

CONDITION OF THE UMMAH

PART 10

WHAT IS ISLAM?

December 26th 2001

The key to success in life is to know who you are. Our identity is shaped by our past, our present, and our vision of the future. Life takes on certain clarity once we know who we are, where we are and where we are going. This clarity develops self-awareness which helps us to objectively analyze the issues we are facing and find solutions to them. This phenomenon not only applies to individuals but to the nations and civilizations as well.

Muslims nowadays, irrespective of where they are from, are suffering from personal as well as religious identity crisis. They don't know who they are, what is expected of them as Muslims, or even what Islam is. The root of the problem with Muslims today is that they have forgotten what real Islam is. Unless they rediscover Islam and embrace it wholeheartedly, they will never be able to be true Muslims.

INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM

Islam is not a statement to utter or an ideology to adhere to. It is a way chosen by Allah SWT as the only acceptable way for people to lead their lives. The word Islam is derived from the Arabic word *sa-la-ma* which means peace. Islam is the state of peace a person enters when he willfully surrenders his soul to Allah SWT and submits to His will and decree. The person who has submitted himself to Allah SWT is called a Muslim.

Salaam is one of the attributes of Allah SWT who is the owner of peace and the Only One who can fill our lives with it. The more we are closer to the owner of peace, the more we will enjoy this peace in our lives.

Allah SWT gave us the gift of Islam and called us Muslims. He SWT wants us to live in peace, spread peace, die in peace, be resurrected with peace and enter the final abode of peace—'*Dar-us-Salam*', jannah.

and it will be said to them: "Enter into these in peace and security." (Al-Hijr 15:46)

For them will be the Home of Peace with their Lord. And He will be their protecting friend because of what they used to do. (Al An'am 6:127)

And Allah invites to the Home of Peace and guides whom He wills to a straight path (Yunus 10:25)

HOW CAN WE ATTAIN SALAAM

We cannot have peace in our lives unless we have peace between us and Allah SWT. Allah SWT has created us and knows our strengths and weaknesses. He SWT knows we have a submissive side and a rebellious side to our personality. We carry goodness in our hearts as well as evil. The goodness envelopes our heart when we are connected to Allah SWT and

evil overwhelms it when we are far removed from Him SWT. And it can only be that way because we become like whom we mingle with and spread what we have in our hearts and minds. Since Allah SWT is the owner of all goodness, the more we are closer to Him and spend our time in His company, the more we will receive His quality. Likewise, the more we are connected to Him and remember Him the more His attributes will begin to manifest in our own personalities and lives, including the peace.

Allah SWT has given us Qur'an as a map to show us the way back to Him SWT. Islam is not a religion only; it is *manhaj haya*—way of life. It teaches us how to live from our own personal life to our interaction with friends, family and the society in large. When we live according to the revelation and teachings of the Almighty and His Prophet SAW, we gain peace within ourselves, are able to deal with others with peace, and can spread it wherever we may be.

If our soul is not at peace, if it is in clash with our desires, temptations, and evil inclinations then it will generate friction between us and others and we will not be able to have stable and productive relationships. When our *nafs*—carnal desires—become so strong that we do whatever we like without any discipline or principals, we lose control over our own selves. At this point our ego begins to control us rather than us controlling it. This is when things don't work out for us and our life begins to disintegrate. That is why, out of His Mercy, Allah SWT asks us to submit to Him and live according to His teachings.

To embrace Islam a person has to declare two sentences...

There is no one worthy of worship except Allah, and Muhammed is the Messenger of Allah.

Even though this statement seems so simple and precise, it has very deep meanings. Let's break it down and see what it really entails.

The *shahadatayn*—declaration of faith—is divided into two sections:

1. Oneness of Allah SWT

The first part of the *shahadatayn* is to declare that Allah SWT is the only one worthy of worship.

Say, "Indeed, my Lord has guided me to a straight path - a correct religion - the way of Abraham, inclining toward truth. And he was not among those who associated others with Allah." (Al-An'am 6:161)

Say, "Verily, I am commanded to serve Allah with sincere devotion." (Az-Zumar 39:11)

So is one whose breast Allah has expanded to [accept] Islam and he is upon a light from his Lord [like one whose heart rejects it]? Then woe to those whose hearts are hardened against the remembrance of Allah. Those are in manifest error. (Az-Zumar 39:22)

The state of Islam requires total submission and surrender to the will of the Creator—slavery to Allah SWT. Submission is the act of heart which results in the surrender of the body. Our bodies are governed by our hearts. Unless the submission of the heart is unconditional and sincere, the body will not follow suit. We should not blame our hands or eyes for doing unlawful things. Whatever we do is a reflection of what is in our hearts. It is

extremely important to monitor ourselves at all times and be aware of what we are doing. This is the true meaning of slavery.

Are we really slaves to Allah SWT?

How can it be when our minds, hearts, and desires are occupied by everyone else besides Allah SWT?

