

# **The Religion of Islam**

*Javed Ahmad Ghamidi*

Rendered into English by  
Shehzad Saleem

## **Al-Mawrid**

Institute of Islamic Sciences  
51-K Model Town Lahore, Pakistan

*Phones: 586 3408, 586 5145*

*Email: [almawrid@brain.net.pk](mailto:almawrid@brain.net.pk)*

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## The Religion of Islam

### Essence of Religion

The essence of religion, in Qur'ānic terms is “*ibādah*” (worship) of God. It is in reality “worship” which the Creator of this world desires of His servants. The Qur’ān says:

( : )

And I created jinn and mankind only that they might worship Me. (51:56)

At various places in the Qur’ān, it is mentioned with clarity that the Almighty sent His messengers to inform people of this very reality:

( : )

And We raised a messenger in each nation with the message: “Worship God and keep away from *al-Tāghūt*.” (16:36)

What does “worship” mean? A little deliberation on the above verse of *Sūrah Naḥl* reveals the answer: Here man has been asked, on the one hand, to refrain from what is *al-Tāghūt* and, on the other, to worship God. *al-Tāghūt* and *al-Shayṭān* are used synonymously in the Qur’ān: they refer to someone who is arrogant and rebellious before the Almighty. The opposite of this obviously is humility and modesty. Consequently, lexicographers generally explain worship as (worship, in fact, is humility and modesty).<sup>1</sup>

If this humility and modesty exists in a person with a true

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1. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār Ṣāḍir, 1300 AH), 271.

cognizance of the mercy, power, providence and wisdom of the Almighty then it is instrumental in totally humbling a person before Him with His great love and great fear. The Qur'ānic words *khushū'*, *khudū'*, *ikhbāt*, *inābah*, *khashīyah*, *taqarru'*, *qanūt* etc are used to depict this very state of a person – a state which originates from his inner self and which then embraces his whole self. *Dhikr* (remembering God to receive peace and inner satisfaction), *shukr* (expressing immense gratitude to God on His abounding favours), *ikhlās* (devoting one's self to God), *tawakkul* (trusting God), *tafwīḍ* (submitting one's self and all of one's affairs to God), *taslīm-o raḍā* (anxiously pleasing God at every step) – all of these are the inner manifestations of this relationship between the worshipped God and His worshippers. In the words of the Qur'ān, this relationship practically manifests itself in the following ways:

( - : )

None profess belief in Our revelations save those who, when reminded through them, prostrate themselves in adoration and give glory to their Lord while expressing their gratitude to Him and are not rebellious to their Lord whose backs forsake their beds, who pray to their Lord in fear and in hope and who spend from what We gave them. (32:15-16)

This kneeling, prostrating, glorifying and praising the Lord, supplicating before Him and sacrificing life and wealth for His pleasure – all these are real forms of “worship”. However, since a person is not mere beliefs; he also has a practical life in this world, this “worship” relates to this practical life as well and in this manner becomes inclusive of obedience. It now requires that a person's outer self also bow before the Creator before Whom his inner self has bowed. His outer self should also become subservient to the Creator to Whom his inner self has become subservient, to the extent that no aspect of life should be left out of it. In other words, he should become a servant of his Lord in every sense of the word. The Qur'ān says:

( : )

Believers! kneel and prostrate yourselves and become servants of your Lord and do good deeds that you may attain salvation. (22:77)

### Definition of Religion

When “worship”, in order to fulfill the rights of the relationship between a servant and His Lord, prescribes metaphysical and ethical bases, determines rituals and stipulates limits, then in the terminology of the Qur’ān, this is called “religion” (*dīn*). The form of this religion which the Almighty has explained to mankind through His Prophets is called “the religion” (*al-dīn*) by the Qur’ān, and its followers are directed by the Qur’ān to fully adopt it in their lives and not create any divisions in it:

( : )

He has prescribed for you the same religion which He prescribed for Noah, and which We have now revealed to you which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, with the assertion: “Adhere to this religion [in your lives] and do not create any divisions in it.” (42:13)

### Contents of Religion

The metaphysical and ethical bases of this worship which have been prescribed by religion are called *al-Ḥikmah*, and the rituals and limits prescribed for it by religion are called *al-Kitāb* by the Qur’ān:

( : )

And God has revealed to you *al-Kitāb* and *al-Ḥikmah* and in this manner taught you what you did not know before, and great is God’s favour upon you. (4:113)

( : )

