



IMAAAN BUILDER 3: UNDERSTANDING AL-ISTITHNAA IN MAINTAINING AND INCREASING ONE'S IMAAN

Introduction

All Praise is due to Allaah, we praise Him, seek His aid and His Forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allaah from the evils of our souls and the evils of our actions. Whomsoever Allaah guides there is none to misguide and whomsoever Allaah misguides there is none to guide. I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allaah, alone, without any partners and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger.

To proceed: This is Imaan Builder 3: Ibn Battah's Explanation of the Concept of al-Istithnaa Affirmed by the Salaf – And Its Role in Assisting the Maintenance and Increase of Imaan.

IMAAAN BUILDER 3: UNDERSTANDING AL-ISTITHNAA IN MAINTAINING AND INCREASING ONE'S IMAAN

Ibn Battah al-'Akbari (rahimahullaah) wrote:

Chapter: Al-Istithnaa¹ In One's Imaan

The Shaikh said: Know, may Allaah have mercy upon us and you, that it is from the affair of the Believers and from their characteristics, that Imaan is found with them, and they are in constant fear for their Imaan, and are severely cautious about their devotional actions. Hence, their hearts are in awe of the fear of losing this Imaan. This awe has encompassed them, they do not know what Allaah will do with them for the remainder of their lives, and so they are cautious of (false) self-praise, and they follow what they have been commanded by their Noble Master, when He says, **“So do not purify yourselves, rather He is most aware of who truly has taqwaa (piety)”** (An-Najm 53:32), so they fear being overcome by the plot of Allaah in dying upon an evil condition (soo' ul-khaatimah). They do not know in what condition they will be in the morning and nor the evening. What He, the Blessed and Almighty, has cautioned them from has made them inherit this awe in every step that they take, **“And no soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die”** (Luqmaan 31:34). Hence, they are in the state that He, the Mighty and Majestic, has described them with, when He said, **“And those who give what they give (in charity) while their hearts are in awe, in that they will be returning to their Lord”** (Al-Mu'minoon 23:60).

Hence, they work righteous deeds, and fear losing these deeds. They also avoid the shameful and evil deeds, having great awe and fear of falling into them, and it is precisely this (i.e. this condition of the hearts of the believers) that the Sunnah has portrayed, from al-Mustafaa (sallallaahu alaihi wasallam).

1175. [Isnaad omitted] – from Aa'ishah (radiiallaahu anhaa) who said, “I said, “O Messenger of Allaah, **Those who give what they give (in charity) while their hearts are in awe...**”, this is a man who steals, fornicates and drinks alcohol?” He said, “No O daughter of as-Siddeeq. But it is a man who fast, prays and gives in charity, but fears that it will not be accepted from him”.”

The Shaikh said: So when this fear was bound to their hearts, it also made binding upon them to make the Istithnaa in their words, concerning the future of their deeds, hence it is from the characteristics of the people of knowledge and intellect that a man say, “I am a believer, if Allaah wills”. And this is not from the angle of being doubtful (in the basis of one's Imaan), and we seek refuge in Allaah from having doubt in al-Imaan, since Imaan (faith) is affirmation (iqraar) of Allaah's Ruboobiyyah, submission to Him in Uboodiyyah (subservience, enslavement), and believing in everything He says or commands or forbids.

¹ AL-Istithnaa refer's to excepting oneself from having complete Imaan, and it is when one says “I am a Believer, if Allaah wills”.

But the one who doubts in any of that is a disbeliever no doubt. However, making the Istithnaa is correct and justified from two angles:

The first: To negate self-purification and praise (tazkiyah), such that a person does not testify for his own soul the realities of Imaan, and those matters which make up its perfection. For whoever declared these characteristics for himself, then he has testified Paradise for himself, and Allaah's pleasure and happiness with him, and whoever made this testimony for himself, then he is actually deserving of its exact opposite...

The second: And Istithnaa is also correct and justified from the perspective of what is yet to occur of one's actions and of one's condition at death, and of the remainder of one's life. And what is meant is that, "I am a believer if Allaah seals my life with the actions of the believers, and if I remain firm and amongst the people of Imaan, in Allaah's view, and if the condition I am currently in of performing the actions of the believers, lasts and continues until I meet Allaah. And I do not know will I actually wake up or enter the evening upon Imaan or not?"

And this is precisely how Allaah has actually conditioned His Prophet and the Believers from amongst His Servants, when He the Most High, "**And do not say about a matter, that I will do such and such tomorrow. Except by saying 'If Allaah wills'.**" (Al-Kahf 18:23-24). Hence, it is not permissible for you, if you are one who believes in Allaah and whose knows that his heart is in the Hand of Allaah, who turns it in whatever direction He wills, that you say, with firm resolution, and absolution, "I will enter the morning as a Believer"... except while adding the Istithnaa to your words, so you say, "If Allaah wills". This is the from the characteristics of the sensible believers...

