

The Meaning of Islaam and Eemaan

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Do the terms Eemaan and Islaam ever mean the same thing? Or do their meanings always differ?

When the terms Islaam and Eemaan are mentioned in the same verse or hadeeth their meaning differs. When mentioned separately they mean one and the same.

Understanding this aspect of our `aqeedah can help us better understand texts of the Qur'aan and Sunnah. Here is how:

The terms Islaam and Eemaan were precisely defined in the hadeeth of Jibreel `alayhis salaam by the pillars they comprise. This famous hadeeth narrated by Muslim explains that Islaam is to testify that there is nothing worthy of worship except Allaah, and that Muhammad (sallallaahu `alayhi wa `alaa aalihi wa sallam) is the Messenger of Allaah, to perform prayer, to give the zakaat, to fast the month of Ramadhaan and to perform Hajj, if one has the means to do so. Eemaan, on the other hand, is to believe in Allaah, and His Angels, and His Books and His Messengers, and in the Last Day, and the qadar (divine pre-ordainment), good and evil consequences thereof.

More generally, one could say that Eemaan is construed to mean testifying and belief, while Islaam represents external submission, such as affirmation by tongue and action by limbs. Whoever has faith, he has Islaam, and whoever has Islaam, he has some degree of faith. This is the reason why when one of these two terms is mentioned, the other is taken for granted and is included in it. When it is said in the Qur'aan, "Verily the Deen with Allaah is Islaam." [3:17] or "Whoever seeks religion other than Islaam it will never be accepted from him." [3:85], the meaning of Faith is included in the term Islaam.

There cannot be Islaam without any faith and it cannot be that Allaah accepts Islaam with no Eemaan at all. So when one is mentioned, the other one is included.

Also, one cannot have Eemaan without Islaam. An evidence from the Qur'aan that Eemaan is of higher degree than Islaam and that when both are mentioned together, they mean two different things is the verse in Soorat ul-Hujuraat: "The bedouins say: 'We believe.' Say: 'You believe not but you only say: 'We have surrendered (in Islaam).'" [49:14] One cannot claim for himself a high level of faith and a strong commitment to Islaam in accordance with the descriptions of true believers in the Qur'aan and Sunnah.

The Eemaan that is negated in the above verse is the complete Eemaan, or what some scholars, such as Ibn Taymeeyah in Al-`Aqeedat ul-Wasitiyyah, termed "al-Eemaan al-Mutlaq" [Absolute Eemaan], which could be defined as Eemaan that does not lack in any of its roots and branches, its internal or external aspects, and an Eemaan that is proven in the heart, on the tongue and with the limbs. Those who are Muslims, but their Eemaan

al-Mutlaq is negated still have Eemaan, however their Eemaan is deficient.

Therefore the term Islaam still includes the meaning of both Islaam and Eemaan. Another example where the absolute Eemaan is negated is the hadeeth: "When an adulterer commits illegal sexual intercourse, then he is not a believer at the time he is doing it, and when a drinker of an alcoholic liquor drinks it, and when a thief steals, then he is not a believer at the time of stealing, and when a robber robs, and the people look at him, then he is not a believer at the time of doing robbery. [al-Bukhaaree] Therefore, when Islaam is mentioned without Eemaan, it includes Eemaan - as action without faith is hypocrisy - but it does not necessarily include al-Eemaan al-Mutlaq.

The Qur'anic descriptions of those who are mu'minoon [as in the beginning of soorat ul-mu'minoon] necessarily include the meaning of muslimoon. Those who are Muslims necessarily have some degree of faith, and Islaam that Allaah (subhaanahu wa ta`aala) accepts also necessarily includes Eemaan, as for instance in the hadeeth that mentions the questioning in the grave: "...They continue, 'What is your religion?' He [believer] answers: 'Islaam is my religion.'" [from an authentic hadeeth mentioned by al-Albaanee in Ahkaam ul-Janaa'iz] The term 'Islaam' here necessarily includes the meaning of Eemaan as well. And the following hadeeth includes both the meaning of Eemaan and Islaam: "The best believers according to their Eemaan are those with the best character." [At-Tabaraanee, Saheeh Jaami` us-Sagheer #1129]