

be our guide in this discussion. Both the Qur'an and the Sunnah were divinely inspired, and as such have no errors. These two great sources of knowledge should be our guide and criterion by which we live our life as righteous individuals aware of our accountability to God.

EIMAN (BELIEF)

Definition:

When the Angel of Revelation Jibreel (Gabriel) asked Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) about belief, Muhammad (PBUH) defined it as,

“Belief is to believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Last Day and to believe in Qadar (Fate), its good and its bad both from Allah.”

Narrated by Muslim

The Qur'an stresses that belief is not empty words, but must be confirmed with our behavior and by our character. The Qur'an refers to the believers as *“Those who believe and do good.”*

What Does Belief in God Entail?

Belief in Allah means that we believe that there is no god except the One God and it is He Who created us and Who cares for all His servants; He is our Creator and our Lord; and no one but God deserves to be worshipped or served. God has all the attributes of perfection as He described Himself and as His Messenger (PBUH) described Him.

Belief in God's Angels:

We cannot see Angels, they are creatures that are different from human beings, they are pure and sublime who obey God and serve Him performing various functions including the following:

- Delivering God's message to His Prophets.
- Recording our actions and sayings.
- They pray for seeking forgiveness on the behalf of those who believe.

- They praise God.
- They guard Heaven and Hell.
- They take our souls at the time of death.

Belief in God's divine Books:

God sent divine revelation to guide mankind to His straight way. These Books include:

- The Torah revealed to Prophet Moses
- The Gospel revealed to Prophet Jesus
- The Qur'an revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

Earlier divine revelation was altered by man, but the Qur'an was safeguarded from alteration because of a promise God made Himself; therefore, the Qur'an is our criterion of what is correct and it contains guidelines that direct us in our life.

Belief in God's Messengers:

Messengers were human beings chosen by God and prepared to deliver His message to their communities and people. They were human beings of high morals and noble character. They applied God's message to themselves and they lived their lives accordingly; therefore, they became examples for us to emulate. We learn from their character, from their patience, determination and wisdom. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was God's last messenger and as such was sent to all mankind. His message is applicable at all times.

Belief in the Day of Accountability:

After we die, we will be resurrected in order to stand judgment. We will have to account for all our deeds. Those who obeyed God and His messengers will be rewarded in Heaven. Those who rejected faith, disobeyed God and only following their vain desires will be punished in Hell. We enter Heaven not only by virtue of our good deeds, but by the mercy of God.

Our eternal life begins when we die. At that time, we are shown our

place in Heaven or Hell. The grave is the first stage of our Hereafter and it is where our reward or punishment will begin.

Belief in Fate:

Nothing happens without the will and decree of God for He knows what will occur in the future. Our job is to live our life as He commanded us and to accept our fate that He willed for us. We must be patient and persevere during adversity not losing hope, but work to change our fate to another fate that God may destine and will for us. We are grateful to God for His blessings, but understand that our money may be a test and a trial for us. We do not look at adversity as punishment but rather as a test from God.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BELIEF AND ISLAM

A person may submit to God in Islam but may not have a solid or firm belief, and when tested he may relinquish his belief in God. Belief in God means submitting to His orders and accepting His will; therefore, every believer is a Muslim. Alternately, the reverse may not be true; not every Muslim is necessarily a believer. The Qur'an explains,

﴿ قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ ءَأَمْنَا قُل لَّمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَكِنْ قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَإِنْ تُطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ لَا يَلِتْكُمْ مِنْ أَعْمَالِكُمْ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴾

[الحجرات: ١٤]

"The desert Arabs say, "We believe". Say, "Ye, have no Faith, but ye (only) say, 'We have submitted our wills to Allah, 'for not yet has Faith entered your hearts. But if ye obey Allah and His Messenger, He will not belittle any of your deeds: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful" (Al-Hujerat 49 : 14)

We learn from this Qur'anic verse that belief has to take root in our hearts before we are true believers. Shaky belief will be severely tested whenever we are subjected to tests and trials.

Belief and Islam in many cases coexist and are synonymous, complementing one another. Belief also denotes piety or righteousness.

WHO ARE THE BEST OF BELIEVERS ?

If we believe in God and obey His orders and take His messenger as our example then our behavior and character will improve. The more we believe in God, the better we become as human beings. We acknowledge God's blessings by thanking Him by helping others who need our help; therefore, we become humble, caring and forgiving. We do not lie or cheat others rather we are honest and sincere. This meaning was explained by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when he said,

"The best among the believers and those utmost in belief are those who are best and most noble in character."

