

Iman and Kufr: The Clear Distinction & Nullifiers of Islam

In the study of Islamic Creed (Aqeedah), few topics are as fundamental as the relationship between faith and action. Many modern discussions revolve around the idea of a private, internalized faith, raising a critical question: is belief in the heart enough in Islam? Abdur-Rahman Abdul-Khaliq's influential book, "The Clear Distinction Between Iman and Kufr," provides a powerful and scripturally-grounded answer to this question, clarifying the very boundaries that define a Muslim's identity.

This in-depth article explores the book's core arguments, offering a comprehensive summary that defines Iman and Kufr, outlines the Nullifiers of Islam (Nawaqid al-Islam), and reaffirms the classical understanding of faith held by Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah.

The Core Conflict: Why Actions Are Part of Faith in Islamic Creed (Aqeedah)

To fully grasp the book's significance, we must first understand its primary theological counter-argument: a direct refutation of the Murji'ah ideology. The Murji'ah were a historical sect who promoted the belief that Iman (Faith) was confined to the heart's conviction and the tongue's confession. In their view, actions are not part of faith. This means a believer could commit grave sins without any decrease in their essential Iman.

The author, Abdur-Rahman Abdul-Khaliq, argues this viewpoint is a dangerous deviation that empties Islam of its vitality. If actions are irrelevant to faith, then:

- The laws of the Shari'ah become optional recommendations rather than binding commands.
- The concepts of reward for [good deeds](#) and punishment for sins lose their urgency.

- The distinction between a pious believer and an open sinner is blurred, so long as both claim to “believe.”

The author dismantles this by returning to the pristine sources, demonstrating that the understanding of the Prophet [Muhammad](#) (ﷺ) and his companions (**Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jama’ah**) was that faith is an integrated whole.

What is Iman? The Three Essential Pillars of Faith

The book meticulously deconstructs the definition of faith, moving beyond a simple translation. According to classical [Islamic](#) theology, understanding what is Iman requires recognizing its three inseparable pillars.

Pillar 1: Belief of the Heart (Tasdiq)

This is the foundation. It is more than just intellectual acknowledgment; it is a firm, unwavering conviction that encompasses several states of the heart:

- **Assent (Tasdiq):** Accepting the truth of what Allah and His Messenger have revealed.
- **Sincerity (Ikhlas):** Directing one’s faith solely to Allah.
- **Love (Mahabbah):** Having [love for Allah](#), His Messenger, and what they love.
- **Submission (Inqiyad):** A heart that is willing to submit to Allah’s commands.

Pillar 2: Statement of the Tongue (Qawl)

This is the public declaration and covenant of faith, epitomized by the **Shahada**: “I bear witness that [there is no god but Allah](#), and I bear witness that Muhammad is His Messenger.” This verbal testimony is not a mere formality; it is what brings a person into the fold of Islam in the worldly sense and distinguishes them from non-believers.

Pillar 3: Action of the Limbs (Amal)

This is the tangible proof of the heart's belief and the tongue's statement. It includes all acts of worship (like prayer, fasting, Zakat) and obedience to Allah's commands. The author emphasizes that actions are not just a result of faith; they are a part of faith itself.

Comprehensive Scriptural Proof: The author repeatedly returns to [the hadith](#) that perfectly encapsulates this tripartite definition:

Iman has over seventy branches or over sixty branches, the most excellent of which is the declaration that 'there is no god but Allah' (La ilaha illallah), and the humblest of which is the removal of what is injurious from the path, and modesty is a branch of Iman." (**Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim**)

This single tradition proves that Iman includes a statement (Shahada), a physical action (removing a harmful object), and an internal quality of the heart (modesty).

The Dynamic Nature of Faith: How Iman Increases and Decreases

A key concept the book emphasizes is that Iman is not a static, fixed state. It is dynamic and alive, fluctuating based on our deeds. Acts of obedience and worship cause it to grow, while sins cause it to weaken.

