

# The Superconcept "Faith" (հավան) in English and Armenian Linguocultures (A Comparative Etymological Analysis)



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The notion “concept” includes social, national and cultural experience of a person. Each of us cognizes the world in his/her own way and this personal, unique vision of the world forms the layers of the concept’s core. Concepts, especially “cultural concepts” are mainly mental formations in which the “nations’ spirit” is reflected. They consist of three components: notional (etymology, contemporary associations), figurative (fixed cognitive metaphors), and evaluative (shows the value of this or that concept).

Among the concepts we distinguish the concepts having super-values for the humanity or “superconcepts”, such as “Faith”, “God”, “Soul” etc.

“Superconcepts” include emotions, images and symbols.

Since they are universal, we can conclude that these concepts evoke experience of the same emotions, images and symbols in all linguocultures. However it is far from true. In spite of their universal essence, each of “superconcepts” keeps in itself a highly national, unique reflection and perception of reality.

Since superconcepts acquire national peculiarities in different cultures, they are experienced in different ways. They accumulate during different historical epochs and move to different associations and images. Thus, the sensual, historical and social experience of a representative of a definite nation makes the “national palette” of a concept. Even a single concept can not be universal. For instance, the superconcept “Faith” arouses various images and associations depending on one’s nationality, especially among people belonging to different confessions.

| CHRISTIANITY  | ISLAM                  | JUDAISM  |
|---|------------------------|--|
| J. Christ   | Mahomet                | God is impersonal.<br>God is realized as a person. |
| Bible   | Koran                  | Tanakh   |
| Church  | Mosque                 | Synagogue  |
| To have faith in God  | To have faith in Allah | To have faith in Yahweh                            |
| The image of a grey-haired and grey-bearded venerable old man |                        | Not to worship a concrete image.                   |

In Christianity, as in any other religion, images and associations of the superconcept “Faith” can differ depending on the person’s religious trend, for instance:

| ORTHODOX                            | APOSTOLIC FAITH                     | CATHOLIC FAITH                              | MOSLEM FAITH   |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| The image of golden domes (cupolas) | The image of gabled roofed churches | The image of Gothic Roman Catholic churches | The image of mosque decorated with calligraphic text |
| Iconostasis                         | _____                               | Cult of the image of Mother of God          | There is no any cult of image                        |

Thus, the core of the superconcept “Faith” is nationally, historically and spiritually subjective.

In majority, the concepts have the “principle of opposition”, as they exist and interrelate with their opposite notions: “love — hate”, “joy — sorrow”, “truth — lie” etc. But just the same principle of opposition is realized in the concept itself. The same superconcept can be positive (+) or negative (-), depending on the character of the notion. For example:

| POSITIVE POLE (+) | NEGATIVE POLE (-) |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Faith in God      | Faith in Devil    |
| Faith in himself  | Faith in magic    |

Thus, the superconcepts, particularly such virtues as “faith”, “hope”, “love”, can be virtues only if they belong to the highest (+) values.

“Faith” belongs to the phenomena of human’s psychics and language can hardly describe it. It is impossible to interpret the experience and meanings of faith with the help of scientific notions and common language. General understanding of faith is vague, polyvalent, and it includes in itself too dissimilar psychic phenomena. The concept “faith” is a metaphor. Its meaning depends on the paradigm and context of interpretation.

Common understanding of faith is not only excessively spread, but also “conceptualized”.

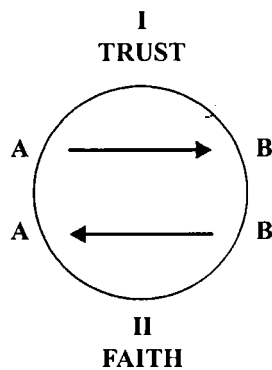
“Faith” is opinion, conviction, that is to say, everything which has any connection with the symbolism of God and assertion of His existence and His help.

According to one of the versions, the “superconcept” “faith” in its religious meaning, goes back to the most ancient heathen notions connected with an appeal to the divinity with a prayer, request or sacrifice etc. In Indo-European languages the meaning “to believe”, “to have faith”, “to trust in” is expressed by an old word-combination “*k[h]ret’ d[h]ett*”, which means literally: “to put a heart”. Thus the same equivalent can be found in the Latin word “credo” (cre+do) = “I believe”, literally: “I give my heart” (compare with old-het. “k(a)ratan”+ “to put the heart into”; from the word “k(a)rat”= “core”, with the root “ker/kard”= “heart”) etc. (Stepanov 2004:402-403.).