Narrated by Termedhi, Abou Dawood and Ahmad

BELIEF IMPLIES GOOD DEEDS AND NOBLE CHARACTER

Belief is not empty words that we utter rather it is righteous behavior and a noble character that truly confirm what we believe. The Qur'an tells us that we are going to be tested and tried until our true nature emerges.

﴿ أَحْسَبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ ﴾ [العنكبوت: ٢]

"Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, "We believe" and that they will not be tested?" (Al-Ankabut 29 : 2)

﴿ وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكٰذِبِينَ ﴾

[العنكبوت: ٣]

"We did test those before them, and Allah will certainly know those who are true from those who are false" (Al-Ankabut 29 : 3)

We should learn from our tests and trials and advance morally and spiritually. This improved belief and better understanding of our responsibility and duty should be reflected in our behavior towards others.

We serve God by helping those among His servants who need our help. We also exhibit our firm belief in God in our character and in how we turn to God. The Qur'an emphasizes that true belief is-not just rituals of worship, but more importantly, it is proper behavior under duress and good character.

﴿ لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَءَاتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ﴾ [البقرة: ١٧٧]

"It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practise regular charity, to fulfil the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing"

(Al-Baqara 2 : 177)

This Qur'anic verse describes ten characteristics that define those who believe, those who are truthful, and those who are righteous. These characteristics are:

1. Belief in God
2. Belief that we are indeed accountable to God
3. Belief in God's angels
4. Belief in God's divine revelation, His Book, the Qur'an
5. Belief in God's messengers by following their orders and their example

6. To help the poor and needy and those related to us and those who need our help and to spend our money in charitable causes. This money was provided to us by God, and spending it in His cause confirms our belief in Him.
7. To establish regular prayer, thus celebrating God's praises and becoming close to Him and receiving His guidance and blessings.
8. To give regular charity, for it is our duty and obligation to help others and to establish social justice. Charity has been repeated twice in this verse to emphasize the importance of giving and helping others.
9. To fulfill our contracts and to be faithful to our promises. Trust must be gained by honesty and fulfilling our trusts.
10. To be patient and persevere in all types of difficulty and adversity, not losing hope of God's mercy or rejecting faith because we are being subjected to tests and trials.

It should be noted that these qualities are those of the true and righteous servants of God and it is they who are the true believers. In other words to deserve to be considered a true believer, we must exhibit these qualities and we must be truthful and sincere. Doing these deeds confirm that we are indeed righteous and pious and that we understand our duty towards God and our accountability to Him.

How we live our life determines whether we believe in God and understand our accountability to Him, or whether we reject faith. If we live our life following God's orders and behave in a truthful righteous manner, then we are indeed true believers. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained this concept when he was asked by a man, "*O messenger of Allah, tell me about Islam a saying that I have no need to ask anyone after you!*" He said,

Say, 'I believe in Allah, and straighten your affairs.

Narrated by Muslim

What the Prophet (PBUH) was referring to as **Istiqama** (living our life straight and upright) denotes that our belief did in fact influence our behavior and character. This is further explained in the Qur'an:

﴿ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ﴾ [فصلت: ٣٠]

"In the case of those who say, "Our Lord is Allah," and, further, stand straight and steadfast, the angels descend on them (from time to time): "Fear ye not!" (they suggest), "Nor grieve! but receive the Glad Tidings of the Garden (of Bliss), that which ye were promised!" (Fusselat 41 : 30)

In other words, the realization that Allah is our Lord and that He knows what we are doing implies that we understand our accountability to Him. That understanding should dictate our behavior and how we deal and interact with others, helping those who need our help; being kind, forgiving and merciful; being honest and sincere; doing our work to the best of our ability; fulfilling our promises; being patient, persevering and constant; and loving for others what we love for ourselves. If we have this degree and this kind of Eiman (belief) then indeed we believe in Allah.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us that someone who believes in Allah must not be vulgar, backbite or commit shameful deeds:

Abdullah bin Masoud (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

“A believer is not the one who back-bites or curses others; neither is he vulgar in speech or does he use bad language.”

Narrated by Termedhi, Ahmad and Hakim

Emphasizing the importance of good character and righteous behavior, the Prophet (PBUH) also said,

Abou Ad-Darda'a (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

“There is nothing that carries more weight in the scale of a believer on the Day of Judgment than a good and noble character; for Allah dislikes the one who is vulgar in speech and shameful in deeds.”