Scriptural Proof: Allah says in the [Quran](#):

"He it is Who sent down As-Sakinah (calmness and tranquility) into the hearts of the believers, **that they may grow more in Faith along with their (present) Faith.**" (**Quran, Al-Fath 48:4**)

This verse explicitly confirms that Iman increases and decreases, directly contradicting the [Murji'ah claim](#) that it remains unchanged by a person's actions.

What is Kufr? The Distinction Between Major Kufr and Minor Kufr

Just as Iman is multifaceted, so too is its opposite, Kufr. The author clarifies that not all acts labeled “kufr” in the texts are equal. This is a critical distinction that prevents extremism on both sides.

Kufr al-Akbar (Major Disbelief): The Exit from Islam

This is any belief, statement, or action that fundamentally contradicts the foundation of Iman and expels a person from Islam. The book explains that Major Kufr can manifest in several ways:

- **Kufr of Denial (Juhud):** Denying something known to be an essential part of the religion.
- **Kufr of [Arrogance](#) (Iba wa Istikbar):** Refusing to submit to Allah’s command out of pride, even while acknowledging His authority. The prime example is Iblis (Satan), who refused to prostrate to Adam. His disbelief was an *action* of arrogant defiance. (**Quran, [Al-Baqarah 2:34](#)**).
- **Kufr of Mockery (Istihza):** Ridiculing Allah, His verses, His messengers, or any part of the religion. As proven in the Quran, this is an act of [apostasy](#), even if done “in jest.” (**Quran, [At-Tawbah 9:65-66](#)**).
- **Kufr of Aversion (I’rad):** Deliberately turning away from the truth, refusing to learn it or act upon it.
- **Kufr of Doubt (Shakk):** Doubting the [pillars of faith](#).
- **Kufr of Hypocrisy (Nifaq):** Professing belief outwardly while concealing disbelief inwardly.

Kufr al-Asghar (Minor Disbelief): Sins that Damage Faith

This category refers to [major sins](#) that are labeled as “kufr” in the texts to show their severity, but they do not expel a person from Islam. They are acts of ingratitude to Allah and severely wound one’s Iman. A classic example is from the hadith of the Prophet (ﷺ):

“Cursing a Muslim is a transgression, and fighting him is Kufr (disbelief).” (**Sahih al-Bukhari**)

The consensus of scholars is that this refers to Minor Kufr. While it is a grave sin, it does not make the perpetrator a non-Muslim.

Crossing the Line: The Nullifiers of Islam (Nawaqid al-Islam)

The book stresses that every Muslim must be aware of the clear actions that invalidate one's faith. These "nullifiers" are the practical application of [the concept of Major Kufr](#). Key examples include:

- **Shirk (Polytheism):** The ultimate sin of associating partners with Allah in worship. This is the one sin Allah has promised not to forgive if one dies upon it. **(Quran, An-Nisa 4:48).**
- **Ruling by Man-Made Law:** Believing that man-made laws are superior, equal to, or permissible to implement in place of the Shari'ah. The author presents the verse from Surah Al-Ma'idah as a damning indictment of this act: "And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed – then it is those who are the **disbelievers (al-kafirun).**" **(Quran, Al-Ma'idah 5:44).**
- **Practicing or Approving of Magic (Sihr):** This is considered an act of Kufr because it often involves seeking help from devils and constitutes a rejection of reliance on Allah.
- **Supporting Disbelievers Against the Muslims:** Aiding an enemy force against a Muslim community is considered an act of treason that nullifies one's allegiance to Islam.

Conclusion: Embracing a Complete and Authentic Islamic Creed

"The Clear Distinction Between Iman & Kufr" is far more than an academic text. It is a vital manual for self-reflection, calling every Muslim to examine the reality of their faith. It dismantles the comforting but dangerous notion that belief can be separated from action and re-establishes the authentic **Islamic Creed** taught by the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions.

The book's enduring legacy is its powerful call for spiritual integrity. It proves from the Quran and [Sunnah](#) that a true and saving faith is one that is firm in the heart, declared on the tongue, and demonstrated through righteous deeds and submission to Allah's will. Understanding this clear distinction is the first and most critical step toward building an Iman that is complete, authentic, and pleasing to our Creator.