

# **THE MEANING OF ISLAM**

by  
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## Foreword

Explanations of the teachings of Islam usually represent this faith in terms of dogma, ritual, and aspects of outward behaviour. The impression is strongly received that what Islam requires from its followers is merely mechanical belief and observance, without any involvement of thought or feeling or the creation of a relationship with God. Moreover, the meaning of the word *Islam* is given as "submission" in such a manner that it implies a forced, unwilling, unloving obedience to an Autocrat.

Yet a study of the Quran and the Holy Prophet's life shows such a projection of Islam to be entirely unjustified. It is in the later development of Islamic theology that we find religion conceived of largely in terms of outward forms.

One of the chief tasks for which Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad appeared as a *Mujaddid* was to revive that lost, real spirit which, according to the Quran and the Holy Prophet, should underlie a Muslim's belief and actions. In the extract presented here from his book, *A'ina kamālāt Islām*, Hazrat Mirza Sahib lays bare the real essence of what is Islam and what it means to be a Muslim in the true and actual sense. The heart and soul, feelings and desires, along with bodily actions, i.e. the entire self, must be devoted to God. It should not be just outward observance with an empty heart.

It will be noticed that Hazrat Mirza Sahib has based his explanation on the text of the Holy Quran, and it is from this text that he shows the Sufi concepts of *fana*, *baqa* and *liqa* to be derived. Unfortunately, over the centuries many Muslim spiritual teachers had introduced baseless ideas and practices which had no support in the genuine teachings of Islam. Hazrat Mirza Sahib accepted only those sound Sufi concepts which were rooted in the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet's practice, and showed

that these concepts were only a means of further explaining the principles already laid down in the sources of Islam.

At the end of the extract, Hazrat Mirza Sahib refers to certain miracles of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, and gives a coherent and logical explanation of how such extraordinary feats can take place at the hands of spiritually eminent luminaries. Most people accept any miracle in the name of religion without applying any thought or commonsense, no matter how baseless or absurd the story might be, while there are others who reject all such occurrences as being irrational and contrary to the laws of nature. Hazrat Mirza Sahib has adopted a middle course, accepting that things beyond normal experience can happen in the life of a man of God, but at the same time placing these miracles within an orderly and well-defined scheme of spiritual laws.

This extract satisfies the paramount need today to present the spiritual side of Islamic teachings, but it does so in a way warranted by the Holy Quran and acceptable to sense and reason.

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Before turning to any other discussion, it is highly important to set fourth a discourse as to what are the ways of attaining the real essence and crux of Islam, and what are the fruits of adherence to that reality? For, in order to gain an understanding of many fine and subtle points, one needs a good knowledge of the essence of Islam, the ways to attain it, and its fruits. It shall be of great advantage to our opponents belonging to our own faith to study carefully the discussion about the essence of Islam, because the doubts and questions which beset them are mainly due to not pondering over the real essence of Islam in its most perfect and highest sense, the paths leading to it, and its fruits. There is no doubt that if, after considering all these facts, my opponents from our own faith read my replies to their objections, they will be relieved of many doubts and misconceptions. The proviso is that they should study thoughtfully, and then, keeping this text in view, consider all my replies which I have written to remove their doubts. Likewise, the opponents of the religion of Islam will benefit very much from an exposition of these truths. From this discussion, they can come to understand what is religion and what are the signs which prove its truth.

### *Meaning of Islam and Muslim*

So let it be clear that, in the Arabic language, *islam* is the word for *paying the price in advance for a thing, or to give the charge of one's affairs to someone, or to ask for peace or to give up a matter or an enmity.*

The technical meanings of Islam are those indicated in the

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following verse:

"Nay, whoever submits himself whole-heartedly to Allah, and he is a doer of good to others, he shall have his reward from his Lord. And there is no fear for such people, nor do they grieve."

(The Holy Quran, 2:112)

It means that a Muslim is one who gives over his entire self to the path of God, the most high. That is, he dedicates his being to Allah for the pursuance of His will and for the attainment of His pleasure, and then he devotes himself to doing good works for God, and employs all his practical faculties in His way. The meaning is that he should be solely for God, in belief and deed. In terms of belief, it means that he must truly consider all his being to have been created in order to know God, to obey Him, to love and adore Him, and to gain His pleasure. In terms of deeds, it means that purely for the sake of Allah he must perform acts of true virtue that are associated with every power and every God-given faculty, and with such fervour, zeal and presence of mind as if he is seeing the face of his real Master in the mirror of his obedience.

The meaning of the rest of the verse is that if a person's beliefs and deeds are founded on such personal love, and good deeds are done by him with such instinctive passion, he is the one who deserves reward in Allah's view, and such people have no fear nor grief; that is, they have ready salvation. For, when a man is in full accord with Allah, by believing in His person and attributes, so that his purpose is akin to God's will and all joy is in His obedience, and all good deeds come to be

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performed not by hard effort but by the attraction of joy and delight; that is the state which must be called success, salvation and deliverance. And in the next world, whatever is perceived and felt are, in reality, the images and impressions of this constant state which will be manifested physically in that world. The meaning is that a heavenly life begins in this very world, and the root of the torment of hell too is the filth and the heedless existence of this world.