Narrated by Termedhi and Abou Dawood

BELIEF IMPLIES PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE

Allah told us in the Qur'an that we are going to be tested and tried.

The nature and degree of the test varies from one person to another. We should understand that being tested and tried is the norm; and that we should learn, improving ourselves and becoming committed. The test and trial is intended to purify our souls and improve our character and behavior. The Qur'an states,

﴿وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ حَتَّىٰ نَعْلَمَ الْمُجْتَهِدِينَ مِنكُمُ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَنَبْلُوا أَخْبَارَكُمْ﴾ [عمد: ٣١]

"And We shall try you until We test those among you who strive their utmost and persevere in patience; and We shall try your reported (mettle)" (Muhammad 47 : 31)

We should not look at our tests and trials as unfair or as a punishment; rather it is our opportunity to show our belief in God by exhibiting patience and increasing our faith. We also earn rewards and our sins are remitted if we are true in the face of adversity and do not reject faith. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained this concept,

Abou Horaira and Abi Sa'eed (May Allah be pleased with both of them) related that the messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

"Whatever afflicts the believer of pain and suffering, tiredness, illness, sorrow, even worrying about something, till Allah remits by it some of his sins."

Narrated by Bokhari and Muslim

Not everyone is capable of exhibiting this degree of belief. Only those who are true believers are capable of being patient during adverse situations, yet humble and thankful to God when they are enjoying His blessings. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said,

Sohaib (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

"I wonder for the affairs of the believer, all his affair is good for him. This fate belongs only to the believer; if he is experiencing a blessing, he is grateful to Allah and it is good for him and counts in his favor; and if he is experiencing an adversity or difficulty, he is patient and perseveres, and it is good for him and counts in his favor."

Narrated by Muslim

BELIEF IMPLIES ACCEPTING GOD'S WILL

It is the realization that all our affairs are controlled by God; therefore, our duty is to be humble and avoid arrogance for our success was willed by God and our efforts could have easily failed! The difficulty we are experiencing is willed by God and He knows what we are going through. If we are patient and not loose faith in Him, then He will reward us; however, if we reject faith and show how shallow our belief in Him is, then we do not deserve His blessing or His help.

The essential elements of our belief in fate include the following:

1. Nothing happens without the knowledge and permission of God.
2. Allah is just and He will not place a burden on any soul more than it can bear.
3. There is a reason behind Allah's fate and decree, for He knows what is good for us, and we may not.
4. Whatever good Allah has destined for us, no one can prevent it from reaching us; similarly whatever adversity or difficulty Allah wills for us, no one but Allah can protect us from such fate.

The Qur'an explains that no one has control over our fate, not the good or the bad except for Allah!

﴿ وَإِنْ يَمَسَّكَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُ إِلَّا هُوَ ۗ وَإِنْ يُرِدْكَ بِخَيْرٍ فَلَا رَادَّ لِفَضْلِهِ ۗ يُصِيبُ بِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ ۗ وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴾ [يونس: ١٠٧]

"If Allah do touch thee with hurt, there is none can remove it but He: if He do design some benefit for thee, there is none can keep back His favour: He causes it to reach whomsoever of His servants He pleases. And He is the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful"

(Yunus 10 : 107)

If we believe that no one can harm us except as God wills, then we are not worried, afraid or apprehensive of what the future may bring. We have done our duty and we trust God's judgment. If we are in difficulty, God knows about it, and we do the best that we can. At the same time, we are certain that if God wills something good for us, it will happen and no one can cheat us out of it. This way we are not sorry or sad because good things may have passed us by or we may not have received what we worked so hard to achieve for it was just not meant to be.

﴿ مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴾ [الحديد: ٢٢]

"No misfortune can happen on earth or in your souls but is recorded in a decree before We bring it into existence: that is truly easy for Allah:" (Al-Hadeed 57 : 22)

﴿ لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَىٰ مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ ﴾ [الحديد: ٢٣]

"In order that ye may not despair over matters that pass you by, nor exult over favors bestowed upon you. For Allah loves not any vainglorious boaster," (Al-Hadeed 57 : 23)

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) further explained this concept of firm belief in Qadar (Fate) as follows:

Ebada bin As-Samit (May Allah be pleased with him) related that he said to his son, *O my son you will not find the true nature and sweetness of belief until you know that what afflicted you was not about to miss you; and what missed you was not about to afflict you.*" I have heard the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) say:

"The first thing that Allah created was the pen. He said to it, 'Write' The pen said, 'O Lord ! What should I write?' He said, 'Write the fate and destiny of everything till the time of the Hour.' O my son ! I have heard the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) say, 'Whoever dies not believing in this, he does not belong to me and is not following me.'"