And remember the favors He has bestowed upon you, and the *al-Kitāb* and *al-Ḥikmah* which He has revealed to you, of which He instructs you. Fear Allah and know that He has knowledge of all things. (2:231)

The Qur'ān also refers to *al-Kitāb* as *sharī'ah*:

( : )

Then We set you on a clear *sharī'ah* regarding religion. So follow it, and do not yield to the desires of men who know not. (45:18)

*al-Ḥikmah* has always remained the same in all revealed religions; however, *al-Kitāb* has remained different due to evolution and change in human civilizations and societies:

( : )

We have ordained a law and assigned a path for each of you. Had God pleased, He could have made of you one community. (5:48)

A study of divine scriptures shows that the *sharī'ah* constitutes the major portion of the Torah and the *ḥikmah* generally constitutes the Injīl. The Psalms are hymns which glorify the Almighty and are a fore runner to the *ḥikmah* of the Injīl. The Qur'ān was revealed as a masterpiece of literature comprising both *sharī'ah* and *ḥikmah* giving warning to those who evade it and glad tidings to those who follow it. The fact that the Qur'ān is a blend of both *sharī'ah* and *ḥikmah* is clearly mentioned in the verses 2:231 and 4:113 quoted above. About the Torah and the Injīl, the Almighty while narrating one of His dialogues which will take place with Jesus (sws) on the Day of Judgement says:

( : )

And when I instructed you with the *sharī‘ah* and the *ḥikmah*, that is the Torah and the Gospel. (5:110)

*al-Ḥikmah* basically comprises the following two topics:

1. Faith
2. Ethics

*al-Kitāb* comprises the following ten topics:

1. The *Sharī‘ah* of Worship Rituals
2. The Social *Sharī‘ah*
3. The Political *Sharī‘ah*
4. The Economic *Sharī‘ah*
5. The *Sharī‘ah* of Preaching
6. The *Sharī‘ah* of *Jihād*
7. The Penal *Sharī‘ah*
8. The Dietary *Sharī‘ah*
9. Islamic Customs and Etiquette
10. Oaths and their Atonement

This is all as far as the content of religion is concerned.

### **Prophets and Messengers**

The envoys of God who have brought this religion are called “Prophets”. A study of the Qur’ān shows that besides being assigned the position of “Prophethood” (*nabuwwah*), some of them were also assigned the position of “Messengerhood” (*risālah*).

“Prophethood” means that a person after receiving divine revelation teaches the truth to his addressees, and gives glad tidings of a good fate in the Hereafter to those who accept the truth and warns those among them who reject it that a bad fate awaits them. In the terminology of the Qur’ān, giving such glad tidings is called *bashārah* and giving such warnings is called *indhār*:

( : )

Mankind was once one community. [Then differences arose between them]. So God sent forth prophets as bearers of glad tidings and as warners. (2:213)

“Messengerhood” means that a prophet is assigned to his people such that he decides their fate through divine sanction so that if they reject him, he practically enforces the sovereignty of the truth upon them by implementing on them God’s Judgement in this very world:

( - : )

And these disbelievers said to their Messengers: “We will drive you out of our land, or you return to our religion.” At this, their Lord revealed to them [– the Messengers –]: “Indeed, We shall cause the wrong-doers to perish! And indeed, We shall cause you to abide in this land after them.” (14:13-14)

( - : )

Indeed those who are opposing Allah and His Messenger shall be humiliated. The Almighty has ordained: “I and My Messengers shall always prevail. Indeed Allah is Mighty and Powerful.” (58:20-21)

It is in accordance with this established practice about *risālah* that it was thus ordained about Muhammad (sws):

( : )

It is He Who has sent his *rasūl* with guidance and the religion of truth that he may make it sovereign over all religions [of Arabia], even though these Idolaters [of Arabia] may detest this. (61:9)

The way this established practice about *risālah* manifests itself is that the Almighty selects His Messengers so that reward and punishment can be meted out in this world through them before



the actual Day of Judgement. It becomes a miniature rehearsal of what is going to take place on that Day. These Messengers are told that if they honour their covenant with God they will be rewarded in this very world and if they do not do so, they will be punished in this very world. The result is that the very existence of these Messengers becomes a sign of God, and it is as if their people can observe God walking on earth with these Messengers and delivering His verdicts. They are directed to propagate the truth and present to the people with full certainty the very guidance of God the way they have received it from Him. In the terminology of the Qur'ān, this is called *shahādah*. Once this is established, it becomes a basis of the judgement of the Almighty both in this world and in that to come. Consequently, the Almighty grants dominance to these Messengers, and punishes those who reject the message presented by these Messengers. For this very reason, Muḥammad (sws) is called *shāhid* and *shahīd* in the Qur'ān:

