

*For Penelope and Adeline—  
Trust in pure joy*





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# Glossary of Key Terms

## (Arabic-Greek-Hebrew)

- Amāna* (pl. *amānāt*) (Arabic) = (traditional) doctrine(s) (Saadya)  
*Archai* (Greek) = first principles (Aristotle)  
*Asbāb* (Arabic) = (natural) causes, means  
Ash‘arite = adherent of a school of traditionalist theology, founded by  
al-Ash‘arī  
*Biṭṭaḥon/boṭeah be* (Hebrew) = trust  
*Emet* (Hebrew) = true, truth  
*Emunah* (Hebrew) = faith, belief  
*Epistēmē* (Greek) = knowledge through explanatory causes  
*Falsafa* (Arabic) = school of Arabic Aristotelian philosophy  
*Ilhām* (Arabic) = inspiration  
*‘Ilm* (Arabic) = scientific, discursive knowledge  
*‘Ilm ḍarūrī* (Arabic) = necessary knowledge  
*Īmān* (Arabic) = faith, trust  
*I’tiqād* (pl. *i’tiqādāt*) (Arabic) = conviction, belief  
*Ittikāl* (Arabic) = reliance, trust  
*‘Iyān* (Arabic) = direct eyewitness experience  
*Kalām* (Arabic) = dialectical theology  
*Kashf* (Arabic) = unveiling, disclosure  
*Ma‘amad har Sinai* = standing in the presence of God (Encounter)  
at Mount Sinai  
*Ma‘amin* (Hebrew) = believe, trust  
*Ma‘rifa* (Arabic) = experiential knowledge  
*Maqām* (Arabic) = spiritual state  
*Mawqif* (Arabic) = standing in the presence of God  
*Mukāshafa* (Arabic) = unveiling, disclosure  
*Mu‘min* (pl. *mu‘minīn*) = faithful believer  
*Mushāhada* (Arabic) = witness(ing)  
Mu‘tazilite = adherent of rational branch of Islamic theology

*Mutakallimūn* = those who engage in *kalām* (dialectical theology)

*Nazar* (Arabic) = speculation

*Pistis* (Greek) = faith

*Qiyās* = logic, syllogistic reasoning

*Riḍā'* (Arabic) = contentment with God's will

*Ṣaddaqa* (Arabic) = to accept as true, acknowledge the truth of, believe, trust

*Sharī'a* (Arabic) = revealed divine law

*Sukūn al-naḥs* (Arabic) = peace of mind/tranquility of soul

*Sukūn al-qalb* (Arabic) = peace of mind/heart

*Tafwīḍ* (Arabic) = entrusting/delegating one's affairs to the Divine

*Tajallī* (Arabic) = divine self-disclosure

*Taqlīd* (Arabic) = unquestioning reliance on the authority of others

*Taṣdīq* (Arabic) = affirmation, voluntary assent, confirmation

*Tawḥīd* (Arabic) = affirmation of divine unity

*Tawakkul* (Arabic) = reliance, trust

*Ta'yīd* (Arabic) = divine assistance

*Ṭibb al-naḥs* (Arabic) = peace of mind/contented soul

*Wahy* (Arabic) = revelation

*Wakīl* (Arabic) = trustee

*Walīy* (pl. *awliyā'*) (Arabic) = friend of God

*Wuqūf* = standing in the presence of God

*Yaqīn* (Arabic) = certainty, certitude

*Zuhd* (Arabic) = asceticism



# Glossary of Key Terms (English)

Asceticism = *zuhd* (Arabic)

Ash‘arite = adherent of a school of traditionalist theology, founded by  
al-Ash‘arī

Belief = *īmān* (Arabic), *amāna* (Hebrew)

Certainty/certitude = *yaqīn* (Arabic)

Conviction = *i‘tiqād* (Arabic)

Experiential knowledge = *ma‘rifa* (Arabic)

Encounter with God at Mount Sinai = *Ma‘amad har Sinai* (Hebrew)

Faith = *emunah* (Hebrew), *īmān* (Arabic)

Mu‘tazilite = adherent of rational branch of Islamic theology

Necessary knowledge = *‘ilm ḍarūrī*

Peace of mind/tranquility of soul = *sukūn al-naḥs*, *sukūn al-qalb* (Arabic)

Reliance = *tawakkul/ittikāl* (Arabic)

Trust = *īmān* (Arabic); *emunah* (Hebrew)

# Introduction

In the twentieth century, certain philosophers of religion have drawn a distinction between two concepts of faith or belief: belief as a propositional attitude, belief *that* something is the case vs. belief, faith, or trust *in* something or someone.<sup>1</sup> There have been several illuminating studies exploring the concept of faith in Judaism generally and in the work of Maimonides in particular.<sup>2</sup> In a recent dissertation, Troy DuJardin, following William Sessions, has broadened the concept of faith to include varied models across philosophical and religious traditions.<sup>3</sup> Through detailed explication of texts, DuJardin in fact identified forty-eight cognate concepts of faith.