How can we expect the peace and sweetness of faith when our hearts are distracted from Allah SWT and busy with mundane matters of this life?

2. Affirmation of the prophet-hood of Muhammed SAW.

The second part of *shahadatayn* is just as important as the first part. By declaring the prophet-hood of Muhammed SAW, we accept Him SAW as our teacher and role model. It is not an option to follow the Prophet SAW's teachings rather it is a commandment of Allah SWT. Allah SWT asks us in the Qur'an to believe in the Prophet SAW and to follow his footsteps—also called his *sunnah*. *Sunnah* refers to the customs, habits and actions of the Prophet SAW as well as his advices and admonitions.

Say: "If you do love Allah, follow me: Allah will love you and forgive you your sins: For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (Al-Imran 3:31)

Today majority of Muslims claim to believe in the *shahadatayn* but they are ignorant of their Prophet SAW and his teachings. This actually reflects a deficit in the fundamental belief of Islam and thus a defect in the very core of their faith.

The Messenger of Allah SAW said, "Everyone from my nation will enter Paradise except those who refuse." They said, "O Messenger of Allah, who will refuse?" The Prophet said, "Whoever obeys me enters Paradise and whoever disobeys me has refused." (Bukhari)

WHERE IS THE BUILDING?

Many Muslims believe that if they carry out the five pillars of Islam, they have fulfilled the right of being Muslims. They could not be farther away from the reality. Rasul Allah SAW has said,

"(The structure of) Islam is built upon five [pillars]: testifying that there is none worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, establishing the prayers, giving zakah, making pilgrimage to the House and fasting the month of Ramadan." (Bukhari & Muslim)

If a person tells you that a particular building is built over five pillars and then just shows you the pillars and no building, can he claim that the building actually exists?

Unfortunately this is precisely what we are doing with Islam! Today, we perform the rituals of five pillars and claim that we have Islam. In reality, we do not have Islam. The hadeeth is very clear in stating the point that Islam is built over five; it does not say that Islam is only the performance of the five pillars!

Not only that we have limited Islam to its five pillars, we do not even perform those properly. Imagine a building with five pillars where one of the pillars of the building is shorter than the rest, the second is thinner than the others, and the third pillar is tilted a

bit. Could anything be built over them or the pillars have to be proportioned and properly balanced?

Note: An important point to understand here is that we cannot perfect our own pillars only and built our personal Islam. Islam is not an individualistic structure where one person resides. It is the way of life for a community and nation. If the majority of the *ummah* does not have strong pillars, we cannot build Islam.

Pillars cannot be built on shifting sand. The ground has to be strong and stable for the pillars to be erected properly. This ground is the *iman* or faith of the person. Unless we have strong *iman*, the pillars will be weak and unstable and sooner or later will crumble. This is precisely our condition today! A small number of Muslims implement the five pillars but these pillars are so tiny and hollow, they are practically non-existent. It is as though one is aiming to create a structure over toothpicks! At this point our condition is such that we do not even have toothpicks and we are looking to build the edifice of Islam.

Let's take *salah* (prayer) for example since it is the most fundamental pillar of Islam. *Salah* is considered to be *imad-ud-deen*—the main column of the *deen*. The main column is what withstands the weight of the entire building. Once this column cracks, the building crumbles. An accepted *salah* is the mode of communication between Allah SWT and His slaves. This is how the slave finds solace from all his worries and through which he receives answers to his calls. It is this kind of accepted *salah* that serves as bedrock to the faith. Can our *salah* be classified as *imad-ud-deen*?

Our *salah* has become a ritualistic act just like everything else in our faith. It is so weak that it barely plays any role in our life. Our *salah* is weak because our hearts are weak; and our hearts are weak because our faith is weak. Since faith is the ground over which the foundation of Islam is erected, the stability and strength of this ground should be the most important issue for every Muslim. So the big question is why is our faith so weak?

Some of the reasons for that are:

1. Lack of sincerity; our hearts have diverted far from the message of Islam.
2. Lack of honesty.
3. Lack of truthfulness.
4. We forget who we are and who Allah SWT is.
5. We have become too arrogant and have built long materialistic hopes instead of preparing for our imminent death.

Note: All these are symptoms of a disease which is lack of *iman*. We lack true *iman* because we have never really embraced Islam. If we sincerely embrace Islam, it will reflect in our actions. It will motivate us to:

- study our *deen*,
- keep good company,
- seek out righteous spiritual teachers to spend time with,
- study the book of Allah SWT,

- study the life of the Prophet SAW and emulate his teachings (*sunnah*) to the best of our ability, and
- make sincere efforts to increase our faith.

If we spend the appropriate amount of time and money required, our *iman* will come alive and the diseases resulting from its absence will diminish. Our sacrifice is the thermometer of our sincerity. Meaning the amount of sacrifice we make for our faith is the sign of our sincerity to it.

