

## The Error of Saying Everyone is a Muslim

By Rashad A. Muhaimin

There is an idea among some American Muslims that everyone is a 'Muslim' even if that person's religion may be Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, or even Atheism. This misguided idea is found among certain groups of generally well-meaning Muslims who are being misguided by their so-called Imams and leaders, either out of ignorance or deliberate manipulation. One of the main proponents of this theory is Wallace D. Mohammed and his followers. Due to a total lack of understanding of the fundamentals of Islam, which stems from a blatant disregard for the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, and the subsequent understanding of the Qur'an based on it, this concept has festered and has been propagated without any such proof from the Qur'an and Sunnah. This concept is usually found where Muslims have little or no access to the works of the people of knowledge such as prisons. Among other things, this line of thinking is used as rationalization for not calling the people to Islam. This legitimizes everyone's belief, regardless of what it is, in the sight of these Muslims. Therefore, when it comes to their relatives, neighbors, co-workers, classmates, etc, they are absolved from their duty to call to Islam. I have been face to face with a Muslim, who claimed his dead Christian mother was in Jannah because she was a 'Muslim'! When I asked whether or not she had actually taken the shahadah and accepted the religion of Islam, he said no. So when I asked why he felt that she was a 'Muslim', he responded, 'Everyone is a Muslim'. Subhaanallah Where in the Sunnah of the Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, is this understood to be the case? Where in the Qur'an does Allah say that everyone is Muslim? Where in the history of Islam is this concept found? The weak explanation is that although everyone is 'Muslim', it is those who actually take the shahadah that become 'conscience' Muslims or 'believers'. They have corrupted the categories of religion and have misunderstood the verse of Allah;

**The Bedouins say: "We believe." Say: "You believe not but you only say, 'We have surrendered (in Islam),' for Faith has not yet entered your hearts. [49:14]**

For according to these misguided people, everyone who takes the shahadah is a believer and this contradicts what is found in the Qur'an, Sunnah, and the consensus of the scholars of Islam. Yes, Allah distinguished between a Mu'min and a Muslim but Islam is confirmed for those who actually profess the *shahadah* and *aslamoo* or *submit* to the will of Allah by performing the acts of Islam. The interpreter Jalaaludeen Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Mahallee (d.863) says about this verse, 49:14, that the desert Arabs were hasty in confirming Eemaan for themselves and they were warned from it. However, Allah confirms their Islam in the same verse, meaning that they had accepted what was obligatory upon them from the religion, i.e., the shahadah, the prayer, the zakaah, etc. .[ Tafseeru Jalaalayn] How does this apply to those who do not even submit to do the acts of Islam? How is Islam confirmed for those who simply exist?

Concerning the levels of religion, Ibn Taymiyyah explains;

'The Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, indicated that religion has three *darajaat* or levels, of which the highest is *Ihsaan*, the middle is *Eemaan*, followed then by *Islam*. Thus, every *Muhsin* is a *Mu'min* and every *Mu'min* is a *Muslim*. However, not every *Mu'min* is a *Muhsin*, nor every *Muslim* a *Mu'min*.'

He goes on to say;

'Therefore, it is well known that if the heart is purified by Eemaan, then the body is purified by Islam, which is part of Eemaan. This is indicated in the hadeeth of Jibreel where the Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, said to his companions: 'That was Jibreel, who has come to teach you your religion.' He, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, regarded *Deen* as Islam, Eemaan, and Ihsaan. Thus,

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it is obvious that our religion is a combination of three concepts but they are arranged in three ranks: Muslim, Mu'min, and Muhsin.'

Shaykhul-Islam goes on to explain that although these levels exist, belief must be in place even for the Muslim, for Islam is indeed invalid without belief.

'For the Muslim is one who is obedient to Allah, but no obedience is serviceable without belief. Hence, it is impossible for anyone to have performed even the most minor act of obedience pertaining to Islam except as a believer. Every Muslim must have belief whether what one means by Islam as the performance of all required acts of obedience, or the performance of simply one of them, for in neither case would these acts have any effect if they were done without belief.'  
[Kitabul-Eemaan, Vol. 7 Majmoo' Fataawa]

If this was the case that everyone had Islam and was a Muslim regardless of what they believed, what was the reasoning for the sending of the Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, the revelation of the Qur'an and the establishment of the Sharee'ah? If everyone is a Muslim because of their mere existence, what of Iblees? Is he a Muslim? This understanding is inherently flawed. It seems that they have taken some ayat and some ahaadeeth to mean something that they do not mean and have twisted them to fit their desires. This is a perfect example of why it is dangerous to study the Qur'an or the ahaadeeth without referring to those who are proficient in the sciences of tafseer, hadeeth, 'aqeedah, Arabic, etc.

One of the verses that these people try to distort is the verse of Allah;

**Do they seek other than the (Deen) religion of Allah (the true Islamic Monotheism worshipping none but Allah Alone), while to Him submitted all creatures in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly. And to Him shall they all be returned. [3:83]**

A cursory glance at this ayah as well as the verses before it and after it provides a clear context for the verse in question. In short, this verse is actually a warning for those who reject the religion of Allah as legislated by Allah, and defined in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. And what is the religion of Allah?

