

UNITED WISDOM

Tawakkul: trust and one's own effort

Freedom and Action

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Epigraph

> *“Walk in trust”*

Sana'i, *Hadiqat al-haqiqa*, First Book, section on trust in God; fragment from J. Stephenson's English translation (1910), PDF p.81. Version used.

What this article is about

A person has finished preparing, sought advice and made a decision, yet the future has not become transparent. This is where trust becomes a difficult question: can we stop demanding a guarantee while continuing to answer for what we do? In Islamic religious language, tawakkul refers to reliance on God. It cannot be fully translated as self-confidence, optimism or agreement with everything that happens. Here we consider a limited question: how trust relates to one's own effort when action is possible but the outcome remains unknown. A Quranic verse connecting consultation, decision and reliance provides one foundation; Sana'i's Sufi poetry offers a different, more ascetic emphasis. We will distinguish these voices and then consider ordinary hypothetical situations. Secular examples help us examine responsibility and its limits, but they neither prove a religious teaching nor require readers to adopt a faith.

I. What is entrusted, and what remains our task

Imagine a small team preparing an open discussion. The participants have agreed on a topic, checked the venue and notified their guests. A day before the meeting, a speaker says they cannot attend. The organiser can change the programme, tell people or cancel the event. They cannot compel the absent speaker to appear, and they do not know whether everyone will like the revised programme. Their responsibility concerns specific decisions, but the consequences of those decisions extend beyond their power.

In this situation it is easy to confuse two different requests. The first concerns our own action: may it be attentive and honest. The second concerns the future: may everything necessarily turn out as we wish. Fulfilling the first does not mean obtaining the second. A person can prepare a meeting carefully and encounter indifference; they can make a mistake and happen to receive a favourable response. The ending alone cannot reveal the whole character of the effort. This is our ethical distinction, rather than a claim that circumstances do not matter at all.

Tawakkul retains a religious recipient of trust. A believer understands action in relation to God; a reader outside Islamic faith can understand the question of effort and outcome failing to coincide, but that understanding does not make their practice tawakkul. Remove the recipient and a useful human question remains, while the concept's content changes. Keeping this distinction allows related questions to be discussed without appropriating someone else's word or declaring that all traditions teach the same thing.

For the organiser, the meeting is not yet lost. They investigate possible replacements for the talk and communicate the actual plan. At the same time, they may acknowledge that they cannot ensure an identical experience for everyone. Recognising a limit does not cancel the work: it clarifies what the person is actually undertaking. If instead they promise that uncertainty itself will put everything right, while necessary actions are available, language about trust closes a question that still needs an answer.

II. Consultation comes before the decision

In Quran 3:159, an address to the Prophet connects gentleness, pardon, consultation with others, a decision and reliance on God. The sequence matters for our question: trust does not erase consultation. The verse is a religious text rather than an instruction manual for running a modern organisation. Nevertheless, it offers no basis for equating reliance with a refusal to hear others. We rely here on the verse we have read, rather than on a complete commentary or a legal ruling.

The significance of consultation becomes clear when another person can change how the task is described. Suppose a family is arranging help for an older relative. One member proposes allocating days immediately; another asks whether the relative actually wants that particular help. A third knows about difficulties with the journey. If the decision has already been inwardly declared unconditionally correct, everyone else can only endorse a finished plan. Genuine discussion allows the initial account to be incomplete. Consultation is therefore a possible source of revised resolve, rather than an ornament added to it.

Listening does not mean that every disagreement will disappear. People may assess available time and the appropriate degree of involvement differently. What matters is which information was actually considered and whose limitations were included in the decision, rather than a promised outcome of agreement. The hypothetical family can clarify who agrees to take part and what the relative themselves permits. Where specialist knowledge is required, an ordinary family discussion is insufficient; this article does not establish medical or legal rules for such a case.

The decision following a discussion also retains an author. We cannot say that everyone now bears a small share of responsibility and therefore nobody needs to explain the next step. One

person may undertake coordination, another a particular journey, and a third may exercise the right to decline. When contributions are named, trust ceases to mean a vague hope that someone else will be willing. It can accompany an accepted responsibility, but cannot replace the consent of those whose participation we count on.