ISLAM REFORMS PEOPLE

La ilaha illal lah—there is no one worthy of worship except Allah SWT—is no ordinary statement. It has the potential to entirely transform a person. It is a conviction that allows the person to overcome his ego, habits, customs, even his very nature. It changes weaknesses into strengths, poverty to riches, ill manners to good manners.

This statement takes away the right from us to blame anyone or anything. It is an open challenge from Allah SWT. He has created us with shortcomings and then has shown us the path of *la ilaha illal lah*—urging us to turn to Him completely and see how He SWT can change our lives.

Let's start the challenge! We can do it!

Islamic history is filled with examples of these wonderful transformations. Let's travel back in time to meet one such personality whose faith reformed him from an arrogant and tough chief to a soft, humble, kind and generous believer. His name was Umar Ibn Al-Khattab (RA).

Umar (RA) was among the toughest men of Makkah. He was a rough person who buried his infant daughter alive following the customs of the Arabian disbelievers. He was so outraged by the teachings of the Prophet SAW that he decided to kill him. In this state of outrage, Allah SWT showered down his mercy on him and he was introduced to the concept of *la ilaha illal lah*. The personality of Umar (RA) before and after embracing *la ilaha illal lah* is a testament of the power of this conviction. From an immoral and brutal person who tortured people because of their belief in one God, he became the shining light of God which illuminated half the world. Umar (RA) was the Caliph of Islam during whose reign Islam spread to the farthest recesses of humanity.

We see the same reformation among the new Muslims. Through *la ilaha illal lah* they discover the meaning of slavery to Allah SWT and the meaning of denying oneself.

And if they do not respond to you - then know that the Qur'an was revealed with the knowledge of Allah and that there is no deity except Him. Then, would you [not] be Muslims? (Hud 11:14)

JOURNEY OF THE MEANING OF LA ILAHA ILLALLAH

So what does it mean Allah is the only one?

How do we really realize without a doubt that Allah SWT is the only one?

The only one of what?

It is a journey of knowledge through which one learns that in reality nothing exists except Allah SWT.

It is the realization that...

The day will come when everything we see will vanish. We will die. Buildings will collapse. Even mountains will perish. Since Allah SWT will destroy everything on this earth therefore in reality they do not exist. The only one who exists is Allah SWT. Everything that we see around us is the power and ability of Allah SWT.

Everyone upon the earth will perish, And there will remain the Face of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honor. (Ar Rahman 55:26-27)

Nothing is absent from the knowledge of Allah or hidden from Him SWT. There is nothing that Allah SWT does not perceive, is unable to see or unable to comprehend. He SWT never sleeps and will never die. He is never absent from any situation and nothing can occur without His knowledge. He is the King of all kings and owner of all that exists. He is the All-Seeing, All-Hearing Lord who is aware of all His creations' minutest needs and activities. Nothing can exist without Him SWT. Everything that has ever existed must perish but He SWT has existed since before all the existence and He SWT will continue to exist after everything ends.

Allah SWT has sublime characteristics and attributes. The more we are aware of His qualities and attributes, the more we begin to realize His divine role in our lives. This is what develops the love of Allah SWT in our hearts. Everything that we see or do not see, everything that we comprehend or is beyond our ability to comprehend, all belongs to Him SWT. Time, distance and space do not apply to Him. Nothing is near or far from Him. He SWT does not need to move in order to be able to reach something. He does whatever He wants; all He has to say is 'Be' and 'It is!'

He is the Creator of all things but has not been created. He is the Only One with no partners, parents or children. There is nothing that is similar to Our Lord SWT. He is the Most Beautiful though we cannot envision Him SWT. Even if we try, we cannot comprehend Him. We cannot touch Him the way we can touch or feel other creations.

He SWT is the way He is without any explanation because our intellects are limited and cannot comprehend His reality. His knowledge encompasses everything. Nothing in the air or under the ground, bottom of the oceans or peak of the mountains, nothing wet or dry, big or small, animate or inanimate, alive or dead escapes His knowledge. He knows our innermost secrets while we are veiled from His presence. Everything in existence is the proof of the magnificence of its Creator. He deserves unlimited praise and gratitude.

He is the Judge and He is Just. He takes care of all His creation in the way He wants, not the way they want. His words are infinite. They are full of wisdom which we can never fully comprehend. His kingdom, majesty, power, ability and strength encompass all His creation. Everything is in His hands and according to His will; while we do not have control over anything. Nobody can stop or change His will. Everything in existence is subservient to Him and all His slaves are according to His will and power.

La ilaha illal lah makes us realize that Allah SWT's bounties on us are unlimited. The highest of His bounties is the ability to recognize who He SWT is! On the same note, the

worst form of veil for a person is to not recognize who Allah SWT is and to not show gratitude for His bounties.

La ilaha illal lah gives us hope that He SWT will watch over us and protect us even if we are sinners and spiritually sick. His clemency knows no bounds. His mercy is such that even our sins become a means to receive His mercy as they cause us to repent and seek His forgiveness.

