



Synopsis of Friday Sermon

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IONA
REPENTANCE
REVITALIZATION OF FAITH
RENEWAL OF COVENANT

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

From Islām to Īmān to Iḥsān: The Journey of Faith

لَيْسَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جُنَاحٌ فِيمَا طَعَمُوا إِذَا مَا اتَّقَوْا وَءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ

ثُمَّ اتَّقَوْا وَءَامَنُوا ثُمَّ اتَّقَوْا وَأَحْسِنُوا ۗ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ (٩٣)

“There is no blame upon those who believe and do righteous deeds for what they have consumed, so long as they have taqwā and believe and do righteous deeds, then have taqwā and believe, then have taqwā and excel (iḥsān). And Allah loves the doers of excellence.” [al-Mā'idah, 5:93]

Al-ḥamdu lillāh, we praise Him, we seek His help and His forgiveness. We bear witness that there is no god but Allah alone, and that Muhammad (ﷺ) is His servant and Messenger.

Allah (SWT) sets before us a profound spiritual progression in the Qur'an. He says: *“There is no blame upon those who believe and do righteous deeds for what they have consumed, so long as they have taqwā and believe and do righteous deeds, then have taqwā and believe, then have taqwā and excel (iḥsān). And Allah loves the doers of excellence.” [al-Mā'idah, 5:93]*

This āyah is not merely addressing a legal matter; it is mapping the inner ascent of the believer. It indicates that faith unfolds in stages, deepening through taqwā until it reaches the station of iḥsān. From this and from the Sunnah, the scholars have identified three interconnected levels that constitute the essence of the religion: Islām, Īmān, and Iḥsān, known collectively as Marātib al-Dīn, the levels of faith.

The structure of these levels was most clearly articulated in the famous narration of Umar ibn al-Khattab (RAA), in which a man of striking appearance approached the Prophet (ﷺ) in the presence of his companions. His clothes were intensely white, his hair intensely black, and there were no signs of travel upon him, yet no one recognized him. He sat before the Prophet (ﷺ) with a posture of deep attentiveness and began to ask a series of questions: “Tell me about Islām. Tell me about Īmān. Tell me about Iḥsān.” After each answer, he affirmed, “You have spoken the truth,” leaving the companions astonished. When he departed, the Prophet (ﷺ) informed them that this was Jibril (Gabriel), who had come to teach them their religion. This ḥadīth¹ serves as a comprehensive framework, organizing the entire dīn into outward practice, inward belief, and spiritual excellence.

Islām, as defined by the Prophet (ﷺ), is the outward submission expressed through the actions of the limbs. It begins with

1. Umar ibn al-Khattab (RAA) said: *While we were sitting with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) one day, a man appeared before us. His clothes were exceedingly white, and his hair was exceedingly black. There were no signs of travel upon him, and none of us recognized him. He came and sat before the Prophet (ﷺ), placing his knees against his knees and putting his hands on his thighs, and said: “O Muhammad, inform me about Islām.” The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: “Islām is that you testify that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; that you establish the prayer, give zakāh, fast Ramaḍān, and perform ḥajj to the House if you are able to do so.” He said, “You have spoken the truth.” We were astonished that he would ask him and then affirm him. Then he said: “Inform me about Īmān.” He said: “That you believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Last Day, and that you believe in divine decree, its good and its bad.” He said, “You have spoken the truth.” Then he said: “Inform me about Iḥsān.” He said: “That you worship Allah as though you see Him; and if you do not see Him, then indeed He sees you.” Then he said: “Inform me about the Hour.” He said: “The one who is being asked knows no more about it than the one asking.” Then he said: “Inform me about its signs.” He said: “That the slave woman will give birth to her mistress, and that you will see the barefoot, naked, destitute shepherds competing in constructing tall buildings.” Then he departed. I remained for a while, then the Prophet (ﷺ) said: “O Umar, do you know who the questioner was?” I said: “Allah and His Messenger know best.” He said: “That was Jibril (Gabriel). He came to teach you your religion.” (Reported by Muslim)*

the testimony of faith, the *shahādātān*, by which one affirms that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Muḥammad (ﷺ) is His Messenger. This declaration encapsulates the essence of *tawḥīd*, negating all false objects of devotion and affirming the exclusive right of Allah (SWT) to be worshipped. It is followed by the foundational acts of worship: establishing the prayer, giving zakāh, fasting in Ramaḍān, and performing ḥajj for those able to do so. These acts are not mere rituals; they structure the life of the believer and cultivate discipline, gratitude, and dependence upon Allah (SWT). Prayer, in particular, is a continual connection to the Divine, as Allah says:

إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدْنِي وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي ١٤

“Indeed, I am Allah. There is no deity except Me, so worship Me and establish prayer for My remembrance.” [Tā Hā, 20:14]

Through these practices, a person enters the fold of Islām and begins the journey of faith.

