāṇa* (Ludowyk-Gyomroi 1947:40), until he sought a different path beyond faith to attain it. She asserts that, in the earliest Buddhist texts, faith is not something that an *arahant* (an enlightened) needs to have and that the Noble Eight-fold Path gives faith (*saddhā*) no weight whatsoever. She disagrees with Beni Maddhab Barua that a *saddhā-vimutta* is to be understood as one who is an *arahant* (Barua 1931:345) or one who is liberated by faith (Ludowyk-Gyomroi 1947:48). Nonetheless, she does state that as time passed, the *bhakti* cult emerged within Buddhism giving a higher valuation to faith (*saddhā*). While the Hindu Upaniṣads and Purāṇa literature are argued to have been written in response to Buddhism, Buddhism itself required a counter-response, which caused such *bhakti* cults to emerge and saw a resurgence in the re-understanding of faith (*saddhā*), especially within Mahāyāna Buddhism (Sekido 1992).

Stephen Evans (2007) argues that one should neither overly presuppose the Kālāma Sutta to be more about epistemology than ethics and attitude nor more about ethics than epistemology. To him, either approach to interpret the text would be inadequate. According to Evans, one needs to look into the Kālāma Sutta from a socio-cultural perspective of its own time to understand it, which would not presuppose a de-emphasis of faith. For example, Evans argues that while the Kālāma Sutta responds to the question *who is telling the truth*, it does not present the truth itself, but only a way or the means to arrive at it. Additionally, he argues that the text does not necessarily mean that the Kālāma Sutta is arguing in favour of individual inquisition, since the Buddha responds to the Kālāmas as a

community in the plural, and as such, makes it more of a communal inquisition than individual. However, I find this specific argument to be weak, as it would be natural for the Buddha to speak in the plural form to the Kālāmas without necessarily denoting a communal inquisition. For example, if someone tells a group of students, “You (pl.) need to study hard to pass the exams,” they are not necessarily suggesting studying should be communal for the students as a group but for them to study individually. Based on the linguistic analysis alone, one cannot make such a conclusion. In the Buddhist context, attaining enlightenment is based on an individualistic effort. Therefore, it is more likely that the Buddha did assume an individualistic inquisition in the discourse of the Kālāma Sutta.

Nalinaksha Dutt (1940) states that “*saddhā*” has two meanings: i) faith (*pasāda*) generating *pīti*- (serene pleasure), and ii) self-confidence generating *virīya* (energy). K. N. Jayatilleke (1963:384–385) divides faith in the Pāli Canon into two different strata, which he suggests may have been confused by scholars of “*saddhā*” in Buddhism thinking that there is a contradiction. He suggests the following interpretation of the Kālāma Sutta:

Thus if we interpret the Kālāma Sutta as saying that one should not accept the statements of anyone on authority nor even seriously consider the views of others in order to test their veracity but rely entirely on one’s own experiences in the quest and discovery of truth, then this would be contradictory to the concept of *saddhā* in the Pāli Nikāyas. But if, on the other hand, we interpret the Kālāma Sutta as saying that while we should not accept the statements of anyone as true on the grounds of authority, we should test the consequences of statements in the light of our own knowledge and experience in order to verify whether they are true or false, it would be an attitude which is compatible with *saddhā* as understood in at least one stratum of Pāli Canonical thought. (Jayatilleke 1963:391)

According to Jayatilleke (1963:391–392), this interpretation assumes that a person may provisionally accept a proposition in order to verify its truth without zealously committing to it. He ties this together with the Caṅkī Sutta¹² that suggests the first phase of verification is safeguarding the truth (Jayatilleke 1963:391–392). In contrast, although it is proper to have doubt, according to the Kālāma Sutta, elsewhere in the Majjhima Nikāya having doubt in the teacher, the doctrine, the community, and

¹² Caṅkī Sutta is a discourse that describes the Buddha being challenged with the idea that the Vedas possess the sole truth. The Buddha responds by describing an epistemic approach, in which knowledge is superior to simply belief and revelation.