This realization of *la ilaha illal lah* is the pillar of our faith. This understanding needs to be deeply inculcated in our hearts and manifested in our thinking, feelings, actions, and reactions.

Unfortunately, today we do not associate only one partner with Allah SWT instead we join many partners with Him SWT, combined with a little bit of belief. This is not what Allah SWT wants!

WHAT DOES ALLAH SWT WANT FROM US?

He SWT wants our hearts to be empty from everything except Him SWT. He wants us to live the belief of *la ilaha illal lah* through our actions. Take for example the names of Allah SWT; we read them but do we really live them?

Why doesn't the reality of Allah SWT come into our hearts?

The reality of Allah SWT can only enter our hearts through sincere struggles and sacrifices. If we sincerely seek His guidance, Allah SWT, out of His ultimate wisdom, generosity and mercy will open our hearts and let us realize the truth. However, if we do not make any effort to seek His guidance and ignore His messages then He SWT, with His ultimate justice will leave us in the darkness.

What does it mean?

It means that we have to make a sincere effort and show Allah SWT that we want His guidance and we appreciate it. Otherwise He will leave us in the cyclone of materialistic life until we die and lose our opportunity.

What prevent our hearts from really inculcating *la ilaha illal lah* are our attachments. We must struggle to remove these attachments from our hearts.

How do we do that?

We have to be in a state of constant vigilance about our *iman*. This requires us to remind ourselves that:

- nobody exists except Allah SWT,
- nothing can happen without His (SWT)'s will,
- Allah SWT is our Master and He will take care of all our affairs.

If we think about it all the time, it will develop faith in our hearts which will eventually begin to govern our actions and thoughts.

HOW DO WE PLEASE ALLAH SWT?

Why do have to please Allah SWT?

How can we please Allah SWT?

This requires honesty and truthfulness! Those who are honest, Allah SWT will guide them to actions that are pleasing to Him SWT. But why would Allah SWT guide us and give us if we lie to ourselves and live make believe lives pretending to be someone we are not? Take for examples those Muslims who talk about Qur'an and *sunnah* but their manners, behavior and life style are not reflective of their talk.

If we leave Allah SWT who is the Truth and run after this transitory world which is fake, then how can we become truthful?

How about those Muslims who know righteous people but instead choose to associate with non-sensical people? Historically, Muslims used to seek out virtuous people and make efforts to be in their company. Now our condition is so pathetic that when we meet pious people, instead of running towards them we run away from them. Those who are honest, gravitate toward any environment that can increase their *iman*.

In here we are talking about pleasing Allah SWT. We cannot please someone we do not know. And we will not attempt to please someone unless we believe He can benefit us.

La ilaha illal lah is a deep and comprehensive understanding which needs to be developed and nurtured. This development requires companionship and an environment. If there is no environment available but we sincerely want it and make initiatives to meet the right people, Allah SWT will open for us.

There is no excuse and there is no one we can blame!

ROAD TO GUIDANCE VS. WHAT?!

Why does Allah SWT give us guidance in different levels?

Allah SWT guides people according to their hearts and souls.

Why doesn't Allah give us more?

It is because we are not seeking it and because we struggle for wrong things. Once the early Muslims received the message of *la ilaha illal lah* they forgo everything. They abandoned the materialistic life and strove to gain the pleasure and closeness of Allah SWT. Whereas, we hear the message, we ignore and return back to our worldly lives as if we have not heard anything. It doesn't work!

It shows that the person lacks sincerity and truthfulness. Allah SWT calls the believers *sadiqeen*—truthful because their actions validate their claims. Anyone whose actions are not according to his words can only be termed a liar!

If we really want to know what truthfulness of actions looks like, we should turn to the story of 'Umair bin Al-Humam Al-Ansari. He was a companion of the Prophet SAW and had joined Muslims in a battle against the polytheists. When the enemy advanced towards the Muslims, the Prophet SAW said: "Get up to enter Paradise which is equal in width to the heavens and the earth."

'Umair b. al- Humam al-Ansari said: Messenger of Allah, is Paradise equal in extent to the heavens and the earth? He said: Yes. 'Umair said: My goodness! The Messenger of Allah SAW asked him: What prompted you to utter these words (i. e. my goodness!)? He said:

Messenger of Allah, nothing but the desire that I be among its residents. He said: You are (surely) among its residents.

He took out dates from his bag and began to eat them. Then he said: If I were to live until I have eaten all these dates of mine, it would be a long life. (The narrator said): He threw away all the dates he had with him. Then he fought the enemies until he was killed. (Muslim)

Imagine after we are told that the Creator can change us, He SWT can do such and such for us, yet we are still not willing to make any efforts to even get to know Him SWT. This is the act of a liar! Whatever bad quality or weakness we have, all we have to do is call Him SWT and ask Him.

Why don't people ask Him SWT enough?