### *Complete devotion of life in God's way*

By looking carefully at the verses which have been extolled above, every wise person can see that the real essence of Islam can only be established in someone if all his being, with all its inner and outer faculties, is devoted solely for God and His way, and all that he has received from God as a trust is returned to the Real Giver. It should not only be in terms of belief, but in terms of deeds as well that he must display the full image of Islam and its perfect essence. That is, the person claiming to be a follower of Islam must prove that his hands, feet, heart and mind, his sense, reason, anger, mercy, gentleness and knowledge, all his spiritual and physical powers, his honour and property, his rest and comfort, and all that he has, from the hair of his head to the nails of his toes, both outwardly and inwardly, so much so that his intentions, the fears in his heart, and the feelings in his soul - all these have become as obedient to God as a person's limbs are in his own control. In brief, it must be established that his sincere step has reached the stage where whatever is his, is not his, but has become God's; and all his limbs and faculties are so engaged in the service of God as if they were the limbs of God.

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By pondering over these verses, it is also plainly and clearly seen that to devote one's life in the way of God, which is the essence of Islam, has two sides to it. First, God must be believed to be the One Who is to be worshipped, sought and loved. In serving Him, loving him, fearing Him and hoping from Him, no one must be taken as being His partner. Celebration, glorification and service of God, all the forms and commands in relation to serving Him, the commandments and prohibitions, and matters relating to the destiny ordained by Him, must all be accepted with one's heart and soul. All these orders, limits, laws, and circumstances ordained for us, must be borne with complete devotion, in the most humble and lowly manner. And one must learn thoroughly all the pure truths and knowledge which are the means of realising His vast powers, the medium of discovering the elevated glory of His dominion and kingship, and a powerful guide for recognising His favours and blessings.

The other aspect of devoting one's life for God is that it must be dedicated to the service, sympathy and help of his creatures, the bearing of their burdens, and the true sharing of their grief. One must bear hardship to provide relief to others, and for their comfort tolerate difficulty for oneself.

This discourse shows that the essence of Islam is very high and lofty, and no one can be truly accorded the honourable title of "follower of Islam" until he gives to God the whole of his being, with all its powers, desires and aims, and leaving aside his egotism and all its implications, devotes himself in the path of God. Therefore, a person can only be called a Muslim, in the real sense, when a mighty revolution has overtaken his life of

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indifference, obliterating forever the stamp of his lower self and all its passions, and after this death a new life of "doing good for the sake of Allah" has been born within him, a life so impeccable that it consists of nothing but obedience to the Creator and sympathy for His creation.

### *Obedience to God and service to His creatures*

Obedience to the Creator must be as such: One must be ready to accept dishonour and degradation in order to display God's power, glory and uniqueness; to keep alive the idea of His unity; one must be prepared to accept death a thousand times; in the way of obeying Him, one hand must be happily willing to cut off the other one; and the love of the greatness of His commands, and the thirst for attaining His pleasure, should make one detest sin as if it were an all-consuming fire or a fatal poison or lightening which reduces everything to ashes, from which one must escape using all one's strength. In brief, to accept His will, one must give up all the pleasures of the soul, and to receive His blessing, one must accept being hurt with mortal wounds, and to show proof of connection with Him, one should sever all human ties.

Service to the creation of Allah is like this. As regards all the needs of His creation, and all the various way in which Divine providence has made some people dependent on others, one must do good with all the real, selfless and true sympathy that one can show, solely for the sake of Allah, and help every needy person with one's God given ability, exerting oneself to bring about reform and improvement in their life of this world and the next.

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This devotion in the way of God, however, can only be worth its name when all the faculties show the mark Divine obedience as if they were an instrument of God which manifests Divine obedience as if they were an instrument of God which manifests Divine acts now and again, or a clear mirror in which the will of God is reflected as a perfect image. When obedience and service for the sake of God reaches this perfect stage, then by the blessing of this Divine colouring it is correct to say, in the sense of the unity of attributes (*wahdat ash-shuhud*), as regards the limbs and organs of a man of this description, that, for example, these eyes are the eyes of God, this tongue is the tongue of God, this hand is the hand of God, these ears are the ears of God, and these feet are the feet of God. For, all these limbs and powers, by being inspired with the purposes of God and having become an image of His will, in the Divine paths, deserve to be called His manifestation. The reason is that, just as a person's limbs are fully under the control of his will and intent, likewise when the perfect man reaches this stage he acquires complete conformity with the will and intent of God. God's greatness, unity, kingship and lordship, and every wish and command, are as dear to him as they are to God Himself. Hence, this great and grand obedience and service for the sake of God, which was attained through love and affection, and is replete with sincerity and real substance - that is Islam, its essence and gist, which is attained after the death of one's self, desire and will.