( : )

We have sent forth a Messenger to you [O Quraysh of Makkah] to bear witness against you, just as We sent a Messenger to Pharaoh before you. (73:15)

This position of *shahādah* was bestowed, besides other Messengers, upon the progeny of Abraham (sws) too. For this reason, the Qur'ān (2:143) called them an intermediate group (*ummat-i wasat*) between Him and His creation, and asserted that they have been chosen for this position just as the Almighty chooses some great personalities among mankind and grants them the status of a Prophet or a Messenger:

( : )

And struggle for the cause of God in a befitting manner. He has chosen you [for this responsibility], and laid on you no burdens in the observance of your faith. He has chosen for you the way of Abraham, your father. He named you Muslims earlier and in this [period of the last prophet] as well. [He had

chosen you] so that the prophet may bear witness against you, and that you yourselves may bear witness [to this religion] against other people of this world. (22:78)

### **Purpose of Divine Books**

Generally, the Almighty has also revealed His books with Prophets and Messengers, and, according to the Qur'ān, the purpose of their revelation is to judge between what is right and what is wrong so that people can resolve their differences through them. In this manner, they are able to adhere to justice regarding the truth. The Qur'ān says:

( : )

And with these [Prophets], He sent down His Book as the decisive truth so that it may settle these differences between people. (2:213)

( : )

And with these [Messengers] We sent down Our Book which is the Judge [between the right and the wrong] so that [through it] people are able to adhere to justice [regarding what is the truth]. (57:25)

### **The Responsibility of *Indhār***

The chain of Prophets and Messengers began with Adam (sws) and ended on Muḥammad (sws). After his departure, divine revelation ceased and the institution of Prophethood was terminated (the Qur'ān, 33:40). Consequently, the responsibility of *indhār* ie, to warn people to adhere to their religion now lies with the scholars of the *ummah* till the Day of Judgement. This responsibility has been mentioned in the Qur'ān in the following words:

( : )

And it was not possible for all the believers to undertake [this job]. So why did not a few from every group among them come forward to gain sound knowledge in religion and

warn the people of their [respective] nations, when they returned to them that they take heed. (9:122)

The Almighty has specified that this *indhār* shall be done through the Qur'ān: Verses such as ( : ) (Remind through the Qur'an whoever fears My warning, (50:45)), and ( : ) (And through this [Qur'an] fight with them with full force, (25:52)) point to this.

For this very reason, the Prophet (sws) is a *nadhīr* (warner) for the whole world, and the scholars of religion actually communicate his *indhār* to people:

( : ) (Blessed be He who has revealed *al-Furqān* to His servant, that it may warn the whole world, (25:1)). Consequently, the Qur'ān says:

( : )

And this Qur'ān has been revealed to me that I may thereby warn you and those whom it may reach. (6:19)

### The Objective of Religion

The objective of this religion stated in the Qur'ān is *tazkiyah* (purification). It means that the individual and collective lives of people should be purified and their beliefs and deeds be developed in the right direction. At many places in the Qur'ān, it has been mentioned that the objective of mankind is to enter Paradise in which they will be pleased with their Lord and their Lord will be pleased with them, and only those people have been promised Paradise who have purified their souls:

( - : )

[At that time], however, successful shall be he who purified himself, and remembered his Lord's name, then prayed. [No], in fact, you give preference to this worldly life in spite of the fact that the life to come is better and more lasting. (87:14-17)

In other words, it is *tazkiyah* which is the objective and purpose of religion. It is for this end that the prophets were sent

and the whole religion was revealed to guide man in attaining this objective:

( : )

It is He Who has sent forth among the unlettered a messenger from their own who recites to them His revelations, purifies them, and [for this, he] instructs them in the *sharī'ah* and in *ḥikmah*. (62:2)

### **The Correct Religious Attitude**

The correct attitude which the followers of this religion should adopt is called *iḥsān*. It means to do something in the best possible way. When some religious duty is carried out in a manner that a complete balance is maintained between its form and spirit, every constituent of it is taken fully into consideration and a person does the deed in a manner that he considers himself to be standing before God, then this attitude is called *iḥsān*. The Qur'ān says:

( : )

And who has a better religion than he who submits to God, such that he does *iḥsān*, and follows the faith of Abraham, who was devoted to [God]. (4:125)

The Prophet (sws) has explained *iḥsān* in the following subtle words:

( ) :

*Iḥsān* is that you worship God as if you are seeing Him because if you are not able to see Him, at least He sees you. (*Muslim*, No: 8)

### **Islam: The Name of this Religion**

The religion introduced in the foregoing pages is called “Islam”, and the Almighty has asserted in the Qur'ān that no other religion is acceptable to Him:

...