It is because they are comfortable with their worldly life and therefore are spiritually sick. But even that is not an excuse. Allah SWT has sent us the medication, has given us the exact prescription on how to take the medication, and then has left it up to us to take the medication. Whoever takes the medication the way it should be would be cured; whoever does less will see less effect; and the one who ignores the medication will remain sick. As for the one who doesn't even attempt to know there is any medication available will not only remain sick, he will be further veiled from the true path.

We should ask why some people respond to the medication while others reject it?

Allah SWT has already told us why it happens. Allah SWT guides people who have certain qualities. For example, He SWT guides those who:

- have contentment,
- have humble and humility,
- have Allah SWT in their hearts,
- believes in what Allah SWT promised.

Now let's put these qualities in action. If we want to receive the guidance from Allah SWT, can we worry about tomorrow? Can we worry about our children, or ourselves even? Is this *adab* (proper manners) with Allah SWT? If we truly respect Allah SWT, we should always be content and thankful. The only worry we should have is how to get closer to Allah SWT and how to show Him our gratitude.

Islam is not a status quo or a group we belong to. Islam is to live *la ilaha illal lah* with our words, decisions and actions. It is the status of our hearts which reflects through our actions.

If we are honest, let's ask ourselves why Allah SWT has commanded us in the Qur'an of the following:

O you who have believed, remember Allah with much remembrance. (Al-Ahzab 33:41)

Why?

It is because Allah SWT knows who He has created. He knows our weakness and our inability to remain focused for long. He knows we tend to forget and need frequent reminders. So after hearing this commandment of Allah SWT, if we still hang out with the

wrong crowd, engage in meaningless conversations, or keep ourselves distracted with futile activities, then who can we blame besides ourselves?

We have complete freedom and choice on how we spend our time. We can spend our time in front of the TV or we can read a good book for our guidance. We can watch a game or do *dhikr*. We can go out to movies with friends or make efforts to meet knowledgeable people. The choice is ours!

Our choices are a reflection of our belief. When someone gives us a small gift, we show our appreciation by thanking him, sending him thank you cards and by telling others about the gift. What then about the gifts of Allah SWT? He SWT created us as *ashraf-ul-makhlukat*—the most esteemed creation—humans, gave us Islam and guided us to seek His message; can we ever thank Him enough? This also answers those who question why Allah SWT would send people to hellfire. He SWT would punish those who deliberately made wrong decisions after they were given complete choice and freedom.

This is why once we get in the habit of constantly remembering Allah SWT, we discover our reality. We realize how insignificant we are, how worthless this life really is, and how the afterlife is the abode of true happiness. This realization puts a believer in an ecstatic state, as if high on drugs.

REDUNDANCY IS NEEDED

At this point you might be complaining that this article has a lot of redundancy but it is done purposefully and knowingly. Allah SWT has created us and knows that we are forgetful creatures. Our natures are such that we are influenced by our environment, people we associate with, and the amount of effort we exert in what we try to achieve.

For example, if we want a certain car we work hard, sometimes for years, to save the amount needed to buy the car.

What motivated us to struggle for years?

What gave us the patience to sacrifice our desires and wants to save for the car?

Why?

It was our goal and our desire which allowed us to persevere and remain patient until we got what we wanted; which in this case was a car. The driving force behind our perseverance, patience, saving, and sacrifice is the belief in what we want. All of us have wants, desires, wishes, and ideas about things that can benefit us. They might all be reasonable items which bring benefit and satisfaction to us, but one thing which is for certain is that this feeling will be short lived. The satisfaction and happiness these objects bring to our lives will be limited and fleeting.

Now let's examine what happens in this life in general...

Allah SWT has created us with weaknesses such as desires, temptations, love of wealth, ability to be manipulated by the devil etc. At the same time He SWT has shown us the path to guidance and has also informed us that the road of guidance is tough since it requires sacrifice of wealth and desires. If we remain patient and earn only what we need, our lives will be simple and we will have time to get to know the Creator. Now we will be able to

devote time to read, do *dhikr*, and seek guidance. Only then will *la ilaha illal lah* begin to make sense to us.

Still there is a stipulation...we will only be able to do this if Allah SWT opens our heart and makes us value the road of guidance!

The following example will help explain the point further *InshaAllah*:

Ali (RA) was a mighty companion of the Prophet SAW, his cousin and son-in-law. Once his family had nothing to eat and he was looking for work in order to buy some food. A merchant hired him to extract water from a well in exchange for dates. For every bucket he hauled, he earned a date.

When he had a handful of dates, he stopped and decided to leave. The merchant urged him to continue working so he could earn more. Ali (RA) said, 'why do I need to earn more? I have enough food for myself and my family for the day.' The merchant insisted that if he works more, he can earn for next few days. When Ali (RA) refused, the merchant was surprised and asked him whether he was tired. He (RA) said, 'No, but the Prophet SAW has taught us that we should not strive for what we do not need. I am not sure whether I will be alive tomorrow so why should I worry about it.'