In this study, I focus on concepts of faith, conviction, and trust in medieval Judeo-Arabic thought. I explore a family of related concepts: the Hebrew term *emunah* (faith or belief), and the Judeo-Arabic concepts of faith (*īmān*), conviction (*i'tiqād*), trust/reliance (*tawakkul*), and certainty (*yaqīn*). The study thus points to a spectrum of conceptions of faith and trust—from the cognitive to the experiential and affective. It offers a case study of the intuition of Sessions and DuJardin that conceptions of faith and trust are expressed in a nexus of terms that bear a family resemblance.

## 1. Judeo-Arabic Literature

Let us begin with a few introductory words about the Judeo-Arabic tradition. Judeo-Arabic literature is literature written in Arabic by Jews for a Jewish audience. The idiom of Judeo-Arabic is closer to the spoken form of Arabic than the idiom used in Muslim literature. Judeo-Arabic literature also often includes terms in Hebrew, especially when treating traditional religious topics. With the exception of certain Karaite (non-Rabbinic) circles around 1000 CE, Jews wrote Arabic in Hebrew letters.<sup>4</sup>

S. D. Goitein coined the term “Jewish-Arab symbiosis” to describe the cross-fertilization between Jewish and Islamic civilizations that took place when Jews were living in Arab lands and Arabic was the shared language through most of the Islamic world.<sup>5</sup> It is likely that Jews in Arab lands began to use Arabic rather than Aramaic in everyday spoken language

from the eighth century on. At this time, a great surge of translations from Greek, Syriac, Pahlavi, and Hindi had produced new writing on subjects originating in these other cultures. Non-Arab Muslims and other minorities, including Jews, participated in this new learning.

Thus from at least the tenth century on, Jews from the educated classes took interest not only in traditional studies of Bible and Talmud, but also scientific studies, such as medicine, mathematics, and astronomy, as well as the study of philology, philosophy, and theology. The rationalism and order of these studies shaped their understanding of traditional Jewish subjects, such as Biblical commentary, as well.<sup>6</sup> The fruit of this rich symbiosis included works such as Saadya Gaon's theological treatise *Kitāb al-mukhtār fī 'l-amānāt wa 'l-i'tiqādāt* (*The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*), Judah Halevi's philosophical dialogue the *Kuzari* (*Kitāb al-radd wa 'l-dalīl fī 'l-dīn al-dhalīl*); Moses Maimonides' philosophical treatise *Dalālat al-hā'irīn* (*Guide of the Perplexed*); and Sufi-inspired devotional manuals, such as those of Bahya ibn Paquda, *Kitāb al-hidāya ilā farā'iq al-qulūb* (*The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart*), and Abraham Maimonides, *Kitāb kifāyat al-'ābidīn* (*The Complete [Guide] for the Servants [of God]*).

In this study, we will explore concepts relating to faith and trust in these texts of synthesis and integration, as well as in cognate Biblical commentaries, and documents uncovered in the Cairo Genizah from the thirteenth-century Egyptian pietist circle of Abraham Maimonides.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Models of Faith

The focus of this study will be Judeo-Arabic conceptions of faith and trust, centered upon distinctive Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic vocabulary. It will also be helpful to keep in mind broader, cross-cultural models of faith that express themselves in Judeo-Arabic thought. We will thus keep in mind two axes—the central terminological axis, and the axis of conceptions of faith and trust. In the course of our discussion, I will have occasion to refer to several models of faith developed by Sessions and DuJardin:

1. the personal relationship model: the model of faith or trust in someone, which includes features of loyalty and love;<sup>8</sup>

2. the belief model: a propositional attitude, belief that a proposition is true;<sup>9</sup>
3. the attitude model: a total world view or life orientation, a way one comports oneself in the world, which will also affect one's personal relationships and beliefs;<sup>10</sup>
4. the devotional model: whole-hearted commitment to a way of life;<sup>11</sup>
5. the confidence model: a non-relational conscious state, a profound feeling of confidence, of serenity, tranquility, calm and peace;<sup>12</sup>
6. the hope model: to desire and confidently await and expect some state or outcome even in the face of improbability.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Hebrew Terms: *Emunah*, *Biṭṭaḥon*

I begin with several terminological distinctions. The Hebrew term *emunah* derives from the Biblical Hebrew root *a-m-n*. It is cognate with several Arabic verbs from the same root: *amuna*, to be faithful; *amana*, to believe or trust in; and *amina*, to be secure. In the Hebrew *Qal* form, it signifies to confirm or support. In the *Nif'al* form, it means to be made firm, sure, lasting; to be confirmed, established or verified; and to be reliable, faithful, trustworthy. Thus in the causative *Hif'il* it signifies to stand firm, to trust or believe, both in the sense of trusting or believing *in* and trusting or believing *that*.