Narrated by Abou Dawood, Termedhi and Ahmad

We learn from this **Hadith** (saying of the Prophet) that everything is known to God, whatever we do or will do, whatever happened in the past or is happening now or will happen in the future. His knowledge encompasses everything. He knows what we will do before we know it and before we embark on our deeds; however, we are only accountable after we do something, not before our actions are done.

It does not serve any purpose to say, “If I only did this ! then things would have been different.” This only causes remorse and sorrow and does not change the facts. Regrets do not help. This concept is explained by the Prophet’s (PBUH) saying:

Abi Horaira (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

“The believer who is strong is better and more beloved to Allah than the believer who is weak ; there is good in both of them. Be careful and do what is good for you and seek help in Allah, but do not panic. If you experience some difficulty do not say, ‘ If I only did this, things would have been different,’ but say, ‘ Whatever Allah willed came to pass, and whatever He decrees happens,” because ‘ If’ opens the door for Satan and his evil work.”

Narrated by Muslim

Our duty in believing in Qadar is to understand and accept that Allah knows what is best for us and to accept His will, our Fate. We should not question His Judgment rather we should accept it with a good heart. We should work and struggle to change our fate to another fate that God may will for us.

BELIEF IMPLIES OBEDIENCE

If we believe that Allah is our Lord and that He has full control, then we must obey His orders as well as the orders of His Messenger (PBUH). If we disobey Allah’s orders and follow our own whims and desires, then we have rejected Allah as our Lord and Master.

The Qur’an explains that true belief means loving Allah for all His blessings, hence following and obeying His orders. Since Prophet Muhammad brought us Allah’s message and explained to us how we use the Qur’an in our life, then we should obey the orders of the Prophet (PBUH) as God’s messenger.

﴿ قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ

رَحِيمٌ ﴾ [آل عمران: ٣١]

"Say: If ye 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)

Following the Prophet's orders without hesitation or arguments is a criterion of true belief.

﴿ فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا ﴾ [النساء: ٦٥]

"But no, by Your Lord, they can have no (real) Faith, until they make thee judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance against thy decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction" (An-Nesa'a 4 : 65).

Many times we may not like an order from God or His Messenger (PBUH), and we try to find excuses to justify not obeying that order. Such an excuse may be that the order is not relevant anymore, or is difficult to apply under our current situation, or what is important is the spirit not the application. They are all excuses to avoid, for we know what we are supposed to do and follow. If we have complete and true faith then we would not hesitate or argue about such an order.

The fact of the matter is that we really have no choice or options except to obey the Divine order for if we disobey we cannot claim the status of believers and we lose guidance.

﴿ وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا لِمُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَىٰ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ ۗ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلًّا مُّبِينًا ﴾ [الأحزاب: ٣٦]

"It is not fitting for a Believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Messenger to have any option about their decision: if anyone disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he is indeed on a clearly wrong Path" (Al-Ahزاب 33 : 36)

What the messenger of Allah is inviting us to do is correct and allows us to gain moral and spiritual life as well as to gain the pleasure of Allah.

﴿ يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ ۗ وَاعْلَمُوا
 أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ ۗ وَأَنَّهُ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ ﴾ [الأنفال: ٢٤]

"O ye who believe! give your response to Allah and His Messenger, when He calls you to that which will give you life; and know that Allah comes in between a man and his heart, and that it is He to Whom ye shall (all) be gathered" (Al-Anfal 8 : 24).

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was a blessing and a mercy from Allah to all mankind, most particularly to the believers. He was given the Qur'an as a mercy and guidance, and he explained the Qur'an, applied its principles in his life; therefore, he became an example to follow in his proper behavior and noble character. If we follow his example and his noble character then we will be closer to Allah and receive His guidance. This is why as believers we love Allah's Prophet (PBUH) so much. We love him more than anything else, or as Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said,

Anas bin Malik (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Prophet (PBUH) said,

"None of you will truly believe until I become more beloved to him than his father and children and all mankind."