These are the teachings of Islam...

- have a simple lifestyle,
- earn what you need,
- be a useful person, and
- spend the maximum of your time for Allah SWT.

Once people become greedy, they work hard until the disease of hoarding wealth enters their heart. Then the purpose of life becomes saving and amassing wealth until they lose their lives to this vicious cycle. They forget the purpose of their lives, and forget that they can die any moment. They forget their journey of guidance and that they are here to serve humanity and do maximum of good deeds to earn Allah's pleasure.

CHECKING SINCERITY

Everything in this life has to be driven from the concept of slavery to Allah; even *da'wah* to Him SWT. This is the prerequisite as well as proof of a person's devotion and belonging to Allah SWT.

So how do we know we are doing da'wah sincerely for Allah or making believe that we are doing something for Islam?

This question needs an honest reflection. The actions of the person have to be governed by discipline and sincerity. The following few points can help the person discipline himself:

- Before you give *da'wah* to anyone, be patient and make *du'a*.
- Learn to consult your Master, Allah SWT. Ask Him SWT, 'O Allah, if I talk to so and so, is it for your pleasure or for the satisfaction of my ego?' Say, 'O Allah if what I am going to do is only for your pleasure, allow me to do it; and If what I am planning to do is not for your pleasure, get me away from it.'
- Question your motives.

- Check your sincerity.
- Set intentions purely for Allah SWT.
- Constantly renew your intentions.
- Build truthfulness between you and Allah by following through your intention.

This is to show how *da'wah* to Allah SWT needs deep sincerity and certain knowledge and understanding. Since the person is working for Allah SWT, he is supposed to be governed by Allah SWT, not by His *nafs* or any ideology. Once this understanding is inculcated inside, then the person will work sincerely for Allah otherwise it will be to satisfy his ego.

This is what we see around us; hundreds of groups are claiming that they are doing *da'wah* and all of them have their own agenda and understanding. All of this massive deviation and misunderstanding is caused because the core is not intact which is *iman* and the understanding of the message.

Once this becomes our practice with every issue in our lives, now we can claim that we are slaves and we have a master. Sincerity is not easy. It is very difficult to do even a single action purely for Allah SWT. If you want to check your sincerity, see....

- What you are doing when you are alone?
- Are you slave to Allah SWT or slave to your base desires?
- Are you being governed by Allah SWT or by your ego and the devil?
- What do you desire when you are alone, since a slave always only desires what pleases his mater?

If da'wah to Allah SWT needs constant monitoring of intentions, how much vigilance do you think all other issues in our lives require?

All of us—from ignorant individuals who are deeply indulged in materialistic lifestyle to educated people who are working for Allah SWT—are far away from the purity of the message.

QUESTIONS NEED ANSWERS

How can we establish Islam when even the honesty and sincerity of the belief is not there?

How can we establish leadership and brotherhood when our faith is so shaky?

Our arrogance has crossed a limit which never before was seen throughout the history of Islam. Every group and ideology claims to have the solution for Islam. But when you really listen it is all empty rhetoric without any mention of Allah SWT. It is as if they do not even need Him. Can we better the condition of Islam without Allah SWT? Blindness is rapidly increasing among people and at the same time the signs of Allah SWT are increasing, yet we blind our eyes from these signs.

Just look at the absurdity of the situation...

We are slaves, running like chicken without heads with no real idea of what to do, and in the meantime everyone is coming with their own masterpiece on how to solve the problem of Islam! In reality it is all a pretentious show. And how can it be otherwise when we are so far away from Allah SWT? If we do not have Allah SWT on our side supporting us, how can we possibly accomplish and achieve anything?

Allah SWT has already given us the keys of success and of gaining victory which are to go back to Him and live the reality of *la ilaha illal lah*.

Where is our allegiance?

The second part of the declaration of faith is our confirmation of the prophet-hood of Muhammed SAW. By declaring him as the last Prophet we agree to take him as a role model of Allah SWT for us to follow and imitate.

Take for example the following *ayah* to see how far we really are from this declaration:

Indeed, those who pledge allegiance to you, [O Muhammad] - they are actually pledging allegiance to Allah. The hand of Allah is over their hands. So he who breaks his word only breaks it to the detriment of himself. And he who fulfills that which he has promised Allah - He will give him a great reward. (Fath 48:10)

We give Islam lip service but when it comes to real life, our allegiance is to our culture! There is no Islam in our lives because when we are faced with situations we do what 'our fathers did', or 'our mothers did' ...instead of investigating what Allah SWT and His Prophet SAW have advised us to do. *Astaghfirullah Al 'Adheem!*

Our allegiance to our culture and customs is stronger than our allegiance to Allah SWT and His Prophet SAW. Even though we know that our cultures are sick yet we are satisfied with following them and are not willing to change. This is called tribalism which is a trait of *jahiliyyah*—pre-Islamic ignorance. There is no room for that in Islam. If we are honest Muslims, we should seek out and investigate what Allah SWT and His Prophet SAW have said about a topic.