Analyzing the etymology of the word “faith” in different languages, Florensky shows the main ways in which different nations understand “faith”. The notion of “faith” by some means or other, relates to the moral values, for example in Latin, English, Armenian, Russian, Hebrew, Sanskrit “to believe” means “to trust”, “to love”, “to permit”, “to approve”. The concept “faith” presupposes two members of an act: “A” and

“B”. In the process of belief “a circular motion of communication” takes place (Степанов, 2004: 405.). “A” or “the bearer of faith” gives his trust to “B”, that is to say, “believes him”. But before it, “B” “*inspires trust*” to “A”. This “inspiration of trust” is not “faith” yet, but it is an embryo. It is something which can evoke faith. But the act of trust inspiration coming from “B” rises as an answer to the inquiry coming from “A” about the possibility of relations with “B”. The answer would be the inspiration of trust from “B”.

The model suggested by U.Stepanov belongs to the prehistoric period of formation of the concept “faith”. In modern world this model can be simplified and appears as a “circulation” of relationships between “A” and “B”.



For modern people belonging to different confessions (Christian, Muslim, Jewish etc.) the embodiment of “B” is *God— Christ, Yahweh, Allah* etc. The believer (“A”) trusts in his/her God (“B”) and an impulse from God (“B”) inspires faith to the believer (“A”).

The “superagence” “God” inspires trust: “a believer” experiences “trust” and obeys waiting for the fulfillment of the promised act. The “superagence” “God” elevates “the impulse of faith” in a “believer’s” heart and entrusts himself / herself to “God” (“the source of faith”). Thus, in one case the result of “communication” is an act of “Contract”, in another case it is an act of “Faith”. The impulses of belief, trust, confidence and faith make the formation of concrete religion.

Thus from the linguistic point of view, “Faith” is the result of “the circular motion of communication” between “A” and “B”. This model is reflected in the derivatives having the Indo-European root “*bheidh*” in such denotations as “*fides*” in Latin and “*pisteuo*” in Greek.

According to Hr. Acharyan’s “Etymological dictionary”, the Armenian word “**հավատ**” (“faith”) is explained as “belief, religion, faithfulness and confidence”. According to Grigor Tatevatzi (18c.), the root “**հալ**” = “*the beginning*” and **ատո** = “*the power of act*”. Prof. Millie connects the old Armenian root “**հալ**” = “*bird*”, “*hen*”, “*cock*” (comp. lat. “*avis*”= “*bird*”; sanskrit “*vayas*”= “*bird*”) with the ancient Indo-European ritual tradition to tell fortunes by the flight of birds and to foresee the future

with the help of their internal organs.

The similar root can be found in the Sanskrit word “**hava**” = “*sacrifice*”, “*offering*” which has direct connections with the sacrificial animal «*cock*». Acharyan interrelates “**հավատ**” and “**ավատ**”, «**ավոտ**» = «**առավոտ**» i.e. «*the beginning of sunrise*». This word pattern, in our opinion, is closely connected with the ancient fire worshippers’ and pagans’ belief in the main Divinity — «*Sun*». Another Sanskrit word should be mentioned «**avatara**» which means «*the Divinity’s earthy incarnation*». Thus, we can find the same root in the following Armenian words : = “**հավատարմություն**” = «*faithfulness*» as a compound of the words “**հավատ**” («*faith*») and «**ար**» («*Sun*», «*Creator*»). It is possible that in its first meaning the root «**հավ**» — «*bird*», «*cock*» is a symbol of Sun, and its second meaning — «*the beginning*» is a symbol of time. «*Cock*» is an «*earthy image, zoomorphic transformation of the Sun*». It’s the symbol of eternal revival of life, the circular motion «*life— death—life*», i.e. «*new birth*». The inner meaning of the root is connected with the ancient Christian tradition of cock sacrifice.