1181. [Isnaad omitted] – from Abu Waa'il who said, "A man came to Abdullaah (bin Mas'ood) and said, "O Abu Abdur-Rahman, I met a group of people and said to them, "Who are you?", and they replied, "We are believers". So Abdullaah said, "Why did they not say, "We are the people of Paradise?"

1182. [Isnaad omitted] – that a man said in the presence of Abdullaah bin Mas'ood, "I am a believer". So it was said to Ibn Mas'ood, "This person thinks he is a believer". He said, "Ask him if he is in Paradise or Hellfire". So they asked him and he said, "Allaah knows best". So Abdullaah said to him, "If only you had entrusted the (judgement) in this life, as you have entrusted it for the next life."

1187. [Isnaad omitted] – from Ali bin Bahr who said, "Al-A'mash, Mansoor, Mugheerah, Laith, 'Ataa bin as-Saa'ib, Ismaa'eel bin Abi Khaalid, 'Ammarah bin al-Qa'qaa', al-Alaa bin al-Musayyib, Ibn Shabrimah, Sufyaan ath-Thawree, Abu Yahyaa, the companion of al-Hasan (al-Basri), and Hamzah az-Ziyaat used to say, "We are believers, if Allaah wills", and they used to criticise those who would not make this istithnaa (exception).

1188. Al-Marwadhi said, "And I heard one of the Mashaayikh say: Have you heard Abdur-Rahmaan bin Mahdee say, "Abandoning the Istithnaa is the foundation of al-Irjaa"."

1189. [Isnaad omitted] – al-Fadal bin Ziyaad narrated to us, “I heard Abu Abdullaah (Ahmad bin Hanbal) say: I never met any of our associates except that they would make al-Istithnaa (i.e. except themselves from having perfect, complete Imaan), and Yahyaa said, “Sufyaan use to hate to say “I am a believer”.”

1190. [Isnaad omitted] - as-Sufyaan said, “The people are considered believers to us (i.e. outwardly) with respect to legal rulings and the laws of inheritance², and we hope that it is actually like that with Allaah, and we do not know what is (the reality of) our condition in the sight of Allaah.”

The Shaikh said: So this is the way of the Believers, and the way of the intelligent ones from amongst the Scholars, that they adhere to al-Istithnaa, and Khawf (fear) and Rajaa (hope). They do not know their state is with Allaah, and nor the status of their actions, whether they are accepted or rejected. Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic said, “Indeed, Allaah accepts from the Muttaqeen (the pious)” (al-Maa'idah 5:27). And He informed about His righteous servant, Sulaiman (alaihi-salaam) concerning his own matter, “And he said, **“So he [Sulaimân (Solomon)] smiled, amused at her speech and said: “My Lord! Inspire and bestow upon me the power and ability that I may be grateful for Your Favours which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do righteous good deeds that will please You, and admit me by Your Mercy among Your righteous slaves.”**” (an-Naml 27:19).

So have you not observed how he asked Allaah to be pleased with him on account of righteous action, since he knew that actions, in and of themselves are not beneficial, even if they appear to be righteous, unless Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic, is pleased with them and accepts them. So is it then permissible for anyone who believes in Allaah and the Last Day to be resolute that his righteous actions are actually from good and commendable actions, in their entirety and that they are all actions that Allaah is pleased with, and are pure, and are accepted by Him?

There is no one who is able to be resolute and certain about this, except an ignoramus who is deceived concerning Allaah, and we seek refuge in Allaah from being deceived concerning Allaah, and in persisting upon disobedience of Allaah. Do you not see, may Allaah have mercy upon you, at a man from amongst the Muslims, who has just performed prayer, has completed and perfected it, and he may even have performed it in Jamaa'ah, and upon its proper time, and had perfected his ablution for it, and then when it is said to him, “Have you prayed?”, he says, “I have prayed, if Allaah accepts it”. And likewise, a people who fast the month of Ramadan, and then they say at its end, “We have fasted, if Allaah has accepted it from us”.

And likewise a people who departs from Hajj, after having completed it and Umrah, and also having completed all of the rituals of Hajj, so when you ask him about his Hajj, he

² In other words, we treat people as having the asl, base or foundation of Imaan (in other words, they are Muslims), so that the rulings pertaining to Islaam can be applied to them (i.e. inheritance laws, marriage, funerals and so on), but as for the reality of their Imaan, its degree and level, then we leave that to Allaah.

says, “We have indeed performed Hajj, and nothing has been left out, except Allaah’s acceptance of it from us”... and similarly, the people meet each other at the end of the month of Ramadan, and they say to each other, “May Allaah accept from us and you”.

This is how the Sunnah of the Muslims passed by, and this is how their habits remained, and those who came after them took it from those before them. And no one opposes this Istithnaa in Imaan and refuses to accept it, except a vile, straying Murji’ whose heart Shaytaan has deceived, and we seek refuge in Allaah from him.

