

The Kalima Shahadah and the fundamentals of Islam (3)

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 22 January 2021

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ
الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿١٦٤﴾

“Certainly Allah conferred a favour on the believers when He raised among them a Messenger from among themselves, reciting to them His messages and purifying them, and teaching them the Book and the Wisdom, although before that they were surely in manifest error.” (The Quran, 3:164)

Among the tasks for which the Holy Prophet was raised was to teach the Quran and wisdom to his followers. In other places in the Quran, it is said that, along with the Book, wisdom was also revealed to the Holy Prophet (4:113, 17:39). His task was to present the teachings of this Book, the Quran, by his own wise words and wise actions. As regards the fundamentals of Islam, and how a person enters the brotherhood of Islam — what we have been discussing in the last two *khutbas* — these are, of course, indicated in the Holy Quran but they have been summed up in a systematic way by the Holy Prophet. The following is a very well-known saying of his:

بُنِيَ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَى خَمْسٍ شَهَادَةِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ، وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ، وَإِيتَاءِ الزَّكَاةِ،
وَالْحَجِّ، وَصَوْمِ رَمَضَانَ

“Islam is based on five (fundamentals): the testimony that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, the keeping up of prayer, the giving of *Zakat*, the Pilgrimage, and the fasting during Ramadan.”
(Bukhari, hadith 8)

All these requirements are mentioned in the Quran, but except for prayer and *Zakat*, they are not mentioned together in a list. The exact words *La ilaha ill-Allah* occur only in a couple of places in this form, and the words *Muhammad-ur rasulullah*

in exactly this form occur only once. But of course they occur very often but in slightly different words. The Holy Prophet through his revealed wisdom decreed these as the five fundamentals of Islam. The *Kalima* is the entry into Islam, and after entering Islam the other four are a Muslim's fundamental duties. These must, of course, be performed both physically by the body and spiritually by the heart and mind.

There is a well-known hadith that the Holy Prophet was sitting with his Companions and a man came and asked him some questions about the very basic teachings of Islam. He first asked him about matters of belief (*Īmān*), which the Holy Prophet answered, and then he asked him: "What is Islam?", meaning the matters of practice in Islam. According to the version in Sahih Muslim, the Holy Prophet replied:

"Islam is that you testify that there is no god but Allah, and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, and keep up prayer, give in charity (*Zakaat*), fast in Ramadan, and perform the Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) if you are able to." (*Muslim*, Book of Faith, ch. 1)

According to the version of this hadith in *Nisā'ī*, the man said: "If I do all this, will I become a Muslim?" The Holy Prophet said: "Yes." It is generally believed that this stranger who asked him these questions was the angel Jibrael who came, obviously not to learn Islam from the Holy Prophet, but to confirm that the Holy Prophet was teaching it correctly. That interpretation means that this answer of the Holy Prophet was confirmed as correct by Divine revelation.

Another incident is reported in Hadith that a man from a rural area, a Bedouin, came to the Holy Prophet while he was sitting with his Companions and asked him a number of questions to verify each of the fundamentals of Islam. In one version of this incident, he began each question with the words: "I ask you by Allah", meaning that "I am making Allah a witness". His first question was: "Has Allah sent you to all mankind?" The Holy Prophet replied: *Allahumma, na 'am*, meaning "By Allah, Yes" or "I call Allah to witness, it is so". The man then asked him: "Has Allah commanded you that you should say five prayers during the day and night?". Again, the Holy Prophet replied in the same words *Allahumma, na 'am*. The man then asked him about

fasting in Ramadan, and then about *Zakat*, and the Holy Prophet replied in the same words. In another version, worded a little differently, the man asked lastly about *Hajj*, and the Holy Prophet confirmed with regard to that as well that **Allah had given him the command** that *Hajj* is obligatory on those who can afford it. According to this version, the man then said: “By Him Who sent you with the truth, I shall do no more and no less than this.” The Holy Prophet said: “If he spoke the truth, he shall enter paradise.” (Sahih Muslim, Book of Faith, ch. 3)

As can be seen, the man asked these questions invoking the name of Allah as witness and the Holy Prophet replied in the same light. So it was more than an ordinary conversation. In the end the man said that he would do **no more and no less** than carry out these fundamentals and the Holy Prophet described this as the way which leads to paradise. Of course, what is meant is that if he performs these duties **in their true sense and spirit**, learning through them how to control bad desires and wrongful behaviour, to display high morals and to do good deeds, then he shall enter paradise in this world and the hereafter. He needs nothing more than these four duties.