III. Resolve does not purchase an outcome

The moment of decision is sometimes experienced as a bargain with the future. A person thinks: because I chose honestly enough, circumstances owe support to my choice. This expectation is understandable, especially after difficult preparation. But the quality of an intention does not entail control over all participants and conditions. When the ending is different, we may be tempted to declare either the whole effort wasted or our faith inadequate. Both conclusions require more information than a single failure supplies.

Imagine someone who wants to restore a broken relationship. They acknowledge a specific mistake, apologise and leave the other person free not to respond. Preparation can be serious, but reconciliation depends on the second party. If an apology comes with a demand for immediate forgiveness, it becomes a new way of controlling someone else. The limit here does not mean that relationships are unimportant. It means that a desired result cannot be secured through one's own moral effort alone.

After the decision, further action may remain possible: keeping the distance one promised, avoiding a repetition of the earlier act, or answering a question if it is asked. This is not an endless demonstration of one's worth. It is a distinction between what one still needs to do and what the other person is entitled to decide. In our scene, another message could be caring or pressuring, depending on the agreement and circumstances. The article does not read hidden motives; it suggests examining the form of the approach and the consent actually available.

Trust should therefore not be measured by how quickly anxiety disappears or whether the desired answer arrives. Religious life has its own foundations, which are not reduced here to an observable mood. Even in ordinary responsibility, a person may continue with a chosen task while experiencing doubt. To assess an action, it is more useful to ask whether the stated boundary has been kept and whether another person has been made responsible for providing our inward relief. This question is more modest than a promise of unwavering confidence, but it concerns an actual action.

IV. A Sufi voice cannot become universal advice

In Sana'i's First Book of the Hadiqa, trust belongs to a severe ascetic vocabulary; an insistence on spiritual striving also appears nearby. This poetic voice does not coincide with a modern formula for sensible preparation. The selected version also distinguishes wisdom for earthly life from faith for another life. The two brief quotations retain this tension without presenting the poem as a manual for all Muslims or evidence of a psychological effect.

Why does this matter for the reader? When an older work becomes the source of a convenient idea, we risk removing everything that makes it inconvenient. The author then appears to confirm a rule we already accepted, even though the actual text establishes a different scale. We can decline an ascetic ideal while still taking seriously the question it raises: what does our effort serve if its only measure is preserving a familiar position? That question does not oblige us to abandon necessary means of living.

When reading religious poetry, we need to distinguish an address within a particular spiritual world from a proposal to a specific person today. An image of relinquishing the self can belong to poetic controversy; transferring it into a directive about safety, possessions or help for dependent people would be a different act. Finding a powerful image does not entitle us to expose anyone to risk. The meaning of a text and the permissibility of applying it require separate discussions.

The difficulty of a source does not make it useless. Instead, it prevents an overly smooth agreement between past and present. We can retain the question of what sustains us, recognise the poet's more radical answer and then clearly state our own limited conclusion. In this article that conclusion concerns the possibility of acting without a guarantee of the desired outcome. It is our reasoning about everyday responsibility; it is not presented as Sana'i's complete answer, a religious ruling or a substitute for consulting a qualified interpreter.

V. Means do not become objects of worship

If the outcome cannot be guaranteed, why check the means? Because relinquishing omnipotence does not mean relinquishing distinctions. A convenient route and a dangerous route do not become equivalent because the future is unknown. A well-prepared message and a misleading message differ too. In the hypothetical meeting, the organiser can check access to the entrance, timing and the clarity of the announcement. These actions do not provide complete power over the event, but belong to the task actually accepted.

The opposite extreme arises when a means becomes the only permissible support. Suppose someone has drawn up a detailed plan for moving home within the same city. The time for handing over the keys then changes. If they believe a good plan should exclude change, the

change itself looks like a personal defeat. Yet the plan was a way of coordinating, rather than a promise of an immobile world. It can be revised while retaining the aim: moving possessions without quietly transferring work to friends. This is an editorial example, rather than financial advice.