**Truly, the (Deen) religion with Allah is Islam... [3:19]**

And the Deen of Islam has been explicitly defined for us by the Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam.

*Islam is built upon five; To testify that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to offer the prayer, to give the zakaah, pilgrimage to the House (of Allah) and fasting in Ramadhan.' [Bukhari]*

*'Islam is to bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and the Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to offer the Salaat, to pay the Zakaat, fast during the month of Ramadhan and to make the Hajj if you are able and have the means to make the journey.' [Muslim]*

Those who enter into this Deen by performing these said steps, with the testimony being the first, have a special name that Allah has given them: Muslims.

**It is He (Allah) Who has named you Muslims both before and in this (the Qur'an), that the Messenger (Muhammad) may be a witness over you and you be witnesses over mankind! So perform As-Salaat, give Zakaat and hold fast to Allah. He is your *Maula* (Patron, Lord, etc.), what an Excellent *Maula* (Patron, Lord, etc.) and what an Excellent Helper!**

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Let us return to the verse, 3:83, and the verses that come after;

**Do they seek other than the (Deen) religion of Allah (the true Islamic Monotheism worshipping none but Allah Alone), while to Him submitted all creatures in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly. And to Him shall they all be returned. [3:83]**

**Say (O Muhammad): "We believe in Allah and in what has been sent down to us, and what was sent down to Ibrahim (Abraham), Isma'il (Ishmael), Ishaq (Isaac), Ya'qoob (Jacob) and Al-Asbaat [the twelve sons of Ya'qoob (Jacob)] and what was given to Musa (Moses), 'Iesa (Jesus) and the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between one another among them and to Him (Allah) we have submitted (in Islam)." [3:84]**

**And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers. [3:85]**

The interpreter Ibn Katheer (d.774) says that Allah rebukes those who desire a deen other than the deen of Allah (Islam), that which He has sent down in the form of His books and that which He has sent His Messengers with, and it (Allah's Deen) is indeed the worship of Allah alone and not associating partners with Him, He who everything in the heavens and the Earth submits to. That is, submitting to him willingly or unwillingly. So the believer submits to Allah in his heart and his body and the kaafir submits unwillingly for indeed he is under Allah's power and great authority, that which is neither repelled nor disobeyed. [Tafseerul-Qur'anil-'Adheem Vol.2]

Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jareer at-Tabari (d.310) explains that this verse is directed at the People of the Scriptures (Jews and Christians) who desire other than to submit in Islam and that they desire other than the obedience to Allah when in fact everything in the Heavens and the Earth humble themselves to Him and has been subjected to obedience. He further explains that it is a warning to those who seek a religion other than Islam from amongst Jews, Christians and the rest of mankind that their return is to Allah after their deaths and they will be rewarded or punished according to the good or evil actions that they performed. And this is a severe warning from Allah, 'Azza wa Jall to His creation that every one of them will be returning to Him after their deaths and to be heedful of returning to him upon other than the way of Islam. [Jaami'ul-Bayaan Vol.2]

The interpreter, Muhammad ibn Ahmad Al-Qurtubi (d.671), elucidates the meaning of *wa lahu aslama*, (and to Him submits...);

'That is submission, humility, debasement and obedience and all of creation is created in this manner. It is because this is the innate nature of the creation and none has the ability to remove this from themselves. Qataadah states: The believer submits willingly and the kaafir, his submission is in the category of that which is beyond his will and upon his death, this will not benefit him.' [Al-Jaami' al-Ahkam al-Qur'an Vol.2]

This natural subjugation that all of creation is under is not the submission that earns the title of Muslim. Obviously Shaytaan, Fir'awn, Abu Jahl, Abu Lahab and other enemies of Allah are creations of Allah but can it be understood by anyone with a degree of understanding that they are Muslims? A Muslim is one who performs the acts of Islam as defined in the Sharee'ah. As The Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, stated;

*'Islam is to bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and the Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to offer the Salaat, to pay the Zakaat, fast during the month of Ramadhan and to make the Hajj if you are able and have the means to make the journey.'* [Muslim]

The 'ulamaa' have explained that the will of Allah is of two categories. As the Hanafee scholar, 'Alee ibn Abee-l-'Izz Al-Adhru'ee explains;

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'The knowledgeable from among Ahlus-Sunnah say: The will or decree in the Book of Allah is of two kinds; *Iraadatun Qadriyyatun Kowniyyatun Khalqiyyah* (The universal will of decree over all of creation) and *Iraadatun Deeniyyatun Amriyyatun Shar'iyyah* (The Legislative and Religious will).'

The Shaykh goes on to explain...

