

Hadith

'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb narrated:

- 1 One day while we were sitting with God's Messenger (peace be upon him) there appeared before us a man whose clothes were exceedingly white and whose hair was exceedingly black. No sign of journeying was to be seen on him and none of us knew him.
- 2 He walked up and sat down by the Prophet, resting his knees against his [i.e. the Prophet's] knees, and placing the palms of his hands on his thighs.
- 3 He said: 'Muhammad, tell me about Islam'.
- 4 God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: 'Islam is to testify that there is no deity other than God
- 5 and Muhammad is God's Messenger,
- 6 to attend regularly to prayers,
- 7 to pay the zakat,
- 8 to fast in Ramadan
- 9 and to offer the pilgrimage to the House if you are able to do so'.
- 10 He said: 'You have spoken rightly'. We were amazed at him asking and confirming the answer.
- 11 He then said: 'Tell me about *īmān*'. The Prophet said: 'It is to believe in God,
- 12 His angels,
- 13 His books,
- 14 His messengers,
- 15 and the Last Day,

From the Qur'an

- ﴿Righteousness is not that you turn your faces towards the east or the west, but truly righteous is he who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets; and gives his money, much as he may cherish it, to his kinsfolk, orphans, the needy, a stranded wayfarer, beggars, and for the freeing of slaves; who attends to his prayers and pays zakat; and [truly pious are] they who keep their promises once made, and are patient in misfortune and adversity and in time of peril. Such are those who have proved themselves true, and such are the God-fearing.﴾ (2: 177)
- ﴿The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him by his Lord, and so do the believers. Each one of them believes in God, His angels, His books, and His messengers. We make no distinction between any of His messengers. And they say, 'We hear and we obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord; to You we shall all return'.﴾ (2: 285)
- ﴿Believers! Believe in God and His Messenger, and in the Book which He has bestowed from on high upon His Messenger, and in the Book which He sent down in earlier times. Anyone who denies God, His angels, His revealed books, His messengers, and the Last Day has indeed gone far astray.﴾ (4: 136)
- ﴿We have created everything in due measure.﴾ (54: 49)
- ﴿Yet they were ordered to do nothing more than to serve God, to worship Him alone with sincere dedication and purity of faith, to attend to their prayers and to pay their zakat. That is surely the right religion, pure and straight.﴾ (98: 5)
- ﴿Believers, fasting is decreed for you as it was decreed for those before you, so that you may be God-fearing.﴾ (2: 183)
- ﴿Pilgrimage to this House is a duty owed to God by all people who are able to undertake it.﴾ (3: 97)





Hadith



16

and to believe in *Qadar* or divine decree, both the good and the evil of it'. He said: 'You have spoken rightly.

17

Then tell me about *ihsān*'. The Prophet said: 'It is to worship God as though you see Him, and while you do not see Him, He certainly sees you'.

18

He said: 'Then tell me about the Hour'. The Prophet said: 'The one questioned about it knows no better than the one putting the question'.

19

He said: 'Then tell me about its signs'. The Prophet said: 'That a slave girl gives birth to her mistress,

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and that you will see the barefooted, naked, destitute herdsmen competing in constructing lofty buildings'.

21

Then the man left and I stayed for a while. The Prophet then said to me: 'Umar, do you know who the one putting these questions was?' I said: 'God and His Messenger know best'. He said: 'That was Gabriel. He came to you to teach you your religion'.⁽¹⁾

The Narrator

'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb belonged to the 'Adiy branch of the Quraysh tribe. He was the second of the rightly-guided caliphs, and one of the ten companions of the Prophet given the assurance of admittance into Heaven. Prior to Islam, he was the Quraysh ambassador: when war occurred between Arabs, they would appoint him to work out the settlement of the dispute and the terms of peace. He embraced Islam in Year 6 of the start of the Islamic message, and his conversion to Islam was a mark of added strength for Islam and Muslims. He participated in all military expeditions with God's Messenger (peace be upon him). He succeeded Abu Bakr al-Ṣiddīq as caliph in Year 13 AH, 634 CE. He was renowned for fairness and justice, as well as firmness, courage and defence of what is right. During his reign, many countries, including Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Egypt, were liberated and became parts of the Islamic State. He became a martyr when he was assassinated in Year 23 AH, 645 CE. He was buried in 'Ā'ishah's apartment, next to the graves of the Prophet and Abu Bakr.