Checking the means includes their availability and their cost to others. A person can suggest a backup, but cannot treat someone else's time as an unlimited reserve. They can ask for help, but a request does not create an obligation to agree. When a plan depends on participation that has never been discussed, the deficiency appears before the outcome. Here one's own effort also means describing a dependency accurately: who needs to confirm participation, which resource is not yet secured, and which part of the idea needs to change.

A sensible means therefore remains provisional and open to examination. It can be relinquished when circumstances change without declaring that decision a betrayal of the aim. Conversely, an aim may itself need revision if it can only be achieved through unacceptable pressure. Trust does not remove this work of discernment. It has its own meaning in religious discussion; in our practical scene, we can only show that a means should help responsible action rather than turn other people into expendable material for our confidence.

VI. Another person's vulnerability does not belong to our resolve

An individual's effort often affects people who did not choose their path. If an adult accepts uncertainty for a personal project, that does not mean a child, employee or loved one must accept the same cost. Conditions of dependence differ, and formal consent is sometimes insufficient to make pressure disappear. A discussion of trust therefore requires a question about who will bear the consequences of my decision, as well as a question about my courage.

Imagine a voluntary group organising an evening meeting. The coordinator proposes working late because otherwise preparation will not be finished. One participant cannot stay. If they are told that a lack of trust is obstructing the common task, a religious word becomes a means of coercion. Even without religious language, demanding proof of commitment through a willingness to endure inconvenience can have a similar effect. In the hypothetical scene, the first questions concern what was promised and who can freely change their participation.

The coordinator's own responsibility may involve reducing the programme, postponing some work or acknowledging that the event is not ready. This does not guarantee a pleasant decision and may cause disappointment. But it does not disguise insufficient resources as someone else's moral obligation. A person is entitled to explain why a task matters, but not to determine another's inward quality from a single refusal. Sometimes a refusal concerns circumstances we do not know; sometimes a participant simply disagrees, and that too requires respect for the agreement.

Here trust places particular demands on speech. We can express our hope without promising another person's participation. We can acknowledge fear without turning it into an argument against another's boundary. We can offer help without portraying a refusal as a spiritual error. Where there is threat, violence or coercion, the initial task concerns safety and available support. A philosophical or religious explanation should not keep someone in danger; the specific action depends on actual conditions and competent assistance.

VII. Work does not disappear after the outcome

Suppose the meeting goes ahead but participants are dissatisfied. One did not receive the time for questions promised in advance; another did not understand the programme change. The organiser may say the outcome was outside their hands. This is true only in a particular respect: they do not control someone else's assessment. Their own announcements, promises and decisions still remain open to examination. Recognising limited power over the ending does not mean declaring every complaint unfounded.

It helps to separate two discussions. The first concerns a factual mismatch between a promise and its fulfilment. The second concerns a fulfilled promise that nevertheless failed to provide the desired experience. The first may require explanation, correction or acknowledgment of an error. The second leaves room for someone else's taste and judgment. Confusing them leads either to an impossible commitment to please everyone or to relinquishing a quite specific obligation to answer for what we said.

Feedback also needs a boundary. Not every accusation establishes a fact, and a person is not obliged to accept every description of their intention. They can clarify what happened, which information is missing and what they dispute. But examination should not exclude an unwelcome result in advance. In our scene, the programme record shows what timing was announced; it does not show everything participants felt. A review can correct a specific agreement without claiming to explain every person's inner life completely.

Trust after an event does not mean prohibiting regret. If something has been lost, a person can consider that loss important. They may continue correcting things or discover that an earlier possibility cannot be restored. The next responsibility then changes: instead of restoring the past in its entirety, they must honestly determine what is available now. This transition does not make the earlier mistake necessary or good. It merely prevents endlessly repeating a demand addressed to a completed event instead of responding to the present task.

VIII. What can be compared with a Stoic distinction

Tawakkul is sometimes placed alongside the Stoic approach to what depends on a person. A comparison is possible at the level of effort and an external outcome, but does not establish an identity between faith and philosophy. In Of Leisure III, Seneca discusses circumstances obstructing public activity and the possibility of benefiting others differently. This provides a limited basis for comparing changes in the form of participation, rather than an account of Islamic reliance.