Yet outward submission alone does not exhaust the meaning of faith. Beneath the actions lies *Īmān*, the inward reality that gives those actions life. The Prophet (ﷺ) defined *Īmān* as belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Last Day, and divine decree in both its good and its bad. *Īmān* is not simply an intellectual assent; it is a settled conviction in the heart, a certainty that shapes perception and conduct. At the outward level, a Muslim is treated as a believer by virtue of professing these beliefs. However, the Qur’an itself distinguishes between mere submission and true internalized faith. Allah (SWT) says:

قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ ءَأَمَنَّا فُلَ لَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَكِنْ قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ ٥

“The Bedouin Arabs say, ‘We believe.’ Say, ‘You have not (yet) believed; rather say, ‘We have submitted,’ for *Īmān* has not yet entered your hearts...” [al-Ḥujurāt, 49:14]

This āyah establishes that Islām can exist without the fullness of *Īmān*. A person may conform outwardly while the heart has yet to be transformed. Nevertheless, such individuals remain within the fold of Islām, indicating that belonging to the community is based on outward submission, while the perfection of faith requires inward realization.

For this reason, the scholars have defined *Īmān* as encompassing the entire human being: conviction in the heart, testimony on the tongue, and confirmation through actions. It is dynamic, increasing with obedience and decreasing with sin. It is the light that animates the body of Islām, transforming ritual into meaning and habit into devotion. Without *Īmān*, acts of worship risk becoming hollow forms; with it, even the smallest deed acquires immense spiritual weight.

Beyond *Īmān* lies the highest station: *Iḥsān*. When asked about it, the Prophet (ﷺ) replied: “That you worship Allah as though you see Him; and if you do not see Him, then indeed He sees you.” *Iḥsān* represents the perfection of faith, where awareness of Allah (SWT) becomes so intense that it shapes every moment of one’s life. It is not a physical seeing, but a witnessing of the heart, a state in which the unseen becomes vividly present. The believer’s certainty in Allah’s existence, His oneness, and His attributes becomes so profound that it is as if they are in His presence. And even if one cannot reach that level, the consciousness that Allah (SWT) sees all is sufficient to transform behavior, purify intentions, and elevate actions. In this state, prayer is no longer a duty alone but a meeting, an intimate encounter; obedience becomes an expression of love; and life itself becomes an act of worship. *Iḥsān* is, in essence, the station where the unseen becomes more real than the seen, and the gaze of Allah (SWT) outweighs the gaze of creation.

These three levels, Islām, *Īmān*, and *Iḥsān*, are not separate domains but integrated dimensions of a single reality. Islām corresponds to the outward form, *Īmān* to the inward substance, and *Iḥsān* to the spiritual perfection that unites them. One may begin with Islām, deepen into *Īmān*, and strive toward *Iḥsān*, but all three remain interconnected. The journey of the believer can thus be understood as a movement from obligation to conviction, and from conviction to love: one prays first because one must, then because one believes, and ultimately because one loves.

What propels this ascent is *taqwā*, a comprehensive awareness of Allah (SWT) that governs both inner and outer life. The āyah from Sūrah al-Mā’idah emphasizes *taqwā* repeatedly, indicating that it is the force that carries the believer from one level to the next.

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“There is no blame upon those who believe and do righteous deeds for what they have consumed, so long as they have *taqwā* and believe and do righteous deeds (Islām), then have (more) *taqwā* and believe (*Īmān*), then have (even more) *taqwā* and excel (*iḥsān*). And Allah loves the doers of excellence.” [al-Mā’idah, 5:93]

Taqwā begins as restraint, a guarding against sin; it matures into awareness, a constant consciousness of Allah’s

presence; and it culminates in presence, a state of nearness that defines Iḥsān. It is nurtured through truthfulness with Allah (SWT), through knowledge of His names and attributes, through constant remembrance, through striving against the soul, the “lower” or “baser” self (the ego-driven, conditioned, and instinctual aspect of human nature) through love of Allah (SWT), and through reflection on the Hereafter. In this sense, taqwā is both the path and the destination. It initiates the journey and accompanies the believer until its completion.

In conclusion, the ḥadīth of Jibrīl presents Islām not as a static set of doctrines or rituals, but as a dynamic path of transformation. It begins with outward submission, deepens into inward certainty, and culminates in spiritual excellence. The believer is called not to remain at the level of form, but to ascend continually, seeking a faith that is alive in the heart and manifest in every aspect of life. Truthfulness awakens this journey, knowledge guides it, remembrance sustains it, struggle disciplines it, and love elevates it, until the servant reaches the station of Iḥsān.

We ask Allah (SWT) to make us among those who submit to Him outwardly and inwardly, to grant us true Īmān that settles firmly in our hearts, and to elevate us to the Iḥsān. O Allah, fill our hearts with taqwā, purify our souls, and make us among the truthful. O Allah, make us worship You with sincerity and presence, and grant us a good ending. Āmīn.

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