Summary

This hadith sums up all the fundamentals of the Islamic faith. It explains the essentials of our religion, which are: Islam, *īmān* and *ihsān*. It also mentions some of the portents of the Day of Judgement.

1 Related by Muslim, 8.

Message and Meaning

This is a great hadith as it explains the different grades of the Islamic faith and states its fundamentals. *Qadi* 'Iyāḍ said: 'This is an extremely important hadith which states all duties, apparent and subtle. All disciplines of Islamic Studies are based on it and branch from it'.⁽¹⁾ 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb narrates that:



1 As they were sitting with the Prophet (peace be upon him), a stranger of unusual appearance came over. He was a young man with very black hair. He was not known as one of the Prophet's companions, but he did not look as someone who had travelled to see the Prophet. None of the marks of a journey, such as uncombed hair, dusty features and attire, was seen on him.



2 Yet this man came through the circle until he sat down facing the Prophet, with his knees touching the Prophet's knees. He put his palms on his own thighs, preparing himself to seek important information. Thus, his attitude was one of humility before the Prophet (peace be upon him).



3 He then said: 'Muhammad, tell me about Islam'. He called the Prophet by his own name, Muhammad, so as to give an impression that he was a bedouin. Bedouins called the Prophet by his own name because they did not have the fine manners of the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār who obeyed God's order: 'Do not address God's Messenger in the manner you address one another'. (24: 63) They were ordered not to address him as they would address friends and siblings, but as God's Messenger.



4 The Prophet (peace be upon him) explained to him that Islam has the five well-known pillars. The first is the declaration that there is no deity other than God. This is the principle of God's oneness which constituted the essence of the message of all prophets and messengers of God. It must be stated verbally, believed in mentally, and acted upon practically. Thus, no worship is addressed to anyone other than God who is the only One to be feared or appealed to. No one else may be His partner in love, hope, pledges or any act of worship. A Muslim must believe that God is the only One who grants benefits or causes harm. No one else can be of any benefit or the cause of any harm to any of His creation except by His permission. He is the One who deserves to be worshipped and all other worship is false.



5 The declaration of God's oneness implies believing His Messenger (peace be upon him) in what he stated. This means that we must believe that he was sent by God, true in whatever he stated as coming from God. Thus, we must believe in what he legislated and obey him in all that he ordered or prohibited. We must respect, honour, support and defend him, and also strive for the success of his message.



6 The second pillar of Islam is 'to attend regularly to prayers'. This means attend to it as it should be performed, after having fulfilled its conditions and essentials. Thus, one must be humble when praying, reminding oneself of God's glory. This is the reason why the Prophet did not say: 'to do your prayers' but said attend to them regularly.

1 *Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, Ikmāl al-Mu'īlim, Vol. 1, p. 204.*

7

The third pillar is the payment of zakat, which is the annual duty a Muslim must pay out of what God has given him of means of livelihood, according to the details outlined by Islamic law. A Muslim pays his zakat willingly, believing that it is his incumbent duty to pay it, and hoping for its reward which is stored with God. A Muslim does not choose the worst of his property to give in zakat, but rather pays it to please God and earn His reward.

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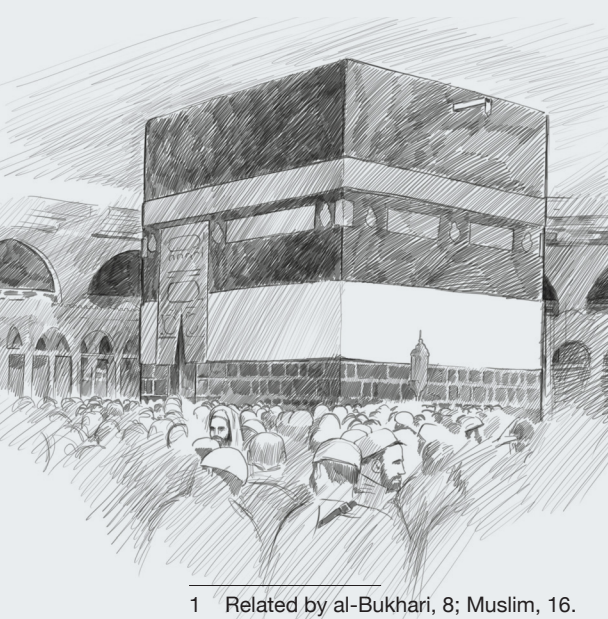
The fourth pillar of Islam is fasting during the month of Ramadan, which means abstention from whatever invalidates fasting, namely eating, drinking and sexual intercourse, every day of the month from the break of dawn till sunset. This is explained in detail in books of Fiqh, i.e. Islamic law. A Muslim fasts in obedience of God, feeling neither compulsion nor aversion to this act of worship.