'Al-Kowniyyah (The Universal): It is the will or decree that is a characteristic of all that occurs and this is like what is found in the statement of Allah;

**And whomsoever Allah wills to guide, He opens his breast to Islam, and whomsoever He wills to send astray, He makes his breast closed and constricted, as if he is climbing up to the sky. Thus Allah puts the wrath on those who believe not. [6:125]**

And the Statement of Allah from Nooh ('Alayhi Salaam);

**"And my advice will not profit you, even if I wish to give you good counsel, if Allah's Will is to keep you astray. He is your Lord! and to Him you shall return." [11:34]**

And Allah's statement;

**...but Allah does what He likes. [2:253]**

Furthermore, *Iraadatun Deeniyyatun Amriyyatun Shar'iyyatun* (The Legislative and Religious will) pertains to the law and it is what ensures approval and rewards, like what is found in the statement of the Most High;

**...Allah intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things difficult for you. [2:185]**

And His Statement;

**Allah wishes to make clear (what is lawful and what is unlawful) to you, and to show you the ways of those before you, and accept your repentance, and Allah is All-Knower, All-Wise. Allah wishes to accept your repentance, but those who follow their lusts, wish that you (believers) should deviate tremendously away from the Right Path. [4:26-27]** [Sharh 'Aqeedah Tahaawiyah]

So the will that the creation submits to unwillingly is the *Kowniyyah* or Universal will of Allah, Most High. This is the category in which even Iblees, Fir'awn, and Abu Jahl all are under the decree of Allah for no one can repel this decree. This kind of submission does not garner the title 'Muslim' as defined in the sharee'ah. In contrast, the *Deeniyyah* or religious, legislative will of Allah is the will in which one willingly submits to and accepts the obligations put upon him by Allah as He has legislated by way of His Messengers and Books and this is the submission that earns the status of one who submits to the Religious and Legislative will of Allah, i.e., Islam and hence becomes a Muslim.

These people who claim that everyone is born Muslim also misrepresent ahadeeth of the Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam in which he said;

'Every child that is born is born upon *al-fitrah*. But it is his parents that make him Jew, Christian, or Magian.' [Agreed upon]

The Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, never said that every child is born upon Al-Islam. And how

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can every child be born upon Al-Islam, even if his parents are Hindu, Christians, etc? Does every child come out stating the testimony of faith or performing salaah? The Prophet, sallallahu'alayhi wa sallam, never said that every child is born a Muslim. He, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, stated the every child is born upon the *fitrah*, or the natural inclination toward that which is best, the greatest of which is Tawheed And even if this hadeeth was understood to mean that everyone is born Muslim, the last part of the hadeeth refutes the theory that everyone IS a Muslim because the Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, clearly stated that it is the parents that make them Jew, Christian, etc. How can one be a Muslim and a Christian at the same time? Did the Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, ever teach or understand that it was possible to be a Muslim and a Christian at the same time? Or a Mu'min and a Kaafir at the same time? Or a Muwahhid and a Mushrik at the same time? This concept is irreconcilable with Islam as defined in the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Let us refer to the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, to understand how he taught the distinction between those who enter into Islam and the rest of mankind. The Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, once stated that the Rights of a Muslim upon a Muslim are five.

'Returning the Salaams, visiting the sick, following the burial, accepting an invitation, and saying *yarhamukallah* (May Allah have mercy upon you) when he sneezes.' [Agreed Upon]

These are explicit instructions detailed by the Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, with regard to the Muslim's right upon another Muslim. It should go without saying that these distinctions are not meant for anyone except those who belong to the Ummah of Muhammad, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam. There would be no need to make the distinction if everyone was a 'Muslim'. Did the Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, ever follow the burial precession of a Jew? Do we shroud anyone who dies and give them a *janaaza*? Of course not. This is for those who say *Laa ilaaha illa-Allah, Muhammadur-Rasulullah*

Finally, let us look at a practical example of the way of the Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, viewed those who had not taken the shahadah

Narrated Anas (May Allah be pleased with him): A young Jewish boy who was in the service of Allah's Messenger, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, fell ill. Allah's Messenger, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, went to visit him. He sat down by his head and said to him, ' *Aslim*' (Submit, embrace Islam). The little boy looked at his father who was sitting beside him. He (his father) said: 'Obey Abul-Qaasim (the Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam).' So he *aslama* i.e., embraced Islam and Allah's Messenger, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, stepped out saying, "Praise be to Allah who has saved him from the Hell-fire.' [Al-Bukhari]

It is clear from this hadeeth and countless others that the Prophet, sallallahu'alayhiwa sallam, never confirmed or acknowledged anyone as a Muslim who had not actually professed their faith and accepted Islam as a religion. If everyone was a 'Muslim' or born 'Muslim', then why would it be necessary to tell this Jewish boy, *aslim*, submit, if he was naturally in a state of submission to the *Deeniyyah* will of Allah? Why would it be necessary to call anyone to Islam if they were already in a state of Islam? This is the reasoning behind this false claim. That da'wah to Allah is not necessary because everyone is 'naturally' a Muslim anyway, just not a 'believer'. As we have proven, Insha'Allah this claim is baseless and inherently flawed and is not found in any text from the Qur'an or the Sunnah, nor was it the understanding of the companions nor the people who followed them. May Allah protect us from this Fitnah,