With all this Islamic knowledge that we have acquired, who do we really follow? Our beloved Prophet SAW or misconceptions, misunderstandings and confusions we have inherited from our cultures?

For example...

How many people consult the scholars on the issues of marriage or business etc?

Those who do attempt to consult religious figures, do they seek out people according to their own ideology and their own cultural background so they can feel good about what he says; or do they approach honest scholars who will give them suggestions according to the pure teachings of Islam?

Islam is not only about salah and fasting. These are pillars that help us to become strong enough to implement Islam properly. If our Islam is not growing, meaning there is something wrong with our pillars or the way we are constructing them. This is an indication that we have to go back and check the foundation. In reality, our foundation is very corrupt. If it was strong, our salah would be strong and proper, and if our salah was strong and proper, it would reflect in our lives.

Each one of us has to fix our foundation by checking our belief step by step:

- Do I really believe in Allah SWT?
- Do I really believe that Allah is the only one in control of everything?
- Am I living the reality of *la ilaha illal lah* through my actions and manners?

- Do I really believe in the attributes of Allah SWT?

Any lack in belief in the attributes of Allah makes one a *kafir* since by disbelieving in them we actually deny the qualities of Allah SWT. For example, let's look at the attribute of Allah SWT *Ar-Razzaq*—the Provider. Who do we really believe is the provider? Is it our paycheck, our investments, job and wealth, or Allah SWT?

If we really believed that Allah SWT is the provider then why would we involve in *haram*, or in professions that are completely wrong? Also, if we really believed in Allah SWT to be the Provider, why would we indulge in accumulation of wealth like there is no end? We behave as if we do not trust Him and have to personally secure our and our families' future. These are the two opposite extremes of disbelieve in Allah SWT as our Provider—one where a person is willing to do anything, even if it is *haram*, to earn an income; and the other trying to accumulate too much beyond his necessity.

Where is the trust in Allah SWT?

Where is our belief in Allah SWT?

Where are the teachings of the Prophet SAW?

Once we accept Prophet SAW to be our teacher, all our actions have to be according to His teachings. After declaring our belief in his prophet-hood, we have to start afresh as though everything that we knew before committing to the *shahadah* is not applicable in our lives anymore.

Islam cannot be mixed with culture and customs. Allah SWT wants pure Islam. A person can be a sinner yet have Islam.

What is the difference between a sinner who has Islam and our condition?

A Muslim is a slave and servant of Allah SWT. Once in a while shaytaan can get the better of him and make him commit sins; he can slip, but he makes *tawba* and goes back to the status of Islam. But imagine those who claim to be Muslims, but live in a state of sins to the point it becomes their lifestyle and once in a while they embrace Islam. A Muslim can slip for a few minutes, hours, or a day but soon returns to Allah SWT seeking His forgiveness; not that sins are his lifestyle and everyday for a few minutes he becomes a Muslim!

Once sins become part of a person's life, faith cannot take root in the heart. This is why people do not see any change in their lives nor do they see the fruit of their worship. If a person's Islam is hollow and weak, everything else will be the same. Once a person's Islam and his faith is corrected, all else such as his salah, fasting and manners will automatically be corrected.

Majority of us have never really embraced Islam! We are born in a "Muslim" environment, with a Muslim name with some Muslim rituals but we have not really learned to live the message of *la ilaha illal lah*. We have not really understood the purpose of our life and this has caused us to deviate towards materialistic comforts. Our thoughts, feelings, inspirations, emotions and goals are all materialistic in nature. In this state we fulfill certain rituals of Islam and feel satisfied about it. Our attitude is such as if we will never die and be held accountable, which is the opposite of the message of Islam.

STEPS TO REMEDY OUR CONDITION

The first step towards remedying our condition is sincerity. The least we can do is cry to Allah SWT and ask Him to make us Muslims. If we are sincere in our prayers, we will follow it with actions which means we will struggle to live *la ilaah ilal lah* inside of us by every mean possible—time, money, and the right mentor.

Warning!

A Muslim can be weak and a sinner, but he will never be a *mushrik* (someone who associates partners with Allah.) Today majority of Muslims are *mushrik* or *kafir* at different levels and are not even aware of it because they are ignorant of the basics of their faith. For example, take *kufur an ni'ma*—disbelief in the bounties of Allah. This implies to not showing gratitude, thanks and contentment for what Allah SWT has given us. Today we find many people complaining—whether rich or poor, male or female, elderly or young, married or single. Majority of them are not content about their condition and are miserable about something they do not have or they want. Meanwhile they overlook all the bounty they already have!

What kind of Islam does a person have if he worries about tomorrow?