9

The fifth pillar of Islam is the pilgrimage to the Sacred Mosque in Makkah and its associated rituals and acts of worship, according to specific rules. It is an obligation to be performed once in a Muslim's lifetime, provided that the condition of physical and financial ability to undertake the journey is met.

It should be noted that in his definition of Islam, the Prophet (peace be upon him) mentioned its five pillars upon which it is built. These are specified in a hadith narrated by 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar who quotes the Prophet (peace be upon him): 'Islam is built on five: the declaration that there is no deity other than God and that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger, regular attendance to prayer, payment of zakat, pilgrimage to the House and fasting during Ramadan'.⁽¹⁾

This does not mean that Islam is limited to these five types of worship. They are indeed its pillars without which it is not firmly established. The other types of worship are complementary to the structure of Islam. If these are missing, the structure of Islam continues to stand, but its image suffers, while absence of the pillars means the collapse of the structure altogether.



10

When the Prophet finished his answer, the man said to him: 'You have spoken rightly'. The Prophet's companions were amazed at him enquiring about something and then confirming the answer as true. A person who confirms an answer is supposed to have perfect knowledge of it, not one who is asking a question in order to learn.

11

The man then asked the Prophet about *īmān*, which is the second level of faith after accepting Islam. The Prophet told him that it means 'to believe in God'. This means that one should believe in Him as the Lord, Creator, Provider, Owner of the universe and Conductor of all affairs, and to believe in Him as the worshipped and obeyed deity. It further requires believing that to Him belongs all fine names and attributes.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 8; Muslim, 16.

Message and Meaning

12

Next, the Prophet mentions belief in the angels. This means that a Muslim believes that they exist and that they have been created out of light and that they do not disobey God in whatever He may command them, and they do what He bids them. A Muslim must also believe in those of them who have been mentioned by God in name and task: Gabriel, the chief angel who delivers revelations to prophets; Michael is in charge of rain and plant life; Isrāfīl who blows the Trumpet; Mālik the keeper of Hell, etc.

13

The Prophet also mentions belief in God's books, which means that these scriptures were revealed by God. This also means believing what they mention and implementing what is confirmed of their rulings. However, the Qur'an abrogates all earlier codes of law. Moreover, those scriptures, such as the Torah and the Gospel, suffered distortion.

14

The belief in God's messengers is also included by the Prophet. This means believing in what they preached, and that God gave them His commands through revelation. They are the best of mankind. We believe in them all including those we are informed about and mentioned in the Qur'an and the Sunnah and those about whom we know nothing. We do not draw any distinction between them. God says: 'Those who deny God and His messengers, and want to make a distinction between [belief in] God and [belief in] His messengers, and say: 'We believe in some but we deny others', and want to pursue a path in-between: (150) those, in truth, are unbelievers. We have prepared for unbelievers humiliating suffering. (151) As for those who believe in God and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them – to them He will give their reward. God is indeed much-forgiving, ever-merciful'. (4: 150-152)

15

Belief in the Last Day is also part of *īmān*, and it means believing in the resurrection, reckoning, Heaven, Hell, the path which all people have to go along and the scales by which their deeds are weighed, the Prophet's intercession and his lake, as well as whatever is mentioned in authentic hadiths about it.