These reports show us that these five are sacred institutions: *Kalima*, prayer, fasting, *Zakat* and the Pilgrimage. This means we must take them solemnly and seriously and act on them properly. It also means that when a Muslim sees someone adhering to these institutions, he must regard him as his Muslim brother. To expel such a person from the Islamic fraternity is to violate the sacredness of these five duties. If someone is showing devotion and attachment to these duties, then even if he is failing to perform them properly or he has gone wrong in some other religious matter or action, no Muslim is allowed to declare that person as being outside the fold of Islam and an unbeliever and *kafir*.

There is an incident of Abdullah ibn Umar, son of Hazrat Umar, from the year 73 A.H. when there was a war between two factions of the Muslims. He did not join either side. He was asked by someone who wanted him to join his side: “Why is it that one year you go for the hajj and one year you go for the *umrah*, and yet you have discarded *jihad* in the way of God? You know how much God has encouraged *jihad*?”

Abdullah ibn Umar replied: “My nephew, Islam is based on five things: Belief in God and His messenger, five prayers, fasting in Ramadaan, giving *zakat*, and the pilgrimage to the House of God.” (Bukhari, hadith 4514)

There is a famous book in English, *The Preaching of Islam*, written by a Christian Englishman Sir T.W. Arnold, professor of Arabic in the University of London, who had also lived in India, taught in Aligarh and Lahore, and was Allama Iqbal’s teacher. The last edition of this book was published in 1913. It is a history of the spread of Islam in various parts of the world starting from the time of the Holy Prophet. This book was so much liked by Muslims that it has been translated from English into many languages of the Muslim world, for example Urdu. Its last chapter deals with the causes of the successful spread of Islam. Sir T.W. Arnold writes:

“Foremost among these [causes] is the simplicity of the Muslim creed, There is no god but God; Muhammad is the Apostle of God. Assent to these two simple doctrines is all that is demanded of the convert, and the whole history of Muslim dogmatics fails to present any attempt on the part of ecclesiastical assemblies to force on the mass of believers any symbol couched in more elaborate and complex terms. This simple creed demands no great trial of faith, arouses as a rule no particular intellectual difficulties and is within the compass of the meanest intelligence. Unencumbered with theological subtleties, it may be expounded by any, even the most unversed in theological expression.” (p. 413)

Arnold goes on to quote from a French book by a Professor Montet who writes:

“To believers, the Muhammadan creed is summed up in belief in the unity of God and in the mission of His Prophet, ... The simplicity and the clearness of this teaching are certainly among the most obvious forces at work in the religion and the missionary activity of Islam. ... A creed so precise, so stripped of all theological complexities and consequently so accessible to the ordinary understanding, might be expected to possess and does indeed possess a marvellous power of winning its way into the consciences of men.” (p. 414)

What these historians are saying is that the *Kalima* is very simple and easy to understand. It can be understood by people of ordinary intelligence and knowledge, and it can be preached by people who are not experts and scholars of religion. This enabled Islam to be preached on a wide scale, because trained priests and theologians were not needed to preach it. Arnold adds: “When the convert has accepted and learned this simple creed, he has then to be instructed in the five practical duties of his religion : (i) recital of the creed, (2) observance of the five appointed times of prayer, (3) payment of the legal alms, (4) fasting during the month of Ramadan, and (5) the pilgrimage to Mecca.” (p. 415)

As we see from these quotations, Islam is admired by its non-Muslim scholars for summarizing its beliefs in a short, simple sentence. There was a Muslim historian and author from India, Maulana Shibli Naumani, who died just over a hundred years ago, who has mentioned this admiration of Islam by non-Muslims. He writes:

“The principles that form the basis of Islam are *Tauheed* (the Unity of God) and *Nubuwwah* (the prophethood of the Holy Prophet Muhammad). Whoever said *La ilaha ill-Allah*, he entered the garden [of Islam]. This is Islam — simple, clear and short. This simplicity is Islam’s mark of distinction as compared to other religions, and a European scholar has expressed his opinion about this simplicity in the following words: If a Christian thinker will cast a look at the lengthy and complicated beliefs of his religion, he will exclaim, *Why could not my religion be so clear and simple that I could be a believer by declaring [something as simple as] belief in one God and His messenger Muhammad*. In fact, these were the only two statements by reciting which, and by expressing belief in which, a non-believer became a Muslim.” (book *Ilm-ul-kalam aur Al-kalam*, p. 273)

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَكُنْمُ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-