Worrying is a form of *kufur* and *shirk* because by worrying about something, a person rejects the role of Allah SWT in his life, shows his distrust in Allah SWT, and declares disbelieve in His attributes. All worship is rejected if he denies Allah SWT's qualities and abilities or does not trust Him SWT because the very crux of Islam is belief in Allah SWT—*la ilaha illal lah!* A person has to be a slave first before presenting his worship to Allah SWT and asking for rewards. There are people who believe in the Creator but Allah SWT calls them disbelievers because they do not show gratitude to Him.

What if we do the same?

If we do the same we will be in bigger trouble because we should know better.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

So far we have tried to give you snapshots of real life examples to help you see how far we have fallen from the reality of *la ilaha illal lah*. Only after we realize our condition, can we attempt to break the status quo and come out of our heedlessness, misunderstanding, and ignorance of our faith. Throughout this series we have attempted to do just that—raise awareness about the condition of the *ummah*, how we have reached this level, and what steps we need to take to change our state.

Throughout these articles you must have encountered a lot of redundancy which was intentional. There are certain messages that need to be repeated in various contexts. This is what Allah SWT has done in Qur'an Makki. The damage this *ummah* has sustained is deep and severe. The systematic diseases of the heart and misconceptions of the faith that have been fed to this *ummah* over the last five hundred years will require serious efforts to overcome. We are in desperate times which require desperate measures. That is why we no longer only 'call on Allah SWT', we have to 'cry to Him SWT'.

What we are facing here is extreme urgency! What makes the situation more worrisome is our abject negligence towards the seriousness of our condition! If we remember just the

topic of death, it will put everything in perspective for us. Even though all Muslims claim that they believe in death and in life after death, their actions do not necessarily match their words. Once we internalize that this worldly life is temporary and the life after death is eternal; that we are not here to build properties rather to work for our eternal abodes, which will be either paradise or hell fire—our attitudes will surely change.

BOUNTY OF BELIEVING IN THE SHAHADATAYN

Once we study the bounty of *shahadatayn*, we will understand how precious and honorable these sentences are. They are the most valuable gift Allah SWT can give to a person. If we truly believe in them, live them, live for them, and die for them our lives will be full of real happiness and peace, irrespective of our materialistic status.

If we really understand this topic, we will value it; and if we value it, we will come to a conclusion that this faith is our real treasure and the source of our success in this life and the next. It is everything. With it, we have everything; and without it, we have nothing.

THE FINAL THOUGHT

It is crucial that we analyze our situation and figure out what our problem is. Each one of us has to ask himself:

- Where is my belief lacking?
- What is my attachment?
- What do I mostly think about?
- Is Allah SWT really *akbar* (great and foremost) in my heart?
- Is the love of Allah SWT and His Prophet the strongest love in my heart?
- What am I aiming for?
- What do I dream about?
- What do I talk to others about?
- What is it that I really want to achieve?
- Where is the reality of Islam inside of me?

We are our best judge since we all know what we are doing!

It is time we embrace the reality of *la ilaha ilal lah* in our lives. Just like food and garbage cannot be mixed together, Islam and *duniya* cannot be mixed together in a person's heart. The Islam of a person will never rise if it is weighed down by his *duniya*. Allah SWT will only accept a believer when he is clean from the impurities of worldly attachments.

Rasul Allah SAW has told us that,

“Verily Allah, the Exalted, is pure and accepts only that which is pure.” (Muslim)

One of the attributes of Allah SWT is *Al-Ghayyoor*, the Jealous. He SWT does not like His slave to love anyone more than Him. Our love to others should be a love of mercy, not an intense love which becomes a driving force and an attachment. This intense love should only be reserved for Allah SWT.

The solution to all our problems lies in *la ilaha ilal lah*. If the Muslim *Ummah* builds the reality of faith, all its issues will be resolved. If every Muslim sincerely embraces Islam, Allah SWT will change the condition of this *ummah*. He SWT will give us wisdom, *baseerah*

(vision), light; all that we need to lead successful and peaceful lives. Once we have the true faith in Allah, He SWT will grant us the unity, the love for each other, the mercy for others, elevation, *shari'ah*, victory—everything that we are looking for. There is no way we will receive them through any other means!

Allah SWT has said,

Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. (Ar-R'ad 13:11)

Don't point fingers to others; only point fingers to yourself! If you want to change anything, you have to start with yourself first. Take charge of your faith, Allah SWT will assist you in your journey.

Start on this journey by...

- Reading the Makki Qur'an. Read with comprehension, reflection, and with the intention to get closer to Allah SWT. Ask Allah SWT to give you messages through His book.
- Being constantly engaged in *dhikr*, *istighfar* and *tawba* to Allah SWT.
- Contemplating about Allah SWT and marveling over His power day and night.
- Constantly reminding yourself of Who it is that is controlling all things!

May Allah protect us from being pretentious people who say what they do not act upon. May Allah SWT lift His anger from us. May He SWT give us guidance, wisdom, light and vision. May Allah SWT allow us to distinguish the right way and follow it, and discern wrong and get away from it. *Ameen*.