16

The last aspect of *īmān* is to believe in *Qadar* or divine decree. This means believing that God, Mighty and Exalted, knew the deeds of all his creation and what happens to them in life. He has recorded all this in the Imperishable Tablet before He created anyone. Therefore, people's actions occur as was previously known to Him and as was recorded. All people's actions, including belief and disbelief, obedience and disobedience are created by God.⁽¹⁾

17

The Prophet's visitor then asked him about *iḥsān*, which is the third level of the faith. The Prophet told him that it means that a Muslim should worship God in the most perfect manner, as though one can see Him close. If one cannot attain such a degree of alertness and fear of God, then one should remember that God is watching him. God says: 'Place your trust in the Mighty One, the Ever-Merciful (217) who sees you when you stand, (218) and [sees] your movement among those who prostrate themselves [before Him]. (219) It is He alone who hears all and knows all. (26: 217-220)

1 Ibn Rajab, *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wal-Ḥikam*, Vol. 1, p. 103.

These levels of religion interlap: Islam is broader than both *īmān* and *iḥsān*, and both these two are parts of Islam. *īmān* is more general than *iḥsān*. This means that a person who is outside the area of *īmān* remains a Muslim, and the one who does not attain the grade of *iḥsān* remains at the level of *īmān*. God says: 'The bedouins say: 'We have attained to faith'. Say [to them]: 'Believers you are not. Rather say, 'We have submitted ourselves', for true faith has not entered your hearts'. (49: 14)

18

The young man then asks the Prophet about the Last Hour and when it occurs. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said in answer: 'The one questioned about it knows no better than the one putting the question'. In other words: what I know about it is no more than what you know, because none knows its timing except God Himself. He says: 'Indeed with God alone rests the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come'. (31: 34)

19

Therefore, the Prophet's interlocutor put forward a different question, asking about its signs. The Prophet told him that one of these signs is that 'a slave girl gives birth to her mistress'. This means that slavery will increase to the extent that a slave girl would give her master a daughter who would be a free woman while her mother remained in bondage. Other suggestions about the meaning of this sign are that slave women would give birth to kings, or that Arabs would be born to non-Arab parents, since the Arabs rank highly among mankind.⁽¹⁾

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The Prophet (peace be upon him) mentions another sign which tells of poor people who used to walk barefoot and thinly clad because of their poverty and the lack of assistance, and bedouin shepherds becoming very rich building towers and skyscrapers. Perhaps this refers to the meaning of the hadith that says: 'When government is in the hands of people who are not qualified for it, the Last Hour is to be expected'.⁽²⁾ This has now happened, with ignorant, rough bedouins assuming power, wealth and respect.

21

Then the man left and 'Umar stayed for a short while. The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked him: 'Do you know who the one putting these questions was?' 'Umar said: 'God and His Messenger know best'. He said: 'That was Gabriel. He came to you to teach you your religion'.

God granted the angels the facility to assume the shape of humans as also other forms. Gabriel came often to the Prophet in the form of his companion Diḥyah al-Kalbī.

1 Ibn Rajab, *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wal-Ḥikam*, Vol.1, pp. 137-136.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 59.