( : )

The only true religion in God's sight is Islam ... and he that chooses a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him and in the world to come he will surely be among the losers. (3:19, 85)

Just as the word "Islam" is used for the whole corpus of religion, it is also sometimes used to imply its outer form. As regards its outer form, it consists of the following five things:

1. Bearing witness that there is no god besides Allah and Muḥammad (sws) is His Messenger.
2. Offering the prayer
3. Paying *zakāh*
4. Keeping fasts of *Ramaḍān*
5. Offering the *ḥajj* of the Baytullāh

The Qur'ān has stressed upon all these directives at numerous places. In a narrative of the Prophet (sws), all these five have thus been mentioned:

e

( )

Islam is that you bear witness that there is no god besides Allah, and Muḥammad is His Messenger and be diligent in the prayer and pay the *zakāh* and keep the fast of *Ramaḍān* and offer the *ḥajj* of the Baytullāh. (*Muslim*: No. 8)

### ***īmān*: The Inner Aspect of Religion**

The inner aspect of religion is "*īmān*" (belief). As per its details mentioned in the Qur'ān, this inner aspect also consists of five things:

1. Belief in God
2. Belief in the Angels
3. Belief in the Prophets
4. Belief in Divine Books
5. Belief in the Day of Judgement

The Qur'ān says:

( : )

The Messenger has believed in what has been revealed to him by His Lord, and so do those who follow [him]. All of them professed faith in God and His angels and His books and His Messengers. [They affirm:] “We do not discriminate between any of God’s Messengers”, and they said: “We heard and have obeyed. Lord! We seek Your forgiveness, and [believe that on the Day of Judgment] to You shall we return.” (2:285)

The Prophet (sws) while including a corollary of belief in Allah – the good and evil of fate ordained by God – has referred to this set of beliefs in the following manner:

:

( )

*Imān* is that you believe in God and His Angels and His Books and His Messengers and the Hereafter and the good and evil fate [ordained by your God]. (*Muslim*: No. 8)

#### **Permanent Requirements of *Imān***

When this *imān*, in its essence, enters the heart and receives its confirmation from it, then on the very basis of its presence requires two things:

1. Righteous Deeds (*a ‘māl-i ṣāliḥ*)
2. Exhorting one another to the truth and exhorting one another to remain steadfast on it (*tawāṣī bi al-ḥaqq wa tawāṣī bi al-ṣabr*)

The Qur'ān says:

( - : )

Time bears witness that these people shall definitely be in a state of loss. Yes! except those who accepted faith and did righteous deeds and exhorted one another to the truth and exhorted one another to remain steadfast on it. (103:1-3)

#### 1. Righteous Deeds

All deeds which result once the morals of a person are purified are called righteous deeds. All their bases are found in human nature and intellect, and the *sharī'ah* of God has been revealed to guide mankind towards these righteous deeds.

#### 2. Exhorting one another to the truth and exhorting one another to remain steadfast on it

Exhorting one another to the truth and exhorting one another to remain steadfast on it relates to one's immediate surroundings. This is an obvious requirement of accepting the truth and is also termed as *amr bi al-ma'rūf* and *nahyī 'an al-munkar* by the Qur'ān, implying the fact that a person should exhort those in his surroundings to what is *ma'rūf* (good) according to human nature and intellect and forbid them from what is *munkar* (evil) according to it:

( : )

And believers, both men and women, are friends to one another. [They] enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil. (9:71)

Every Muslim should fulfill this requirement of faith as a well-wisher. If a person wants to fulfill this requirement with the right spirit, then it cannot be fulfilled unless he is a well-wisher of his fellow human beings. The Prophet (sww) is reported to have said:

( )

Religion is well-wishing for God, for His book, for His Messengers, for the rulers of the Muslims and for their common masses. (*Muslim*, No: 55)

**Contingent Requirements of *Imān***

Described above are the requirements of faith in ordinary circumstances. However, there are certain circumstances in which three other requirements can arise. They are:

1. Migration for the Cause of Religion (*Hijrah*)
2. Supporting the Cause of Religion (*Nuṣrah*)
3. Adhering to Justice (*Qiyām bi al-Qisṭ*)

Their details follow:

**1. Migration for the Cause of Religion (*Hijrah*)**

If it becomes difficult for a person to worship the Almighty, he is persecuted for his religious beliefs and it becomes impossible for him to live as a declared Muslim, then his faith requires him to shift to another place where he can openly practice his faith. In the terminology of the Qur’ān, this is called *hijrah* (migration), and a person who evades it when it becomes necessary has been promised the dreadful doom of Hell by the Almighty:

( : )

The angels will ask people whose souls they take in circumstances such that these [people] had wronged their souls [by concealing their faith and deeds out of fear from others]: “In what circumstances were you in?” “We were helpless and oppressed in the land,” they will reply. The angels will say: “Was not the earth of God spacious enough for you to migrate [to another place]?” It is these people whose abode shall be Hell, and what an evil abode it is. (4:97)

**2. Supporting the Cause of Religion (*Nuṣrah*)**

If there arise circumstances in which for the purpose of protection or dissemination of religion some action is required to be taken, it is a requirement of faith that one should offer this support through whatever means he can. And if a stage comes



that those in authority among the Muslims decide to launch an armed offensive for this purpose, then it is required of a Muslim to place his life and wealth at their disposal in such a way that they are able to use them at whichever front they want to. In the terminology of the Qur'ān, this is called *nuṣrah* of the Almighty. When, after the formation of the Islamic state in Maḍīnah, the Prophet (sws) required *nuṣrah*, and people were asked to present themselves for an armed struggle, the Qur'ān called people for this *nuṣrah* in the following words:

( - : )

Believers! Shall I point out to you a deal that will save you from a woeful torment? Have faith in God and His messenger, and fight for God's cause with your life and wealth. This would be better for you, if you understand. [In return] God will forgive your sins and admit you to gardens below which streams of water flow; He will lodge you in pleasant mansions in eternal gardens. This is great success. And [listen!] He will [also bestow upon you] what you desire: help from God and a victory which will soon come. And [O Prophet!] Give these glad tidings to the faithful. Believers, be God's helpers in the way Jesus son of Mary said to his disciples: "Who will be my helper in the cause of God?" The disciples replied: "We are God's helpers." (61:10-14)

All efforts which have been undertaken in the near or distant past for the protection, survival and revival of religion, have been undertaken to fulfill this requirement of faith. In Muslim history,

the source of all these efforts which were through the spoken or the written word or through wealth and money or through the sword and blade is this very requirement of faith. The Qur'ān asserts that if at some time this requirement arises, a true believer should give it the foremost priority and nothing in this world should be dearer to him. The Qur'ān says:

( : )

[O Prophet!] tell them: "If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your tribes, the wealth you have acquired, the merchandise you fear may not be sold, and the homes you like, are dearer to you than God, His Prophet and the struggle for His cause, then wait until God makes His Judgement and [remember that] God does not guide such people who break their promises". (9:24)

### 3. Adhering to Justice (*Qiyām bi al-Qist*)

If emotions, vested-interests and biases try to divert a person from justice in some worldly or religious matter, his faith requires him not only to adhere to justice but also if his witness is required in these matters, he should do so even if it puts his life in danger. He should uphold the truth by saying what is the truth and surrendering before it. He should adhere to justice and bear witness to it, and stick to it in his beliefs and deeds. This is called *qiyām bi al-qist* (adhering to justice), and in the Qur'ān it is referred to in the following words:

( : )

Believers, adhere to justice by bearing true witness before God, even though it be against yourselves, your parents, or your kinsfolk. If someone is rich or poor, God knows better about them both. So do not be led by base-desires, lest you

swerve from the truth. If you distort your testimony or decline to give it, you should remember that God is well aware of all your deeds. (4:135)

( : )

Believers, adhere to justice by bearing witness for God. Your animosity for some people should not induce you to turn away from justice. Be just; this is nearer to piety. Have fear of God; indeed, God is well aware of all your deeds. (5:8)

On the basis of this very requirement of faith, the Prophet (sws) used to ask people to make the following covenant with him: (Wherever we are, we shall always say the truth and not care for the reproaches of a reproacher regarding God, (*Muslim*, No: 1709). He even went to the extent of saying:

( )

Upholding truth and justice before an oppressive ruler is a great *jihād*.<sup>2</sup>

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2. *Ibn Mājah*, No: 4011.