Suppose someone can no longer organise a large meeting but can help another person prepare a small conversation. Relinquishing the previous scale does not yet mean relinquishing participation. Such an example can be considered through Seneca's question of available usefulness. A believer may also understand their choice in relation to trust in God, but neither description follows from the other. A shared everyday decision does not make the grounds on which different people reach it identical.

This distinction also matters in living together. In a mixed group, one participant prays, another relies on philosophical reasoning, and a third does not want to discuss worldviews at all. They can agree on timing and responsibilities without a shared spiritual vocabulary. There is no need to require everyone to endorse one interpretation of uncertainty. It is enough that a religious or philosophical foundation for one's own participation does not cancel another's consent or create promises in the whole group's name.

An appropriate connection between traditions helps frame a more precise question and then leaves differences in place. An inappropriate connection turns a familiar word into a universal key and makes reading a specific text seem unnecessary. Here we compare a possible change in the form of effort; we do not assert a shared teaching about God, nature, salvation or virtue. A reader may remain with the practical distinction without choosing a religious position. Freedom to read in that way is a condition of discussion, rather than proof that differences are unimportant.

IX. The measure of effort remains an open question

There is no single measure of sufficient effort that can be established in advance for every situation. Sometimes a person really has not checked an important fact. Sometimes they are already repeating an action that changes nothing further and infringes another's boundary. These cases can only be distinguished through the task, available information and consequences for those involved. A general formula about trust cannot tell us exactly when to send another letter or relinquish an earlier idea.

Returning to our meeting, the organiser can check three separate matters: what remains possible to do, what needs agreement, and what already belongs to someone else's decision. Each needs a specific answer. If the venue is inaccessible, a change is required; if the speaker has declined, that refusal must be respected; if the audience disliked the topic, comments can be heard without promising to control taste. This attention to detail does not destroy hope. It prevents hope from presenting itself as a secured resource.

One's own effort can be reconsidered even after a conscientious beginning. New information need not expose the earlier decision as insincere. It may simply change the conditions. But revision should be explained to those who were promised participation: what prompted the change, what remains, and which commitments need renewed agreement. Recognising uncertainty is joined here to clarity in communication. Otherwise the unpredictability of the world becomes an overly convenient reason for withholding information about our own actions.

A limited conclusion to our discussion emerges. Tawakkul remains reliance on God within religious life; we do not replace it with a technique for confidence. In ordinary examples, one's own effort retains meaning without a guaranteed outcome, while uncertainty does not cancel responsibility to others. A person can seek advice, make a decision, revise a means and correct a mistake. At the same time, they need not demand that the future necessarily confirm they were right. These possibilities do not promise ease, but allow the next task to be named more precisely.

X. Waiting has its own form of responsibility

Once a step has been completed, there is often an interval in which no further action is yet called for. The letter has been sent, an arrangement proposed, and the other party has not made a decision. This interval can mistakenly be considered empty: if nothing is happening, something else must immediately be done. But another approach sometimes adds no information and only changes conditions for the recipient. Waiting also requires discernment: it may be an agreed pause, or conceal a forgotten commitment to announce a delay.

Suppose two people agreed to discuss a proposal in a week's time. Each evening the sender asks whether an answer is ready, although circumstances have not changed. They explain this by the importance of the question. For the recipient, that persistence may mean the agreed period has effectively been cancelled. The sender's responsibility here concerns keeping the stated timeframe, rather than finding another way to obtain certainty. If an important change has occurred, it can be communicated separately, with an explanation of why the previous arrangement needs reconsideration.

There is also the opposite scene. Someone promised to return with an answer but has realised they will not be ready on time. Silence does not become trust in events merely because the final answer is still unknown. They can communicate the delay, propose another date or acknowledge that an answer cannot currently be given. Such a message does not guarantee the other party's acceptance. But it allows that person to decide on the basis of real information, rather than wait under conditions that have already changed without their knowledge.