Implementation

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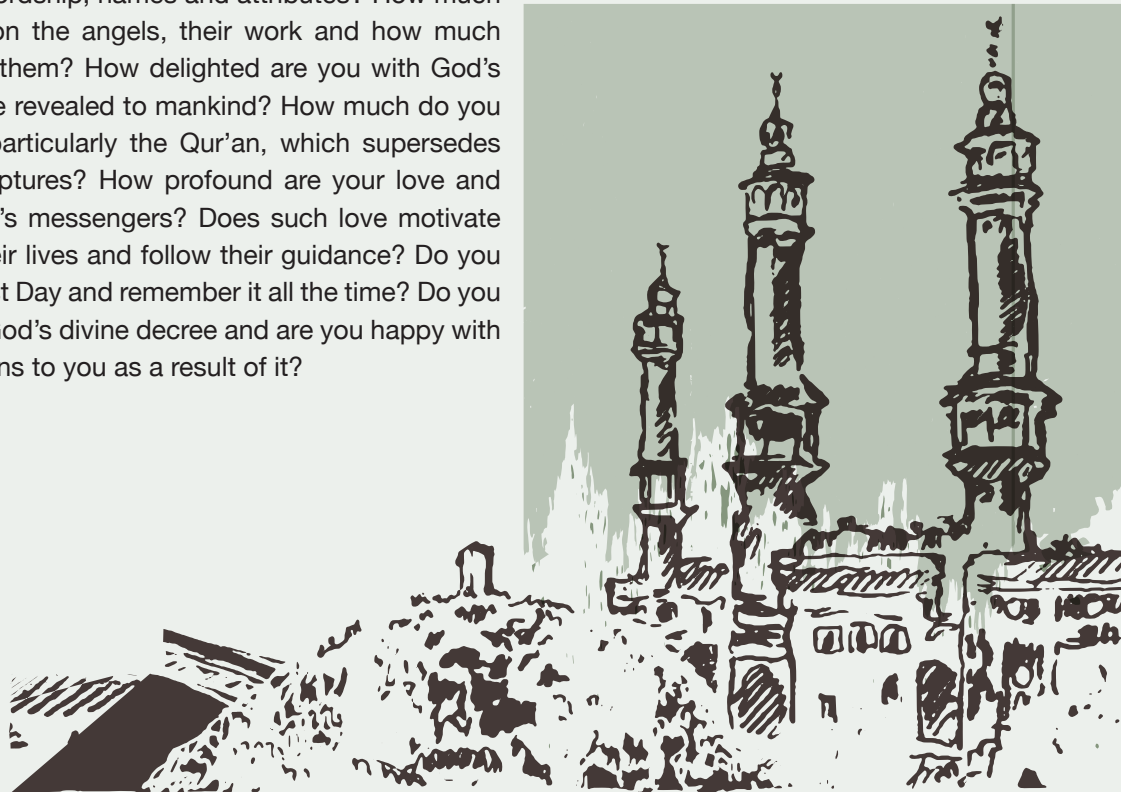
When Gabriel came to see the Prophet (peace be upon him) he sat as a student seeking to learn. He was attentive, ready to receive the information he would be given. He did not seek to impress the people present with his high position of honour as the angel entrusted with bringing God's revelations to His Messengers and being the Holy Spirit. Everyone who seeks information from a scholar should observe good manners. He must not ask questions that assume an arrogant posture or speak in an unbecoming way.

2

The pillars of Islam are among the most important matters to which a Muslim must give priority in his daily and annual plans. Every Muslim must periodically take stock of their implementation. They must perfect each of these pillars by doing them well and add what is recommended of the same type. Muslims should consider their declaration of God's oneness and perfect it with frequent glorification of God. They must do their obligatory prayers well and complement these with recommended prayers such as the *Witr* and *Sunnah* prayers as well as repeating the glorifications of God included in the prayers and afterwards. They should pay their zakat in full, with pleasure, and add some voluntary donations, or *ṣadaqah*. They fast during Ramadan and ensure not to spoil their fasting by committing sin. They should add whatever is convenient of voluntary fasting. They must perform the pilgrimage at least once during their lifetime and add what is easy for them of hajj and 'umrah.

3

Reflect on every one of the essentials of *īmān* and how you feel about each of them. How strong is your belief in God, His Godhood, Lordship, names and attributes? How much do you reflect on the angels, their work and how much do you respect them? How delighted are you with God's books, which He revealed to mankind? How much do you respect them, particularly the Qur'an, which supersedes all previous scriptures? How profound are your love and respect for God's messengers? Does such love motivate you to study their lives and follow their guidance? Do you venerate the Last Day and remember it all the time? Do you truly believe in God's divine decree and are you happy with whatever happens to you as a result of it?





Ihsān is the highest grade of religion. Have you tried to worship God as if you can see Him? If you cannot achieve this, try to worship Him knowing that He is looking at you. This, in itself, is far greater than if the world's cameras are focused on you. Do not belittle the fact that God is seeing you.



When man is firm in his belief and aware that God is always with him, seeing and watching him, he will be ashamed to show himself to God as approaching good deeds lazily, let alone being seen committing a sin. God says: 'Place your trust in the Mighty One, the Ever-Merciful (217) who sees you when you stand, (218) and [sees] your movement among those who prostrate themselves [before Him]. (219) It is He alone who hears all and knows all. (26: 217-220)



Islam gives special importance to the Last Day. It does not tell us when it will take place, but gives us some signs of it. Such signs, as well as other indications, should motivate us to always remember it. Do we, when we are alone reflecting on our affairs, remember that it will inevitably come?

