

# What it means to be a Muslim:

The Prophet (SAW) defined the vision and mission for Muslims in very simple terms. He instructed us to “submit to the Will of Allah”, which He relayed in the Quran. If this statement is broken down into its constituent parts, it can be interpreted “as a vision component (future) “to achieve the Grace of Allah,” and the mission component (present)” how to live a life.” The Prophet then transformed the whole nation of “Jahilliya” (ignorant) by establishing the mission of each and every Muslim who believed in this vision.” Without this clarity of vision we do not have a mission and without the clarity of mission we cannot achieve our destination (vision).

When we say Islam means “Submission to the Will of Allah” and Muslim is the one “who submits to the Will of Allah”, we mistakenly rolled the vision and mission statement into one. The vision statement defines the ultimate goal. The mission statement is the action plan on how to achieve the ultimate goal.

This confusion stems not only from a lack of clear understanding, but also from the connotations of the word “submit.” At the time of Prophet (SAW) the word “submit” was understood in a cultural context where the concept of authority was essential to individuals and clan survival. But in today’s world, wives do not submit to husbands, children do not submit to parents and men do not submit to authority except when it provides material well-being. The word “submit” is now disconnected from any concept of modern daily life especially for Muslim youth. In today’s context, submission confers a wholly negative connotation. This is incredibly unfortunate, because the Prophets were all sent to unleash human potential.

In today’s world defining Islam solely as “submission to the Will of Allah’ HAS LED many scholars to interpret Islam into narrow areas of rules and regulations that govern our life. In the Quran there are extensive numbers of do’s and don’ts. In addition, the tradition of the Prophet (SAW) have further defined the permissible (Halal) and prohibited (Haram). Many of these range from the very minute aspects of individual life to larger issues of community and conduct in war. These rules and regulations and their interpretations have now formed the codification of modern Islam’s sectarianism rather than the representation of Allah’s Will.

Unfortunately defining Islam as “submission” has become part of the folklore of Islam. The dictionary defines “submission” as “to yield to governance or authority.” When other men in the name of religion usurp this authority, it creates a slippery slope that violates first dictum of the Shahadah, “there is no God but the one God.” The constant drum beat of “submission” also has a profound effect on human mind, facilitating the subjugation of your God given intelligence to the will of other humans, especially reflected by the treatment of women in “Islamic communities”. This loss of human spirit is contrary to the liberation Islam came to bring.

So how we redefine the word “submit” so that it gives meaning and clarity to the truest purpose of Islam?

So what is the definition of a Muslim (Mission statement of a Muslim)? It should be:

**A Muslim is the one who is best possible human being in the service of Allah**

Quran has used the word “Abd” (servant/slave) to define who we are as a people. It is as a servant of Allah that we will attain His Mercy (vision). The Quran repeatedly used the word “righteous”(salaheen) in 31 verses to define those who Allah considers to be His slaves. Righteousness therefore is the operational word for Muslim’s mission. To be truly righteous we have to become” the best possible human being in the service of Allah.”

This mission statement “to be the best possible human being in the service of Allah” distills the whole essence of what it means to be a Muslim. This definition also servers two basic requirement, to fulfill rights of Allah (Haqooq Allah) and rights of fellow human beings (Haqooq ul Ibad) . If we are in the service of Allah, we are trying to fulfill His rights (although we can never ever fulfill rights of Allah no matter what we do, but at least trying) and if we are trying to be the best human beings we are also trying to fulfill rights of others (parents, family, neighbors, employees, employers, community etc and other creations).

Allah has appointed us as His viceroy on Earth [Quran 6/165 ] and tasked us to represent Him as embodied in His 99 attributes. Our challenge is to represent Him to the best of our human abilities in embodying these attributes. Therefore, to be the best possible human beings in the service of Allah, we have to strive for excellence in our love for Allah and the Prophet (SAW). We have to strive for excellence in knowledge of Quran and Sunnah. We have to strive for excellence in our worship. We have to strive for excellence in our relationship with our family. We have to strive for excellence in acquisition of knowledge about the world around us. We have to strive for excellence in support of our community. We have to strive for excellence in our professions. We have to strive for excellence in our service to fellow men. We have to strive for excellence in protecting all of nature around us. Then and only then only can we say that we are discharging our responsibilities according to the Will of Allah and claim to be “ the best community raised up for mankind” as mentioned in [Quran 3/110].

Imagine the impact on young mind if they grow up with the mindset that they are required to be best in each and every one of these endeavors. It is easy to understand and everyone can relate it to all aspects of their lives. This also creates an active purposeful framework for life. Imagine the impact when children from the earliest awakening of consciousness hear repeatedly their defining purpose in life.

No one can argue with the statement “a Muslim is one who strives to be the best human being possible in the service of Allah”. If every Muslim grows up with this identity and understanding, there is no limit to future possibilities because Allah has promised the king of help that guarantees incredible success as exemplified by the achievements of the early Islamic civilizations.

Allah has said that the Muslims are: كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ  
وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ مِّنْهُمْ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ  
وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

“The best nation which has ever been raised for the guidance of mankind. You enjoin good, forbid evil, and believe in Allah. Had the people of book (Jews and Christians) believed, it would surely have been better for them; among them some are believers but most of them are transgressors.[Quran3/110].

We just have to believe and live up to it by making this an essential part of our being.