Deriving from the *Qal* form, *emunim* are faithful ones. The Deity is described as “the faithful God (*ha-El ha-ne'eman*)”; likewise, Moses is described as “faithful in all my house (*be-kol beiti ne'eman hu*).”

The noun *emunah* is found in the Bible, applied both to God, as in Deuteronomy 32:4, where God is called “a God of faithfulness (*El emunah*)”; and to humans, as in Habakkuk 2:4, “a righteous one will live by his faithfulness (*šaddiq be-emunato yiḥyeh*).”<sup>14</sup>

The *Hif'il* verb is clearly used in the Bible in the sense of a personal relationship. For example, the well-known verse about Abraham, “and he trusted (*he'emin*) in the Lord and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6), connotes trust in the faithfulness of a personal agent with whom Abraham is in relationship. The verse also may

carry some connotation of propositional faith, belief in the promises articulated by God, belief that however improbable, God's words will be realized.

The figure of Abraham illustrates additional dimensions of faith. There is an aspect of hope, the confident expectation of a greatly desired outcome, that Abraham in his old age will have a child and a family. There is a dimension of faith as confidence, a quiet assurance that all will go well despite the improbability. One can also see in the figure of Abraham an example of faith as a total life orientation, a way one comports oneself in the world.

Scholars such as Kenneth Seeskin and Howard Wettstein have argued that in these Biblical examples, there is no sense of the propositional attitude, belief *that* God exists.<sup>15</sup> In response, Charles Manekin has argued that "belief in God was never taken for granted, certainly not in the Bible"; believing in God presupposes warrants for belief.<sup>16</sup> Believing in God means trusting in God's words, God's faithful character, and God's promises. At the same time, it is worth noting that in common English parlance, the phrase "to believe in God" has taken on the connotation of belief *that* God exists, while the Biblical term *he'emin* tends more towards the connotation of trust and faith.

The example of Abraham shows that the models are in practice not completely separate, but rather intertwined. The example of Abraham also suggests two additional models we might add to DuJardin's rubric, powerful expressions of faithfulness that are worth highlighting, which may be additional subsets of faith as an attitude. The model of Abraham suggests steadfast commitment. The object of commitment can be a person, but it can also be a moral ideal. As Kenneth Seeskin notes, commitment to an ideal is expressed in actions. Thus the verse from Habakkuk, "the righteous shall live by his faithfulness," suggests that the righteous shall live by remaining true *to* God.<sup>17</sup> Seeskin also adds another dimension that is worth taking into account. He notes that faith is closer to a moral virtue than an intellectual virtue, and that faith is remarkably similar to courage. We might thus add faith as courage. Biblical figures such as Abraham and Job demonstrate courage in remaining steadfast in their commitment and loyalty in the face of adverse circumstances. Steadfast commitment and courage are two aspects of faith as an attitude; they represent a total life orientation, a way of walking in the world.

In this context, we can note the words of Alexander Altmann in a fascinating talk given at the University of Chicago in 1961, which has just recently been published. Altmann confines the concept of “faith” proper to the Biblical tradition.<sup>18</sup>

And there is faith nowhere else, in the pregnant sense of the word “faith.” Faith as an act of commitment, an act of surrender, an act of trust, an act by which, in the words of the prophet Habakkuk, “the righteous liveth.” He lives by faith. And that he lives by faith implies not only that he holds a certain belief such as the proposition “God exists”—apart from the fact that holding a proposition to be true is not faith. Even if you direct the act of faith to such an object of faith, this is not faith in the full and pregnant sense of the word, it is not all the faith. It is only an abstraction, perhaps a segment of what we mean by faith. If the righteous lives by his faith, it means that his existence, his entire existence, is dominated by faith, by a faith that explicates itself in many ways, in many directions, that expresses itself in a number of thoughts, in a number of stories of a sacred character, in a number of acts of hope and trust and so on. So that really when a believer goes to church or to synagogue and hears a sermon in which this life of faith is expressed and he says “amen,” this saying of “amen” is an act of faith in which the totality of the implications and the backgrounds of his particular tradition is expressed.<sup>19</sup>

Altmann goes on to speak of “the essential act, the existential act, of trust, surrender, and the multitude of beliefs that go into the making of a faith.”<sup>20</sup> He thus clearly has in mind faith as attitude, a total life orientation, which includes a complex of trust, surrender, and belief.

