

Lesson 21

Supplementary Notes

Islām and Īmān

LEXICAL MEANINGS

Islām

In the **lexical** context, Islām means **surrender** and **submission** to the commands of Allāh. This meaning occurs in the Qur'ān : ("Then, when [Abraham (عليه السلام)] and his son] had both **submitted** [to Allāh's command for Abraham (عليه السلام)] to sacrifice his son], and [Abraham] laid [his son] down on his forehead.") Qur'ān [(37) Aṣ-Ṣāffāt, 103] Islām also shares the same root as "**salām**" which is peace, and thus it conveys the meaning of attainment of or bringing about of peace. So, one cannot be a Muslim without submitting unreservedly to Allāh and His Messenger (ﷺ), and it is only in this way that one can attain true peace. Anyone who is not content to submit in this way, but insists on hankering after knowledge which is beyond his grasp, and asking questions which cannot really be answered, is veiling himself from true faith and knowledge. Such a person will be confused, suggestible and prone to doubt, vacillating in that manner between faith and disbelief, and between affirmation and denial. Although he is not a believer, yet he is not firm in his rejection either. He ruins and loses his worldly life as well as his Hereafter.

Īmān

Īmān (belief) lexically means **affirmation and confirmation in the heart**, as we find in a verse of the Qur'ān: ("[Joseph (عليه السلام)]'s brothers] said, 'O our father! Indeed, we went racing with one another, and we left Joseph (عليه السلام)] with our belongings, and the wolf devoured him. But you will not **believe** us, even if we are truthful.'" Qur'ān [(12) Yūsuf, 17]

("Nay, by your Lord! They do not **believe** until they appoint you [Muḥammad (ﷺ)] as judge in those disputes which arise amongst them, and then do not find any resistance in themselves against your decisions, and accept [them] with full submission.") Qur'ān [(4) Al-Nisā, 65] In this verse, Allāh indicates to us the attitude of faith, and that it comprises three things:

- 1) **Resorting to Allāh and the Messenger (ﷺ) for judgement.** Thus, one who resorts to other than Islām for judgement, and considers that valid, is a disbeliever. "Is it then the judgement of **Jāhiliyyah** (ignorance) that they seek? Who is better in judgement than Allāh for a people certain [in faith]?" Qur'ān [(5) Al-Mā'idah, 50] Imām Ibn Hazm (may Allāh have mercy upon him) says,

“So, it is not permitted for a Muslim, who affirms Allāh’s oneness, to resort in [any] dispute to other than the Qur’ān and accounts from the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ), nor to refuse what is found in them. If he does that after the proof has been established for him, then he is a **transgressor**. And, if he does it considering it permissible to depart from their command and enjoining obedience to others besides them, then he is a **disbeliever**; we have no doubt concerning that.” [Al-Iḥkām, 1/99]

- 2) **Not finding any resistance in the heart against the judgement of Allāh and His Messenger (ﷺ)**, so that one will not be uncertain about it, nor imagine that some other judgement is better than it. So, one who is doubtful or suspicious about the laws of Islām is a **disbeliever**. “And, when they are summoned to Allāh and His Messenger (ﷺ), to judge between them, you see a group of them turning away. Yet, if it had been their right [they were seeking] they would have come to him submissively. Is there in their hearts a disease, or are they doubtful, or do they fear that Allāh and His Messenger (ﷺ) will deal unjustly with them? Nay, those are the wrongdoers.” Qur’ān [(24) An-Nūr, 48-50]
- 3) **Accepting the judgement and submitting to it unreservedly**. The believer must submit to Allāh’s laws, and accept them even if he cannot see their exact implication or wisdom. All of these three stages are imperative in order to have Īmān. Then, if the Īmān is to be perfect, the believer must, in addition, also submit outwardly by practically carrying out these orders after accepting them.

The Gabriel hadith

On the authority of ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه) : While we were sitting with the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) one day, there came upon us a man with extremely white clothes and extremely black hair. No sign of journey could be seen on him, nor did any of us know him. [He advanced] until he sat before the Prophet (ﷺ), such that his knees were touching his. He put his hands on his thighs and said, “O Muḥammad! Inform me about **Islām**.” Then, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said, “**Islām is** that you testify that there is no god but Allāh and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh, [that you] establish Ṣalāt and give Zakāt, fast Ramaḍān and to perform the Ḥajj to the House [(i.e. the Ka’bah)] if you can make a way thereto.” [The man] said, “You have spoken the truth,” whereupon we were astonished at him, asking [the Prophet (ﷺ)] and [yet also] confirming him.

He said, “Then, tell me about **Īmān** (faith).” [The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ)] said, “[**Īman is**] That you believe in Allāh, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, the Last Day, and that you believe in Destiny, the good of it and the bad of it.”

[The man] said, "You have spoken the truth. Then, tell me about **Iḥsān** (goodness)." [The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ)] said, "[**Iḥsān is** That you worship Allāh as if you see Him, but since you do not see Him, then [know that] He is seeing you." He said, "Then, tell me about the **Hour** [of Judgement]." He replied, "The questioned one is not more knowledgeable about it than the questioner." He said, "Then tell me about its indications." He replied, "That the slave-girl shall give birth to her mistress, and that you see poor, naked, barefoot shepherds vying in [erecting] tall buildings."