According to Gh. Alishyan, besides the above mentioned meanings observed in Latin «*fides*»; Italian «*fede*», French «*fai*», the root «**հավ**» is related to the word «**հա**» or «**այո**», which means «*yes*» or «*agreement*» (comp. turc. «*evvet*»; Hebrew «*ehovt*» = «*confession*» ). The same meaning of confession is preserved in some other words derived from the root «**հավ**»: “**հավաստիք**”, “**հավանություն**”, “**հավատարմություն**”, “**հավաստի**” etc.

We think that the Armenian root «**հավ**» derives from the old root «**վահ**» (it is well-known that in ancient times the borrowed words were written from right to left = «*anagram*»). “**վահ**” means «*god*» (comp. “**վահան**” - *the God of thunderstorm and lighting*).

In the English language there are three words for different types of faith: «*faith*», «*belief*» and «*trust*» (comp. “**հավատ**” and “**հավատք**”). «*Belief*» means something, which exists, while «*Faith*» is religious belief. The word «*faith*» has different usage and is very often an equivalent to the words «*confidence*» and «*belief*». In Old English the word «*believe*» was «*belyfan*». From the 1175 «*belief*» replaced Old English «*geleafa*» derived from West-Germanic «*galauban*».

The English word «*faith*» was derived from Latin «*fides*» (= «*trust, belief*»), from the root «*fidere*» = «*to trust*») and entered into English from Old French «*fei*» and «*feid*». In Middle-English (1150-1475) «*faith*» was transformed into the word «*belief*». «*Faith*» got the meaning «*loyalty to a person to whom one is obliged to by promise or duty*».

For the most part the object of faith regardless of the discourse has positive character, for instance: «*light of faith*», «*good faith*», «*true faith*», «*the Christian faith*», «**լույս հավատ**», «**հաստատուն հավատ**», «**անբիծ հավատ**». In these word combinations the notion of «*faith*» expresses positive inner state of a person, a positive act. The concept «*Faith*» can be verbalized by the preposition «*in*»: «*put faith in*»; «*lose one’s faith in*»; «*belief in a divine power*».

Reliable sources of information about the concepts are the idiomatic and parameological funds of language. Idioms, proverbs and sayings read as “*folded*” cultural texts, are the main constituents of “*the cultural concepts’ language*”

(Степанов, 1997: 60.).

The contrastive analyses of the idioms discloses differences in their images and linguo-associations. The existence of idioms lacking equivalence is explained by the uniqueness of national culture, despite the fact of identity in Christian perception of faith.

The structure of the concept is reflected in the derivatives of the word “հավատ” jointly forming a united “space” and moving to a higher level of abstraction. Having a nominative function, derivatives depict the world in detail, arrange connections between its components and denote the results of human conceptual activities.

The analyses of language material shows the high potential of the word “հավատ” in word formation. According to Acharyan’s and Malkhasyan’s dictionaries, there are more than 50 derivatives to this word. The basic word “հավատ” identifies all the derivations. They are mainly compound words: *հավատաստհման, հավատափոխ, հավատափորձական, հավատտար, հավատաքաղց, հավատաքընճական, հավատալիություն, հավատապատում, հավատանամակ, հավատավաճառ, etc.*

Numerous compounds show that for the most part the word and notion “հավատ” are interpreted when they are connected with religious sphere. The productivity of word formation in Armenian can be explained by a “specific” verbal mentality of native speakers.

#### References:

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#### **«Հավատ» (faith) կոնցեպտը անգլիական և հայկական լեզվամշակույթներում (ստուգաբանական վերլուծություն)**

Հոդվածում առաջադրվում է «գերկոնցեպտ» եզրույթը և քննության են առնվում դրա լեզվամշակութաբանական հայեցակերպին վերաբերող հարցեր: «Գերկոնցեպտները» այն գերարժեքներն են որոնք ծագումնաբանորեն փոխանցվում են մարդու գիտակցության մեջ և գոյատևում հասկացությունների, պատկերացումների, գիտելիքների, զգայական ընկալումների և ապրումների տեսքով: Լեզվամշակութաբանության դիրքերից հոդվածում վերլուծվում է այդ գերկոնցեպտներից կարևորագույնը՝ «հավատը»: Կատարվում է «հավատ» և «faith» բառերի ստուգաբանական վերլուծություն: