

Sufyān ibn 'Abdullāh al-Thaqafī narrated:

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I said: 'Messenger of God, tell me something of Islam about which I will not need to ask anyone after you'. (In Abu Usāmah's narration: 'about which I will not need to ask anyone else'.)

2

The Prophet said: 'Say: I believe in God, then steadfastly pursue the right way'.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by Muslim, 38.

From the Qur'an

﴿Say: 'I am but a human being like yourselves. It has been revealed to me that your God is the One and only God. Therefore, take the straight path to Him and seek His forgiveness. Woe to those who associate partners with Him'.﴾ (41: 6)

﴿As for those who say: 'Our Lord is God', and then steadfastly pursue the right way. For these, the angels will descend, saying: 'Have no fear, and do not grieve, but rejoice in the good news of paradise which you have been promised. (30) We are your guardians in the life of this world and in the life to come. There you shall have all that your souls desire, and all that you ask for'.﴾ (41: 30-31)

The Narrator

Sufyān ibn 'Abdullāh belonged to the Thaqif tribe which lived in Taif. He was a companion of the Prophet and narrated hadiths from him. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb appointed him as Governor of Taif. He was a member of the Thaqif delegation which visited the Prophet in Madinah. He lived in Madinah. 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr and his own son Abu al-Ḥakam ibn Sufyān transmitted hadiths he narrated. He died in Year 41 AH 662 CE.

Summary

One of the Prophet's companions wanted the Prophet to give him a comprehensive statement that sums up what is required of a Muslim. The Prophet told him that he needed to believe and to steadfastly remain a believer.



Message and Meaning

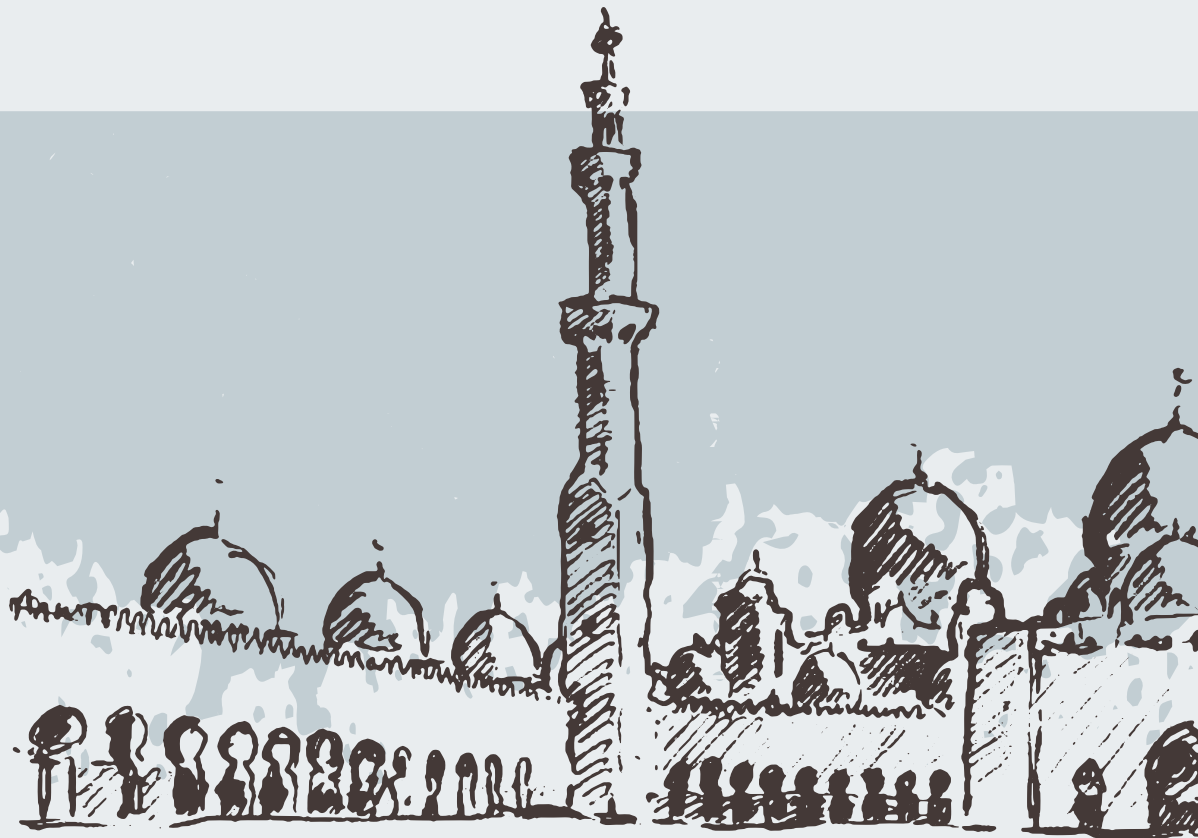
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A companion of the Prophet (peace be upon him) asks for a comprehensive statement that incorporates the total meaning of Islam, that he can clearly understand. He did not want to go further for explanations, and further wanted to be able to put it into effect, implementing it immediately.

