

Lesson 21

Supplementary Notes 2

Islām and Īmān

Deeds and Faith

Last time, we discussed various implications of Islām and Īmān, and the commonalities and differences between them. Among the points we noted was the **lexical definition** of belief, which is confirmation or affirmation in the heart. In the second part of this supplementary notes, we continue on this line, and explore the **definition** of Īmān in the Shari'ah.

Definition of Īmān

In the Shari'ah, the lexical meaning of Īmān is taken and specified further, as is the case with many other words. Ṣalah, for example, lexically means any type of prayer, but in the context of Shari'ah we know it has a more precise implication. Similarly, Ṣawm lexically denotes abstinence from something, while in the Shari'ah it refers to abstaining from food, drink and sexual relations from pre-dawn to sunset with the intention of worship.

Scholars are in agreement that Īmān (according to the Shari'ah definition) includes at least two components :

- 1) **Pronouncement by the tongue**, which comprises declaring that there is no god but Allāh, and that Muḥammad (ﷺ) is the Messenger of Allāh. One should use the words, "I bear witness that . . .".
- 2) **Affirmation by the heart** : being convinced of the truth of Islām without any reservations, and intending to always remain Muslim. If someone intends to enter Islām for some time and to leave at some time in the future, his Islām is invalid.

The pronouncement or declaration by the tongue is an expression of the belief which is affirmed in the heart. Someone who declares the Two Testifications of Faith by his tongue, and believes in their implication with his heart, is a **believer** without doubt. Someone who declares it by tongue, but whose heart is unsure about it, or believes something contrary to its implication, is a **hypocrite** and a **disbeliever** before Allāh, even though he may be treated as a believer by people in this world. "Among mankind are those who say, 'We believe in Allāh and in the Last Day,' although they are not believers. They seek to deceive Allāh and those who believe, but they deceive none

but their own selves, although they do not realize. In their hearts is a [spiritual] disease, and so Allāh has increased them in [that] disease. And theirs is a painful punishment because they used to lie." Qur'ān [(2) Al-Baqarah, 8-10]

One who disbelieves in Islām and refuses to pronounce it by tongue is clearly a disbeliever (**kāfir**). The only enigmatic case, then, is that of *someone who believes in Islām in their heart, but has not declared their belief by tongue*. The authentic view is that this person is a believer before Allāh on the Day of Judgement (provided he dies in this belief), but that we (the Sharī'ah and Muslims) will treat him as a disbeliever in this world as long as we see no sign of Islām from him. His belief will save him on the Day of Judgement, but as far as worldly treatment goes, we can only go by outward appearances. The Prophet (ﷺ) has said, "I have been ordered to fight people until they testify that there is no god but Allāh, and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh, and [until] they establish Ṣalāt and give Zakāt. Then, if they do that, they have safeguarded their lives and property from me except in the justice of Islām, and their reckoning is with Allāh." [Narrated by Bukhārī and Muslim]

However, if such a person was asked to declare the Testifications of Faith, but refused, and there was no danger posed to his life in declaring them, then he is a disbeliever not only in our eyes, but before Allāh also. This is because he has shown arrogance to the religion of Allāh, and that is disbelief. A case in point here is that of **Abū Ṭālib**, the Prophet (ﷺ)'s uncle:

"On the authority of al-Musayyib (رضي الله عنه) : When Abū Ṭālib was close to death, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) came to him, and found Abū Jahl and 'Abdullāh ibn Abī Umayyah ibn al-Mughīrah there. He (ﷺ) said, 'Uncle! Say, 'There is no god but Allāh', words by which I can intercede on your behalf before Allāh.' Thereupon, Abū Jahl and 'Abdullāh ibn Abī Umayyah said [to Abū Ṭālib], 'Will you turn away from the religion of 'Abdul-Muṭṭalib [i.e., Abū Ṭālib's father and the Prophet (ﷺ)'s grand father]?' The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) continued to present this to him [by repeating 'Lā ilāha illallāh' to him in the hope that he would also say it], with the two [pagans] all the while turning him back with those words [of theirs], until Abū Ṭālib uttered as his last words, 'Upon the religion of 'Abdul-Muṭṭalib,' and refused to say 'There is no god but Allāh'." [Narrated by al-Bukhārī]

After Abū Ṭālib's death, the Prophet (ﷺ) said about him, "He is in the Fire upto his ankles, and were it not for me, he would have been in the lowest depth of the Fire." [Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Ibn Ḥibbān]