Then, [the man] left, and I [(Umar (رضي الله عنه))] remained behind for a while. Then, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said, "O 'Umar! Do you know who the questioner was?" I said, "Allāh and His Messenger know best." He said, "Indeed, he was Gabriel (جبرائيل), who came to you to teach you your religion." [Narrated by Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah]

In the above Ḥadīth, we find a distinction between the words **Islām**, **Īmān** and **Iḥsān**. The Prophet (ﷺ) has indicated **three levels within the religion**, the highest being **Iḥsān**, the second being **Īmān**, and the lowest being **Islām**. Each higher level encompasses those below it, so that the existence of the state of perfect Īmān implies the existence of Islām, and similarly, the state of Iḥsān embraces Īmān. In this sense, every **Muḥsin** (one in the state of Iḥsān) is a **Mu'min** (one in the state of Īmān), but the reverse is not always true. Similarly, every **Mu'min** is a **Muslim** (one in the state of Islām) without the reverse necessarily following. A **Mu'min** will necessarily be a **Muslim**, because he must be practising the five pillars before he can reach the higher state of Īmān. In the same way, a person may be performing the five pillars, but may not reach the higher level of **Īmān**.

Similarly, in another Ḥadīth, we are told : "The **Muslim is** one from whose tongue and hand another Muslim is safe. The **Mu'min is** one whom people trust with their lives and property. The **Muhājir** (emigrant) **is** the one who abandons evil. The **Mujāhid is** the one who strives against his self in the obedience of Allāh." [Narrated by Aḥmad, Tirmidhī and others] This Ḥadīth mentions a total of **four levels**, each higher than and encompassing the one before it. It is obvious that one who is trusted with life and property will necessarily be such that others are safe from his tongue and hand, for otherwise they would not have trusted him.

It is also obvious that the descriptions given in these Ḥadīth are not comprehensive, for one cannot be a Muslim without accepting Islām, even if one is good to others. Nor can one be a Mu'min without belief in the six pillars, even if one is trustworthy. Similarly, if one truly abandons evil, he will physically emigrate from the Land of Kufr to the Land of Islām if he is able to, otherwise he is not a Muhājir. In the same way, striving against one's self is only one aspect of jihād. If the Muslims are under attack, for example, then sitting at home and trying to fight against one's self is not enough. The true mujāhid is the one who goes and fights for the sake of Allāh, for this is the most effective way of fighting one's desires for life and comfort.

In summary, **these levels are** subtle and eloquent descriptions based on the **lexical meanings of Islām, Īmān, Hijrah and Jihād**.

SHARI'AH MEANINGS

Notwithstanding the deeper shades of meaning and different lexical meanings, the words **Islām** and **Īmān** are used **interchangeably** in the context of the **Sharī'ah**, such that if we refer to someone as a **Muslim**, it is equivalent to saying he is a **Mu'min**, and vice-versa. In other words, **Islām and Īmān are essentially inseparable**. Allāh tells us about the fate of the People of Lot (لُوطٍ). ("Then, We removed from it (the town of Prophet Lot (لُوطٍ)) whoever therein was among the believers (**Mu'mins**). But, We did not find therein other than a single house of **Muslims**.") Qur'ān [(51) Adh-Dhāriyāt, 35-36] This house of Muslims which was saved was the house of Lot (لُوطٍ) (with the exception of his wife who was a disbeliever), and hence the verse indicates that **a Muslim is essentially equivalent to a Mu'min** (believer).

Similarly, in a Ḥadīth, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "I command you to believe in Allāh alone. Do you know what belief (**Īmān**) in Allāh alone is? [It is] testifying that there is no god but Allāh alone, without any partners, and the establishment of Ṣalat, the giving of Zakāt, and the endowment of a fifth of your booty." [Narrated by Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad and others] This Ḥadīth describes **Īmān** by referring to the pillars of **Islām**, again confirming the essential equivalence of the terms.

This idea is clarified by the Ḥadīth, "Indeed, in the body is a piece [of flesh], such that if it is good, all the rest of the body will be good, whereas if it be corrupted, all the rest of the body will be corrupted. Indeed, [that piece] is the heart." [Narrated by Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad and others] So, whoever truly has a good heart must necessarily have a good exterior, although the reverse is not always true.

Imām Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah said, "The scholars in previous times used to write these words to one another : Whoever reforms his heart, Allāh will reform his external actions. Whoever makes good that which is between him and Allāh, Allāh will make good that which is between him and people. And, whoever works for his Hereafter, Allāh will suffice him for his world[ly needs]." [Narrated by Ibn Abi'd-Dunyā in *Kitāb al-Ikhlāṣ*] In the same light, Imām Abū Ḥanīfah said, "Lexically, there is a difference between Īmān and Islām, but [in the Sharī'ah] there is no Īmān without Islām, nor does there exist Islām without Īmān, the two being [inseparable], like the inside and outside [of something]." [Al-Fiqhul-Akbar] •••