Narrated by Bokhari and Muslim

When we firmly believe in Allah and accept Him as our Lord obeying His orders, and accepting Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as Allah's Messenger obeying his orders, then we will be able to appreciate and feel the effect of true belief in our hearts. Such firm belief will be able to withstand all manner of tests and trials. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said,

Al-Abbas bin Abdul-Muttalib (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

"He who accepts and is content with Allah as His lord, and Islam as his religion, and Muhammad as his Apostle, indeed will taste and feel the sweet effect of belief."

Narrated by Muslim

BELIEF IMPLIES HELPING OTHERS

If we believe in Allah and understand our accountability to Him and appreciate His blessings then we must feel a special bond with others who share our belief. They are our brothers and sisters, and the bond of belief that unites us is much stronger than kinship or blood relationships. Allah described in the Qur'an that the believers care for each other and support one another. They do what is right and avoid what is wrong and they obey Allah and His Messenger (PBUH).

﴿ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴾ [التوبة: ٧١]

"The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His Mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise" (At-Tawba 9 : 71).

They receive God's mercy, not just because of their good deeds but because of their joint effort and working together.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) gave the example of how strong the relationship between the believers as a building with each part of the building reinforcing the other part,

Abi Musa (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

"The relationship between the believer and other believers is that of a building, each part of the building reinforcing the other part, then he put his fingers inside each other."

Narrated by Bokhari and Muslim

Not to harm others is the least that a Muslim can do. To be trusted by others because of our deeds and character is a step higher. To set an example for others by avoiding sin and shameful deeds is to play an active role; to strive in the way of Allah with our persons and goods is

the highest degree of belief and the best example we can set. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said,

Fudala bin Obaid (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

“I will tell you who is a Muslim. He is the one who other Muslims fear no harm from his tongue or hand; the believer is he who other people trust him with their possessions and persons; and the immigrant is he who immigrates from wrong deeds and sin; and the one who strives in Jihad is he who strives to control his desires in obeying Allah.”

Narrated by Ibn Mindah, Haithami, Bazzar and Tabarani

An even higher degree of Eiman (belief) is to love for our brothers what we love and cherish for ourselves.

Anas bin Malik (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

“None of you will believe until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.”

Narrated by Bokhari and Muslim

This means that we have indeed liberated our souls from greed and that we are willing to give other people what we truly love and desire for ourselves. This high status can be reached only by a few who understand that genuine love and true brotherhood is more important than material possessions. They are looking for something more rewarding than selfish pleasures. They are looking for Allah and His pleasure. They love their brothers because they love Allah. They love them for the sake of Allah, not expecting a reward from them or appreciation. As Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated,

Anas Bin Malik (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

“Three traits whoever has them will surely find the sweet effect of belief, who loves Allah and His messenger more than anyone else; who loves a servant of Allah for no reason except that he loves Allah; and who hates to return to unbelief after Allah has saved him, in the same way that he hates to be thrown in Hell Fire.”

Narrated by Bokhari and Muslim

When we love one another and help each other, we gain the pleasure of Allah and we are rewarded by His Paradise. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said,

Abi Horaira (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

“By the One holding my soul in His hand, you will not enter paradise till you believe; and you will not believe until you love each other. Shall I tell you something that will enable you to love one another if you do it? Spread greetings among yourselves.”

Narrated by Muslim

In this Hadith, the Prophet (PBUH) was emphasizing that a criterion of belief is to love our brothers and sisters. When we see each other, the first thing to do is to greet one another and be cordial. This is a step in knowing one another and working together trusting each other. Unless we do this we cannot claim true belief. We must confirm our belief in Allah by our behavior and by being good toward our Muslim brothers and extending a helping hand.

A good place to start is to be good to our neighbors. Those who live close to us have certain rights over us, the least of which is not to harm them, but to be friendly and helpful. Unless we behave in such a righteous way, we cannot claim true belief nor will be able to enter heaven. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

Abi Horaira (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

“The one whose neighbor is afraid of his harm will not enter paradise.”

Narrated by Muslim

Our neighbors are those who live close to us, who work with us, and those with whom we pray. Of course those who live with us under the same roof are even closer neighbors and have more rights over us than our other neighbors.

BENEFITS AND REWARDS OF BELIEF

There are numerous benefits and rewards for true belief in Allah. We can summarize some of these as follows:

1. Belief makes us happy and content, more likely to accept our tests and trials and to accept our fate as what Allah has willed for us.
2. Sincere belief in Allah is essential before our deeds are accepted and rewarded.
3. Our hearts and souls are purified from greed and evil when we love for others what we love and desire for ourselves.
4. Solid belief allows us to obey Allah and His messenger since we understand that their orders guide us and give our life meaning and purpose.
5. Belief in Allah is rewarded both in this life as well as in the Hereafter.
6. When we believe in Allah and follow His orders living our life as He commanded us to do, we receive His blessings and are rewarded by His forgiveness and mercy. We are guided to His way.
7. We are protected from the evil influence of Satan.
8. We are protected from the suffering of the grave.
9. We are delivered from Hell Fire and its punishment and enjoy eternal bliss in paradise.