It thus becomes clear in what sense faith is a virtue. Faith points to integrity of character. There is also a bridge concept between faith or belief *in* and faith or belief *that*—that of truth. As Seeskin has pointed out, in the Bible to be true is to be steadfast; the Hebrew word for truth (*emet*) derives from the root *a-m-n*, to be firm, fixed, steadfast. Thus the Biblical concept of truth refers to steadfastness and reliability. Something that is factually true is trustworthy and reliable. Likewise, to be true to one’s word, to be a true friend, is to possess moral qualities of faithfulness and reliability.<sup>21</sup>

Another key articulation of Biblical faith is the Israelites' response to the parting of the Red Sea: "and Israel saw the great work (literally: the great hand) that the Lord did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared (or: were in awe of) the Lord, and they believed/trusted (*ya'aminu*) in the Lord and in Moses his servant" (Exod. 14:31). The great display of God's efficacy awakens awe and reverence as well as trust in the words and promise of the Lord transmitted through the Lord's servant Moses. Here again, scholars such as Louis Jacobs have argued that there is no question of the existence of God or Moses.<sup>22</sup> In response, Charles Manekin has suggested that there is, however, an answer to the question of the existence of a God who is sovereign, one who "could be relied on to save them from the Egyptians. Without this demonstration they would have little warrant to believe that God exists *as their God*, a being powerful enough to vanquish their enemies and provide for them in times of need."<sup>23</sup> The parting of the Red Sea inspires belief and trust in the power and faithfulness of the God who has delivered them.

Trust in God came to be expressed in medieval Jewish literature by the term *biṭṭaḥon*, a noun drawn from the verbal root *b-t-h*, as in its Biblical precedent: "What is this confidence (*biṭṭaḥon*) wherein you trust (*baṭaḥta*)?" (II Kgs. 18:19 = Is. 36:4). The root has connotations of strength, firmness, and security.

The theme of trust in God is pervasive in the Psalms, a mirror of God's love and faithfulness: "I will say to the Lord, 'my refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust (*Elohai, evtah bo*)'" (Ps. 91:2). "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, Oh Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness (*emunah*) every night" (Ps. 92:2–3).

A parallel theme is that one should not trust in anything other than God: "Do not put your trust in princes (*al-tivṭeḥu bi-ndivim*), in a mortal human, in whom there is no help" (Ps. 146:3). A much-cited passage is that describing King Asa, who is criticized in 2 Chronicles 16 for two expressions of lack of trust: he relied on the King of Syria rather than on God, and in his illness he did not consult God, but only physicians (2 Chr. 16:7–12).<sup>24</sup> Baḥya ibn Paquda and Abraham Maimonides respond that one should both trust in God, and consult a physician. This approach echoes an anecdote found often in Sufi sources: A certain man came [to the Prophet] riding his camel, and asked him: "Messenger of God, should I leave her loose

and put my trust in God?” The Prophet responded, “Tie her up and trust in God!”<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. Arabic Terms: *I’tiqād, Īman, Tawakkul*

We can note that there is no way to distinguish in the Hebrew term *emunah* between the sense of “to believe” and that of “to trust or have faith.”<sup>26</sup> The term *emunah* was used in medieval translations of Judeo-Arabic texts to translate two semantically different Arabic terms: *i’tiqād* and *īmān*.

Lane’s *Arabic-English Lexicon* asserts that the Arabic term *i’tiqād* derives from the root ‘-q-d, which signifies to tie, as a cord or rope; to tie firmly, fast, or strongly; and, by extension, to complicate, so as to tie in a knot. The eighth form of the verb, *i’taqada*, is to determine one’s mind firmly upon a thing; to believe firmly or be firmly persuaded; to become certain or sure.<sup>27</sup>

Andreas Lammer and Raphael Kretz, in their online dictionary of Arabic philosophical terms, attest the following for ‘-q-d:

##### *i’tiqād*—‘-q-d (VIII, inf)

- conviction

Source: Dhanani (1994)

- conviction

Source: McGinnis/Reisman (2007)

##### *i’taqada*—*ya’taqidu*—‘-q-d (VIII, verb)

- to believe, to believe firmly in, to be convinced of (+ bi- / acc.); to firmly determine his heart or mind upon something (+ acc.).<sup>28</sup>

It thus seems that *i’tiqād* in philosophical, as in other sources, is to believe or be convinced of something, to firmly determine one’s mind upon something, or hold something with conviction.