1191. [Isnaad omitted] – Abu Nasr Asmah narrated to us, “I heard Abu Abdullaah saying, “Sulaimaan bin Harb used to carry this – meaning the Istithnaa – upon [Allaah’s] acceptance. They used to say, “We act, but we do not know whether it is accepted or not”.”

1196. [Isnaad omitted] – Hammad bin Zaid informed us, saying, “I heard Hishaam mentioning, “Al-Hasan (al-Basree) and Muhammad (Ibn Seereen) use to be extremely fearful of saying “Mu’min (Believer)” and would instead say “Muslim”.”

1199. [Isnaad omitted] – Abu Bakr Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Haani al-Athram said, “I heard Abu Abdullaah (Ahmad bin Hanbal) being asked about al-Istithnaa when he would say, “Imaan is speech and action, it increases and decreases”, so he would make Istithnaa out of fear and out of caution, and it was not as they would say due to doubt, but it was action for which he would make Istithnaa (i.e. the exception).”

End quote from Ibn Battah. Al-Ibaanah, 2/862-876 (with abridgement).

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

1. Imaan in the view of Ahl us-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah consists of the speech of the heart and tongue, and the actions of the heart and limbs. All of the actions of goodness enter into Imaan and are from its reality. Imaan also has an asl (base or foundation), on account of which one enters into Islaam, and thereafter, there is increase and decrease based upon the level and extent of actions – that is the actions of the heart, tied to the actions of the limbs. Because of this, the Salaf permitted the making of Istithnaa, in other words, that a person does not resolutely say “I am a believer”, since it is not known to him whether he has brought all of the actions of goodness, and whether his actions will be accepted by Allaah, or whether he will actually die upon Imaan, or remain upon good deeds. Hence, they allowed the addition of “If Allaah wills” and they were in fact severe in that and would detest if a person merely said, “I am a believer”, without excepting himself from having complete Imaan.

2. As for the Murji'ah then they expelled actions from Imaan. Hence, according to them, Imaan was a single entity, and was either the speech of the heart only, or the speech of the tongue, or both – but actions did not enter into Imaan. For this reason, they would make it forbidden for a person to say “I am a believer, if Allaah wills” since making this exception, in their view, is tantamount to doubting in the basis of Imaan, which to them is only one entity, devoid of any actions. So since Imaan could not increase or decrease according to them, it followed that everyone's Imaan was exactly the same, and could not be subject to increase or decrease.

3. The way Ibn Battah has dealt with the issue of al-Istithnaa is excellent and illustrates the depth of understanding of the Salaf. The context of making al-Istithnaa, is the great fear of having one's deeds rendered null and void, and the great fear of not knowing what lies ahead, in what remains of one's life. Thus, al-Istithnaa is justified and appropriate from two angles: a) fearing the false self-praise or self-purification of oneself by saying with certainty, “I am a believer” – meaning, that “I have brought all of the requirements of Imaan and acted upon all of its branches, and all of it is accepted by Allaah and He is pleased with it” and b) due to not knowing what will happen for the rest of one's life, and what types of actions he will commit and whether he will actually remain upon Imaan or not. So on account of this the Salaf would refrain from saying “I am a believer” without accompanying that with “If Allaah wills”.

4. And this is the trodden path of the Salaf, then there come the newly-arisen, foolish minded ones, born of the Awakening of Qutubism, and in their futile bid to accuse the innocent from Ahl us-Sunnah of the Irjaa' of Jahm Ibn Safwaan, wallow in their extremist practical neo-Irjaa' and state with such resolution and certainty that so and so is “ash-Shaheed” and they do not make the exception, showing the greatness of their ignorance and the severity of their straying in action, and the deception in their hearts brought about by Shaytaan, and we seek refuge in Allaah from such ones. For their saying, that the Mockers of the Messengers of Allaah, the Revilers of the Companions, those who utter kufr and words of apostasy, and call for the abolition of parts of the Sharee'ah, and that Islam is no more than a cocktail of Christianity and Socialism, and refrain from the Jumu'ah

prayer, and shave off their beards, and speak with the sayings of the Jahmiyyah, Ash'ariyyah, Mu'tazilah, the Rafidah, and Hulooliyyah, – that the likes of these are “Shuhudaa”, then this is but pure unadulterated misguidance, we seek refuge in Allaah from such straying filth, and from being deceived by Shaytaan and from being abandoned by Allaah...

5. So the Muslim takes caution about declaring himself and others to be “Believers” (or Martyrs) for fear of praising himself or others, above and beyond their true condition, and for fear of presuming over Allaah in matters that they have no knowledge of.

6. And all of this makes them inherit the great and constant fear and awe for their actions, in all of their actions, in all of their steps and movement, at all times.