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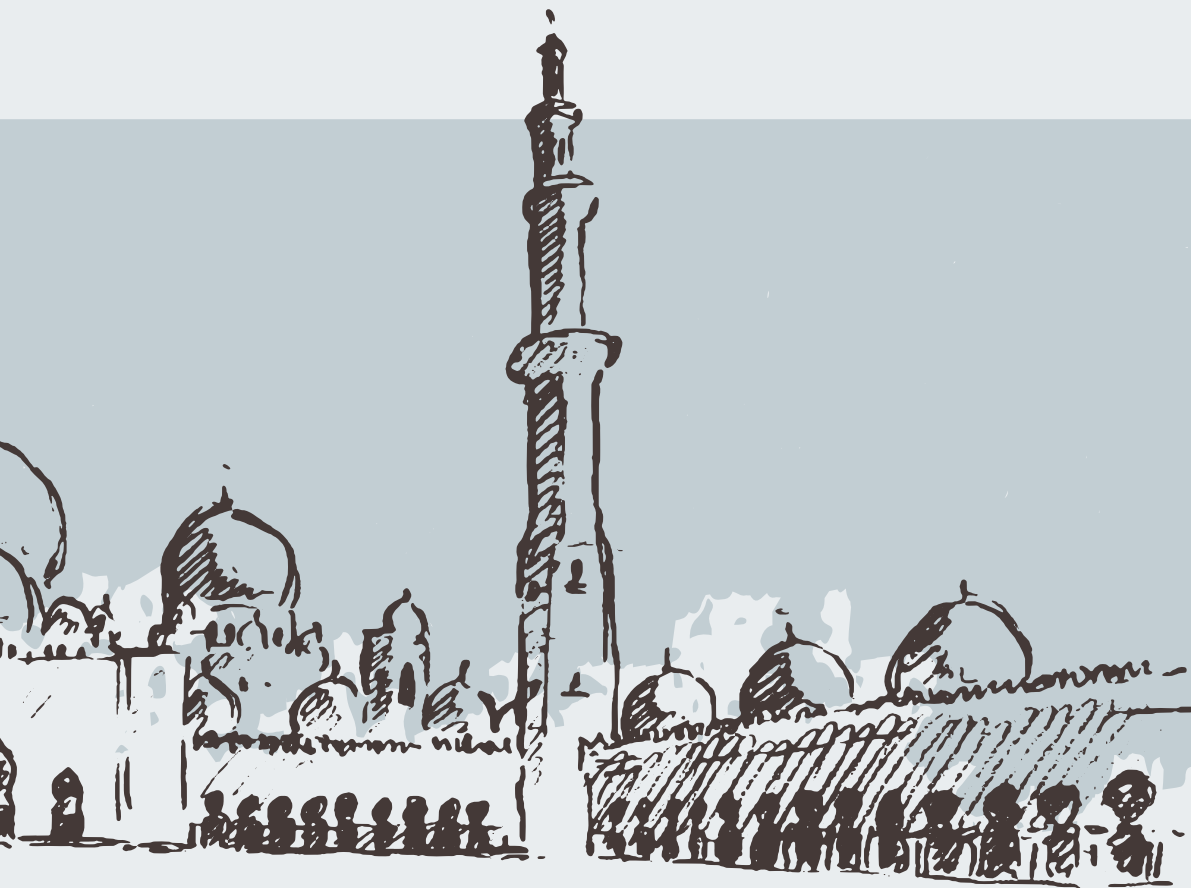
The Prophet gave him what he wanted. He told him to declare his belief in God. This is something that he should say verbally and accept logically and mentally, putting it into effect practically. Thus, he should not do anything that was contrary to what he said, believed and implemented. The Prophet ordered him to remain steadfast in such a way of life. This meant that he should not commit any sin and should remain consistent in his worship.