*Stages of spiritual progress fana, baqa, liqa*

It should also be remembered here that the verse

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mentioned above, i.e.

"Nay, whoever submits himself whole-heartedly to Allah, and he is a doer of good to others, he shall have his reward from his Lord; and there is no fear for such people, nor do they grieve"

refers to the three essential stages of perfect spiritual good grace: *fana* (annihilation), *baqa* (continuance) and *liqa* (meeting with God). As we have just said, the words "submits himself whole-heartedly to Allah" teach that all powers and limbs and whatever else is one's, must be handed over to God and dedicated in His way, and this is the state which in other words is called *fana*. The reason is that when a person, according to the sense of this verse, hands over his whole being along with all its powers to God, devoting it to His way, and refrains completely from the urges and comforts of his lower self, then undoubtedly a kind of death comes over him, and it is this death which the men of the spiritual sciences call *fana*.

The words after this, "and his is a doer of good to others", refer to the stage of *baqa* because when man, after a complete and perfect *fana* and extinction of lower passions, comes to life again through Divine urge and prompting, and, after the termination of all selfish actions, becomes activated again by spiritual movement, this is the second life which ought to be termed *baqa*.

The words after this, "he shall have his reward from his Lord, and there is no fear for such people, nor do they grieve", affirm and prove the receiving of reward, and negate and deny

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fear and grief. This refers to the state of *liqa*. For, when a person reaches that high rank in knowledge, conviction, reliance (upon God) and love, where the reward for his sincerity, faith and fidelity does not seem to him to be mere imagination, supposition, or conjecture, but is as certain, definite, manifest, palpable and perceptible, as if he had received it, and he acquires such a faith in the existence of God as if he can see Him, and all fears about the future are lifted from view, and no trace is left of any past or present grief, and every spiritual favour appears to be present - this is the state which is clean of all murkiness, safe from every doubt, and above any pain of anxiety, and is termed *liqa*. The word *muhsin* (doer of good) in this verse very clearly testifies to the rank of *liqa*, because according to the explanation of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) *ihsan* denotes that perfect state at which man forms such a close relationship with God during worship that it is as if he were seeing Him.

The rank of *liqa* is fully attained by the spiritual wayfarer when the Divine hue conceals and covers under itself the human element as fully and completely as fire hides the colour of a block of iron, so that to outward appearance there is nothing but fire. This is the stage at which some spiritual students, when they reached it, have made errors and mistaken the relationship of "presence within the Divine Being" (*Shuhud*) as being "unity with the Diving Being" (*wujud*). To those saints who reached this rank, or those who attained some measure of it, certain spiritual scholars have applied the term "sons of God" due to the analogy that those persons lie entirely in the lap of affection of Divine attributes, and just as a man's son bears some resemblance to his father in appearance and features, likewise

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they too bear some resemblance to the beautiful attributes of God in the sense of reflecting them, because of being moulded according to the Divine attributes. Although such a term is not openly used in the language of the Shariah, the spiritual men have, in fact, deduced it from the Holy Quran. As Allah the Glorious says:

"Remember Allah as you remember your fathers; nay, with an even stronger remembrance." (2:200)

It is obvious that if it was forbidden in the Shariah to use such words metaphorically, then God would have kept His Word Free from a manner of expression from which the legality of such use could be deduced.

### *Miracles of the Holy Prophet*

At this stage of *liqa*, a man can sometimes perform feats which seem to be beyond human strength, having the appearance of Divine power. For instance, our leader and master, the head of the apostles, the last of the Prophets, peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, threw a fistful of pebbles at the disbelievers during the battle of Badr, and that fistful was cast, not being accompanied by any prayer, but by his spiritual strength. However, it showed Divine power and had such an extraordinary effect on the enemy forces that there was none of them whose eyes remained unaffected, all being rather like blinded. So much confusion and panic was caused in their ranks that they started to flee as if they had lost all their senses. Allah the Glorious refers to this miracle in the following verse:

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"You (O Prophet) did not throw when you threw, but it was Allah Who threw." (8:17)

i.e., Divine power was invisibly working behind it, and it could not be the work of human power.

Likewise, a second miracle of the Holy Prophet, the splitting of the moon, came about through the same Divine power. There was no prayer accompanying it, for it took place merely by the pointing of a finger which was full of Divine power. There are many other miracles of this kind which the Holy Prophet showed merely through personal power, without any prayer accompanying them. On several occasions, by dipping his fingers into a small amount of water contained in only a bowl, he increased it so much that all the troops, camels and horses drank of it, and yet the original quantity of water still remained. There were some instances when he fed thousands of hungry people to the full by touching a few pieces of bread with his hands, or made a whole company drink milk by blessing a small amount of it with his lips, or made the water of a salt-water well sweet by adding his saliva to it, or healed badly-injured men by putting his hand upon them, or mended the eyes of soldiers whose pupils had fallen out due to the shock of battle, by the blessing of his hand. Similarly, there were many other works he performed due to personal power, which involved an invisible Divine power.