There has been significant debate about the translation of the term *i’tiqād* among contemporary translators of Saadya and Maimonides. Rav Joseph Qafih, commenting upon his translation of Saadya’s definition of *i’tiqād*, writes:



Our teacher has informed us of a great matter here when he explained the word *i'tiqād*—which most of the early scholars translate as “belief” (*emunah*), which is definitely an incorrect translation. Even R. Yehuda Ibn Tibbon translates [*i'tiqād* as] “belief” (*emunah*) here [in this passage], while above in his translation of the book title, [he translated] *i'tiqādāt* as “*de'ot*,” which in my opinion is the most appropriate translation. Here, our Rabbi defines this term [*i'tiqād*] well, which is a conviction (*de'ah*) and a view (*hashkafah*) that a person arrives at as a result of investigation, and not just “belief” (*emunah*), which is something that comes through reception (*qabbalah*) and tradition (*masoret*) or even out of mental blindness (*ivaron lev*) or just plain error. Therefore I have translated *i'tiqād* generally as “conviction” (*de'ah*).<sup>29</sup>

Likewise, in commenting on Maimonides' explanation of *i'tiqād* in *Guide* I:50, Qafih writes:

Here our Rabbi defines this concept well, and one should definitely not translate [*i'tiqād* as] “belief” (*emunah*), because belief is a view (*hashkafah*) held by a person through tradition (*masoret*), and without fundamental knowledge (*yedi'ah yesodit*) . . . while “conviction” (*de'ah*) is a view (*hashkafah*) that a person arrives at through fundamental investigation (*haqirah yesodit*) and through comprehensive examination of the premises that lead to it, and even [examining] the objections that may be anticipated to be raised against it, in order to know whether it is capable of standing up to [the objections].<sup>30</sup>

In contrast, Michael Schwarz, in his recent translation of the *Guide*, responds to Qafih:

Even though Nuriel and Qafih proposed translating the word *i'tiqād* through the word *de'ah* . . . I found that such a translation corresponds to Rabbi Saadya Gaon's use of the term *i'tiqād* in his book *Emunot ve-De'ot*, but not to Maimonides' use of this phrase in the *Guide of the Perplexed*. On the other hand, the term belief (*emunah*) seems to me to be an appropriate translation for *i'tiqād* in all its appearances in this book,

and therefore, wherever the word *emunah* appears in this translation, it represents the word *i'tiqād*, and wherever the verb *he'emin* and its derivatives appear, it represents the verb *i'taqada* and its derivatives, unless otherwise noted.<sup>31</sup>

I have chosen to translate the term *i'tiqād* as “conviction” throughout this manuscript, while recognizing that different thinkers (and sometimes even the same thinker) use the term differently, and that the meaning will vary according to context. It is also important to note that the term *i'tiqād* often carries the connotation of well-founded conviction, and thus in many contexts is close to knowledge.

The term *īmān* derives from the root *a-m-n*, which connotes to be or become secure, safe, or in a state of security or safety; to be or become quiet, or tranquil, in heart or mind; to be secure or free from fear.<sup>32</sup> Lammer and Kretz attest:

*'amina—yāmanu—'m-n* (I, verb)

- to be safe, to feel safe

*'amuna—yāmunu—'m-n* (I, verb)

- to be faithful, to be trustworthy

*'āmana—yu'minu—'m-n* (IV, verb)

- to believe in (+ *bi-*)

The fourth form, commonly followed with the preposition *bi-* (in), can signify “to believe” or “to believe in something,” including “to believe in God” (*āmana bi'llāh*); it may also have the connotation of “having faith or trust in,” as in “trust in God” (*īmān bi'llāh*).<sup>33</sup>

It thus seems plausible to say that the primary significance of *īmān* is the connotation of faith, trust, and security. However, the term clearly also possesses epistemological significance. This is true in both Arabic and Hebrew of the root *ṣ-d-q* as well.<sup>34</sup> Lammer and Kretz attest for the second form of the root *ṣ-d-q*:

*ṣaddaqa—yuṣaddiqu—ṣ-d-q* (II, verb)

- to accept as true, to acknowledge the truth of (+ *bi-*);  
to deem credible, to believe, to trust.<sup>35</sup>

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