This advice by the Prophet is the practical meaning of the Qur'anic verses: 'As for those who say: 'Our Lord is God', and then steadfastly pursue the right way. For these, the angels will descend, saying: 'Have no fear, and do not grieve, but rejoice in the good news of paradise which you have been promised. (30) 'We are your guardians in the life of this world and in the life to come. There you shall have all that your souls desire, and all that you ask for'. (41: 30-31)



'Steadfast pursuit of the right way' is a phrase that signifies the fulfilment of all obligations and refraining from all prohibitions. If a person neglects an obligation or commits something prohibited, he is not considered to be pursuing the right way.

The Prophet's companions gave several definitions of such pursuit, but they all focus on the same meaning. Abu Bakr said that the steadfast pursuit of the right way means 'not to associate any partner with God'. What he meant is steady adherence to belief in God's oneness. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said that it means 'diligent observance of orders and prohibitions. One must not quickly change direction like foxes do'. 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān said that it means 'sincerity in working for God's cause'. 'Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib and Ibn 'Abbās said that it means 'doing what is obligatory'. Al-Ḥasan said: 'They steadfastly pursue what God has ordered. They obey His commands and steer away from disobeying Him'.



Implementation



An intelligent person asks about what is important and essential in relation to religion, not about what is insignificant.



A Muslim should not be either too shy or too proud to ask about religion. Knowledge is lost between pride and shyness. The Prophet's companions were not deterred by anything from asking about their religion.



Asking a question is the key to knowledge. The one who asks about what he does not know of religious and life's matters that ensure happiness and safety in this life and the life to come is the one who is wise.



An essential accomplishment for an educator or an advocate of Islam is to do like the Prophet, expressing important meanings in simple and short sentences. Long and detailed speeches may become difficult for the audience to understand or remember.



Steadfastness is as essential to faith as the soul is essential for the body. When the soul gets weak, the body progressively weakens until it almost dies. The same applies to faith when it lacks steadfast implementation. It weakens until it almost dies.



The Qur'anic term for steadfastness is *istiqāmah*, which also connotes sound health and proper balance.



Steadfastness in the pursuit of the right way does not preclude the possibility of error or committing what is sinful, then turning to God in repentance. Such pursuit of the right way is hard. Therefore, God says: 'Pursue the straight path to Him and seek His forgiveness'. (41: 6) This states the order to follow the right way with diligence and to seek God's forgiveness for any wrong you may do.



The pursuit of the right way applies to all aspects of life: beliefs, worship, interaction with people, manners, morality, etc. In belief, a person must remain constant in believing in God and His oneness, rejecting all types and aspects of polytheism, deviation and error. In worship, a believer must do what he is bidden and refrain from what is forbidden. In manners and morality, a person must endeavour to have the right qualities and deal with people in fairness and kindness. He must steer away from all that is bad and evil in social dealings. In commercial transactions, he must ensure that his earnings are legitimate and steer away from cheating, injustice and betrayal of trust.