A pause therefore need not be either passivity or continual control. It can have a clear boundary: how long we will wait, which change requires a message, and what happens if no answer arrives. It is better to agree on these conditions than declare them for someone else. In religious life, waiting may be accompanied by prayer; in a shared undertaking, it still does not make someone else's will our property. The possibility of remaining without a final answer coexists with the duty to fulfil what has already been promised and is actually available.

What this means in practice

If such an experiment suits you, choose an ordinary small task with an uncertain outcome: inviting someone to talk, preparing a meeting or making a proposal. Do not choose a situation involving threat, coercion or a decision requiring specialist professional assessment. You can decline the exercise altogether; it does not test faith, strength of character or a person's entitlement to feel anxious. This everyday examination is also insufficient for a religious interpretation of tawakkul.

Describe the desired outcome separately from the action you are actually willing to take. For example, the desired outcome is a worthwhile conversation, while the action is a clear invitation stating the topic and leaving freedom to decline. Then name the information to check before sending it: a suitable means of contact, an intelligible question and a real ability to fulfil a promise. If the other person's participation is not yet agreed, identify this as uncertainty rather than as a deficiency in their goodwill.

After checking, choose one next step. Alongside it, state a limit: which response you cannot demand and which condition will stop further approaches. Reconsider the step if new information emerges. If a refusal has already been expressed, the exercise provides no basis for continued pressure. Trust and hope do not replace consent; in danger or unsafe conditions, stop the experiment and seek appropriate available support.

Once the action is completed, return to your record once, at a time you choose. Compare what was promised with what was done, without assessing everything solely by the other person's response. One narrow possible result of the exercise is a clearer description of your own contribution and the uncertainty that remains. You may notice one specific correction: for

example, stating a timeframe for a reply in advance instead of later demanding an immediate decision. Such a correction concerns the form of an agreement, rather than a judgment about a person. If that description does not help or becomes repeated self-accusation, you can finish without continuing. No obligatory emotional state or successful outcome is promised here.

Key quotation

> *“For this world wisdom”*

Sana'i, *Hadiqat al-haqiqa*, First Book, section comparing the creation of Adam and Jesus; fragment from J. Stephenson (1910), PDF p.133. The adjacent clause distinguishes earthly guidance from faith for another life. Version used.

Connections between traditions

Subject	Sources actually read	Possible connection	Substantial boundary
Consultation and subsequent action	Quran 3:159; Seneca, Of Leisure III	Resolve does not exclude consideration of circumstances and available participation.	The verse addresses the Prophet and includes reliance on God; Seneca discusses Stoic usefulness and obstacles to activity.
Effort and the scale of an aim	Sana'i, selected First Book sections; Seneca, Of Leisure III	The form of effort is not exhausted by a familiar external role.	Sufi ascetic poetry is not identical to Stoic reasoning or modern organisation of work.

These are our limited comparisons. Historical influence between the cited texts and a common teaching held by all Muslims are not asserted.

Sources

1. **Quran, 3:159.** The verse itself was read in Quran.com's English display alongside the Arabic text; the translator's name was not exposed in the retrieved display, and independent philological verification of the Arabic is not claimed. A complete commentary was not used as a fully read source. Verse.

2. **Sana'i. Hadiqat al-haqiqa, First Book.** J. Stephenson, editor and translator, *The First Book of the Hadîqatu'l-Haqîqat*, Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press,1910. Selected contexts on PDF pp.48,70–72,81–82,133 and version information were read. Quotations come from pp.81

and133. This digital transmission omits notes; the complete Persian original has not been read. PDF.

3. **Seneca. Of Leisure, III–IV.** Wikisource English version, the traditionally published Aubrey Stewart translation in *Minor Dialogues*. The selected argument in III about conditions and forms of participation is used; biographical dating is not inferred from it. Text.

Tags

tawakkul, Islam, trust, reliance, effort, decision, consultation, responsibility, uncertainty, intention, outcome, means, consent, boundaries, Sana'i, Sufism, Hadiqa, Quran, Seneca, Stoicism, participation, help, commitment, promise, revision, mistake, feedback, religious language, comparing traditions, voluntary choice

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