So, in spite of the fact that Abū Ṭālib was very kind and sympathetic to the Prophet (ﷺ) and to Islām, he died as a disbeliever because he was ashamed to declare the Testifications of Faith. Similarly, someone who knows the truth of Islām does not become a Muslim unless and until they submit to and accept this truth. If they know it is true, and yet continue rejecting it and opposing it, they are disbelievers. Allāh tells us about the Pharoah and his followers that "They rejected [Our signs], although

their own souls were convinced of the truth thereof, [and they did that] out of wrongdoing and arrogance." Qur'ān [(27) Al-Naml, 14]

Usāmah ibn Zayd (رضي الله عنه), along with another Muslim of the Anṣār, was once fighting a disbeliever on the battlefield. When they had overpowered the disbeliever, he said, 'Lā ilāha illallāh', whereupon the man of Anṣār held off, but Usāmah (رضي الله عنه) pierced him with his spear and killed him. News of this later reached the Prophet (ﷺ), who rebuked Usāmah (رضي الله عنه) severely. He said, "Did you kill him after he said 'Lā ilāha illallāh'?" Usāmah (رضي الله عنه) said, "O Messenger of Allāh! He was only taking refuge [behind those words]?" But the Prophet (ﷺ) continued saying, "Did you kill him after he said 'Lā ilāha illallāh'?" until Usāmah (رضي الله عنه) wished that he had only accepted Islām that day [so that his previous sins could be forgiven]. [Narrated by Bukhārī and Muslim] According to another narration, the Prophet (ﷺ) said to Usāmah (رضي الله عنه), "Why did you not dissect his heart to see if he said it [for that reason] or not?!" This Ḥadīth again reiterates the fact that we have to treat people based on what we see from them; we are not required to investigate their secret affairs, nor to make pronouncements on what is in their hearts.

Are Deeds a Part of Faith?

Scholars of **Ahl al-Sunnah** have differed on whether deeds are a part of Īmān, although they are agreed that good deeds are essential for the preservation and well-being of Īmān. According to Imām Abū Ḥanīfah and Maturīdīs, deeds are not a part of Īmān, since they are concerned with the body and limbs rather than with the heart. In many verses of the Qur'ān, Allāh refers to "Those who believe and do good deeds," and this supports the idea that they are separate. According to the Ash'arī scholars who are the majority, deeds are a part of faith. In their support is the Ḥadīth, "Faith is seventy and some branches, the highest of which is saying *Lā ilāha illallāh*, and the lowest of which is removing something harmful from the road." [Narrated by Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and Nasā'ī]

In any case, the difference of opinion here is a minor technical point, for all of Ahl al-Sunnah are in agreement that the religion is like a tree whose root is the faith of the heart, and whose branches and fruit are the good deeds. The more good deeds a person does, the stronger is his tree of Īmān, and the more fruit it produces. And, in the absence of good deeds, Īmān becomes weak, dry and shrivelled, and there is a danger that it may die out altogether. "Do you not see how Allāh sets forth a parable? A good word is like a good tree, whose root is well-established and whose branches are in the sky; it gives forth its produce at every season by the leave of its Lord. And the likeness of an evil word is like a bad tree, which is uprooted from the surface of the earth; it has no stability." Qur'ān [(14) Ibrahim, 24-25]

Can Īmān Increase and Decrease?

Īmān can and does increase and decrease. Although every believer is certain of the truth of Islām, and entertains no doubts about it, the higher the person's spiritual level, the stronger his certainty (**yaqīn**). And, the stronger one's certainty, the more it will motivate one to do good deeds and to keep away from evil. The variation in the strength of certainty can be understood by likening it to the strength of vision, such that the believer with strong certainty is like one who sees clearly, while the one with a lower level of certainty (but who still affirms without any doubt) is like one who still sees, but not as clearly, whereas the disbeliever can be likened to a blind person.

Also, in the early days of Islām, as new verses and regulations were being revealed, a Muslim would believe in and accept more facts, and in this sense his faith might also be said to have increased. Similarly, someone who has many proofs backing his faith and can therefore stand strong against confusions raised by disbelievers, can be said to have stronger faith than someone who believes with certainty, but does not have the ability to defend the belief when confronted by disbelievers. It is to be emphasized that one cannot be a partial believer by believing in only a part of Islām. Faith cannot be partitioned; it can only increase and decrease in the ways we have mentioned.