the training, and being angry with one's co-religionists are considered five obstacles of the mind. This kind of doubt (*vicikichā*) is considered one of the five obstructions. One needs to clear one's mind from this doubt (*vicikichāya*), becoming certain of moral values (Jayatilleke 1963:393). However, Jayatilleke suggests that this doubt would not be removed through blind faith, but through critical study and evaluation (Jayatilleke 1963:393). It is self-realization in the soundness of the teacher and the doctrine through an inquisition, which brings forth certainty or rational faith (*ākāravatī saddhā*) (Jayatilleke 1963:393). This may be compared to how the Qur'an sometimes uses "zann" from a positive perspective, as in the following:

and unto the three who were left behind until the earth, despite its breadth, closed in upon them, and their own souls closed in upon them, and they were zealous (*zannū*) that there is¹³ no refuge (*malja'*) from God, save with Him. Then He relented unto them, that they might repent. Truly God is Relenting, Merciful. 119 O you who believe (*āmanū*)! Reverence your Lord, and be among the truthful. (Qur'an 9:118–119)¹⁴

The above passage shows that sometimes, though not often in the Qur'an, zeal might be perceived positively. This can be paralleled with "saddhā" in Buddhism, in which zeal may be portrayed positively, though sometimes negatively, especially if it is followed blindly. Also, this Qur'anic passage shows that the only refuge (*malja'*) from God is God. Therefore, the zeal that is acceptable, according to this passage, is that there is no such refuge from God except God. Later, the Qur'an speaks to those who believe or take refuge (*āmanū*). Perhaps the Qur'an may be reinterpreted as stating that faith is taking refuge (*īmān*), and that is the zeal (*zann*) that is acceptable. As discussed earlier, since the Qur'an requests its audience to gain knowledge through observation and reason in order to reach faith or refuge (*īmān*), then even such zeal in the above passage may be seen as only coming after observation and reason. Indeed, the Qur'an asks its audience to adhere to God and to His messenger (e.g., Qur'an 3:32, 3:132; 5:92; 8:20; 24:54; 47:33; 58:13; 64:12). In the same context, the Qur'an also asks people not to fight one another (e.g., Qur'an 4:59; 8:1, 8:46). Adhering to God and to the messenger, while not fighting with one another, appears to have a parallel to the Majjhima Nikāya asking people not to have doubt in the teacher, the

¹³ *TSQ* translates "zannū" as "they deemed there to be ..."

¹⁴ I translated "zann" as zeal, unlike *TSQ*, to remain consistent with the definition of the term used in this article.

doctrine, the community, or the training, and not to be angry with one another. In this way, we may find that as the Kālāma Sutta, in its essence of taking refuge after investigating and verifying the truth through experiential knowledge, does not contradict having faith (*saddhā*) within the Pāli Canon. Then so, too, the Qur'an with its understanding of "īmān" as taking refuge does not contradict the other use of the same term as faith that comes through reason and observation.

CONCLUSION

The epistemology expected from the audience of the Kālāma Sutta and the Qur'an in order to have refuge in their respective messages appears to have many parallels that allow for further interfaith dialogue. The Kālāma Sutta and the Qur'an both abhor dogma and detest believing in something just because it is based on tradition. They both despise blind faith in favour of experiential knowledge or reason through observation. They seem to invite some sort of scepticism. In both, faith may be understood as taking refuge and not as dogmatic zeal. Therefore, what is faith and the role of reason in the Qur'an? The Qur'anic faith is a refuge (*īmān*) that only comes through reason and observation, and it is not identical to dogmatic zeal (*ẓann*). It is experiential knowledge that one attains to have trust and take refuge (*īmān*). The Qur'an does not typically require one to have outright trust in itself, Muḥammad, or its message. It invites people to have experiential knowledge that would lead them to take refuge (*īmān*) through observation and knowledge of natural signs (*āyāt*). The Qur'an does not want its audience to believe through supernatural signs or miracles. As there are scholarly debates on the correct meaning of "*saddhā*" in the Pāli Canon, whether or not it is faith/confidence, then so should the term "*īmān*" in the Qur'an be examined on whether or not it is accurately understood as faith. It seems that the accurate meaning of "*īmān*" is taking refuge, security, and safety, which is very different from dogmatic zeal (*ẓann*).

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