We are going to stress two aspects of the reward that Allah promised the believers:

- ♦ His reward both in this life as well as in the Hereafter
- ♦ Protection from the suffering of the grave

BELIEF IS REWARDED BOTH IN THIS LIFE AND THE HEREAFTER

The Qur'an stresses that those who believe and confirm their belief by their deeds will be rewarded twice:

- ♦ They will live a good life.
- ♦ And will be rewarded according to the best of their deeds.

﴿ مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً ۖ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴾ [النحل: ٩٧]

"Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has Faith, verily, to him will We give a new Life, a life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions" (An-Nahl 16 : 97)

Not only will Allah reward the righteous according to their best deeds but He will forgive their minor sins and shortcomings. We are afforded many opportunities to avail ourselves of God's forgiveness. When we pray or fast or give charity our sins are forgiven. When we help others and when we make a difference in the life of those with whom we come in contact, our mistakes are forgiven. When we invite others to God through our good example and proper behavior we gain God's forgiveness and His mercy. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained that fasting and prayer when done with devotion and sincerity is rewarded with forgiveness of our sins.

Abou Horaira (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

"Whoever fasts Ramadan with full belief seeking his reward only from Allah the sins that he committed before will be forgiven; and whoever stands up in prayer seeking Allah's blessings on the night of power, praying with full conviction and seeking his reward only from Allah, his previous sins will be forgiven."

Narrated by Bokhari and Muslim

In contrast to the believer who receives his reward both in this life and the Hereafter, the unbeliever receives the reward of his good deeds only in this life. His state of unbelief deprives him and nullifies his reward in the Hereafter. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained,

Anas Bin Malik (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

"Allah never wrongs the believer for he is rewarded for all the good deeds that he performs in this life as well as in the Hereafter. As for the

unbeliever, he is fed according to his good deeds in this life, but he will find no good deeds to benefit him during his accountability in the Hereafter.”

Narrated by Muslim

OUR BELIEF PROTECTS US FROM THE SUFFERING IN THE GRAVE

Every person will be questioned in his grave about his faith. Those who believe will be able to respond and answer correctly avoiding suffering in their graves. Those who have no faith or conviction will not be able to lie and will suffer for their rejection of faith. Allah strengthens the believers during their questioning by the angels. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained what would occur in the grave.

Al-Bara'a Bin Azeb (May Allah be pleased with him) related that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said,

“Seek Allah’s protection from the suffering of the grave two or three times. Indeed the deceased can hear the footsteps of those accompanying him to his grave. As they leave, he will be asked, Who is your Lord? What is your religion? Who is your Prophet?” In another narration he said, “The two angels will come and seat him and will question him. Who is your Lord?” He will say, “my Lord is Allah.” They will ask him, “What is your religion? He will say my religion is Islam.’ They will ask him, “Who is this man who was sent to you?” He will say, “He is the Messenger of Allah.” They will ask, “How do you know that?” He will say, “I have read the Book of Allah and I believed in him and bore witness to his truth.”

Narrated by Abou Dawood, Bokhari and Muslim

In another narration, the Prophet (PBUH) said,

The Qur’anic verse Ibrahim 14:27, this verse was revealed concerning the suffering of the grave. It will be said (to every one), “*Who is your Lord?*” He will say, “My Lord is Allah, and my prophet is Muhammad (PBUH).”

Narrated by Bokhari and Muslim

﴿ يُثَبِّتُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا بِالْقَوْلِ الثَّابِتِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ وَيُضِلُّ
اللَّهُ الظَّالِمِينَ ۗ وَيَفْعَلُ اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ ﴾ [إبراهيم: ٢٧]

"Allah will establish in strength those who believe, with the Word that stands firm, in this world and in the Hereafter; but Allah will leave, to stray, those who do wrong: Allah does what He wiles"
(Ibrahim 14 : 27)

In other traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), it is related that the believer's grave will be lighted and he will be able to see his place in heaven. In contrast, the unbeliever's grave will be dark and constricted, and he will see his place in Hell Fire.