

A Summary of Ibn Rajab's Explanation on the Hadith of Gibril

It is narrated from `Umar ibn Khattab (Allah be well-pleased with him), "While we were sitting with the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) one day a man came up to us whose clothes were extremely white, whose hair was extremely black, upon whom traces of traveling could not be seen, and whom none of us knew, until he sat down close to the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) so that he rested his knees upon his knees and placed his two hands upon his thighs and said, 'Muhammad, tell me about Islam.' The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, 'Islam is that you witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and you establish the prayer, and you give the *zakat*, and you fast in *Ramadan*, and you perform the pilgrimage of the House if you are able to take a way to it.' He said, 'You have told the truth,' and we were amazed at him asking him and [then] telling him that he told the truth. He said, 'Tell me about *Iman*.' He said, 'That you affirm Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day, and that you affirm the Decree, the good of it and the bad of it.' He said, 'You have told the truth.' He said, 'Tell me about *Ihsan*.' He said, 'That you worship Allah as if you see Him, for if you don't see Him then truly He sees you.' He said, 'Tell me about the Hour.' He said, 'The one asked about it knows no more than the one asking.' He said, 'Then tell me about its tokens.' He said, 'That the female slave should give birth to her mistress, and you see poor, naked, barefoot shepherds of sheep and goats competing in making tall buildings.' He went away, and I remained some time. Then he asked, 'Umar, do you know who the questioner was?' I said, 'Allah and His Messenger know best.' He said, 'He was Gibril who came to you to teach you your religion'."

Islam

Ibn Rajab says: It is a *hadith* of tremendous importance which comprises an explanation of the whole religion. For this reason, the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) said at the end of it, "This was Gibril who came to you to teach you your *din*," after explaining the degree of *islam*, the degree of *iman* and the degree of *ihsan*, all of which he called "*din*".

As for Islam, the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) explained it as the outward actions of the limbs such as words and deeds, the first of which is witnessing (*shahadah*) that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, which is an action of the tongue. Then there is establishing the prayer, paying *zakat*, fasting *Ramadan* and pilgrimage of the House for whoever is able to take a way to it.

In the narration of Ibn Hibban he added to that the performance of *'umrah*, *ghusl* from sexual intercourse or emission, and completing *wudu*, which draws our attention to the fact that all of the outward duties comprise that which is named Islam. Others include

His words in one of the narrations, "'Then if I do that will I be a Muslim?' He said, 'Yes.'" (i.e. in the narration of Ibn Hibban) shows that whoever completes his performance of the five pillars of Islam has really become a Muslim, along with the fact that whoever affirms the two *shahadahs* has legally become a Muslim. If someone enters Islam by that means, he is bound to undertake

the establishment of the rest of the characteristics of Islam.

Iman

Ibn Rajab says: As for *iman*, the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace). Allah has mentioned *iman* in His Book with these five fundamental principles in many places, such as in His words, exalted is He, "The Messenger has *iman* in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and so do the believers. Each one has *iman* in Allah and His angels and His Books and His Messengers." (Baqarah: 285)

Iman in the Messengers requires that one believes in everything of which they have informed us: the angels, the Messengers, the Book, the Rising and the Decree, and other things of the details of which they have informed us of the attributes of Allah, exalted is He, and the attributes of the Last Day.

Included in *iman* in the Decree is the good of it and the bad of it. Because of this phrase Ibn 'Umar narrated this *hadith* as a proof against those who repudiated the Decree. Belief in the Decree has two degrees: first, belief that Allah, exalted is He, has prior knowledge of what good and evil the slaves do, their obedience and disobedience, before creating them and bringing them into existence, knowing who of them are people of the Garden and who of them are for the Fire. The second degree is that Allah, exalted is He, created all of the slaves' actions, good and bad, *kufr*, *iman*, obedience and disobedience, and willed them for them. This is the degree which the people of the *Sunnah* and of the Community affirm, but which the people of free-will (al qadariyyah) reject and deny.

Someone might ask why the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) seems to be making a distinction in this *hadith* between *iman* and *islam*, making all conduct a part of *islam*, not a part of *iman*, although the well-known opinion of the *Salaf* and the scholars of *hadith* is that *iman* consists of three things: statements, conduct and intention, and that all conduct is subsumed, therefore, under the category of *iman*.

The way to reconcile these seemingly contradictory statements about the relationship of the word *islam* to *iman* is to understand that both have the same meaning when they are used without the other. When they are used together, however, each one has a specialized meaning, as is the case in the *hadith* we are discussing.

Not every Muslim is a *mu`min*, however, because his *iman* might be weak, in which case his heart is not perfect in its faith, although he performs some of the acts of Islam. This was true of the Bedouin, about whom Allah said in the Qur`an "The Bedouin say, 'We have believed.' Say: 'You have not believed, but rather say, 'We have submitted.'" According to the opinion of Ibn 'Abbas, these people were not hypocrites, merely persons of weak faith.

Thus, someone whose faith is imperfect may not be a *mu`min*, according to this understanding of *iman*, but nonetheless remains a Muslim. As for *Islam*, it is not removed from a person merely

for failure to perform some of the conduct *Islam* requires. Only conduct that contradicts it in its entirety is sufficient to exclude a person from *Islam*.

It is very important to understand the relationship of *islam* to *iman* and *iman* to *islam*, because this has been the source of many *fitan* in the Muslim community, including the *Khawarij*, who thought that major sins exclude a person from Islam, and therefore, could be treated as non-believers.

Further, included in the category of *iman* is the trembling of the heart (*wajal al-qulub*) out of remembrance of Allah, trembling when one hears Him mentioned or His Book recited, its increase as result, firm trust in Allah, fear of Him in secret and in public, satisfaction with Allah as Lord, and so forth. Allah said in the Quran, “The believers are those who, when Allah is mentioned, their hearts tremble”; “Is it not time for the believers for their hearts to fear on account of remembrance of Allah and the Truth which has been revealed?”; “and let the believers place their trust in Allah”; and, “in Allah place your trust, if indeed you are believers.”

And Allah alone gives success

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