

ISLAM AND MUSLIMS

Islam is an Arabic word which means peace, purity, acceptance and commitment. The religion of Islam is the complete acceptance of the teachings and guidance of God, that is, surrender to the Will of God. Muslim are those who accept freely and willingly the supreme power of God and strive for total re-organisation of their life according to the revealed teachings of God. They also work towards the establishment of a just and equitable social order, which would totally reflect the guidance of God.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him - PBUH) was born in the year 570 A.C. in Makkah in Arabia. He came of noble Arab family. He received the first revelation at the age of forty. As soon as he started preaching Islam, he and his followers were persecuted and had to face severe hardships. He was therefore commanded to migrate to Madinah, another city in Arabia. During a short span of 23 years, he completed his prophethood and died at the age of 63. He was put to rest in the city of Madinah, he left neither wealth nor property. He led a perfect life and set an example for all human beings. His biography illustrates in real life, the meaning and implications of the Quranic teachings

CONTINUITY OF MESSAGE

Islam is not a new religion. It is, in essence, the same message and guidance which God revealed to all His Prophets. *'Say: We believe in God and that which was revealed to us, and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and to the Prophets from their Lord; we make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we submit.'* (Quran 3:84)

The message which was revealed to Muhammad (PBUH), the Last Prophet in Islam is in its comprehensive, complete and final form.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

Every action which is done with the awareness that it fulfils the will of God is considered an act of worship in Islam. Nevertheless, the specific acts of worship, termed the Pillars of Islam provide the framework of spiritual life.

They are the following:

1. THE DECLARATION OF FAITH: *'I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except God, and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger'*. The Prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH) obliges the Muslims to follow his exemplary life in every way.
2. PRAYERS: are prescribed five times a day as a duty towards God. They strengthen and enliven the belief in God and inspire man to a higher morality. They purify the heart and control temptation towards wrong doing and evil. It should be stressed that while God Almighty does not need our prayers we cannot survive without His blessings and guidance. *'O you who believe seek help with patient perseverance and prayer; for God Almighty is with those who patiently persevere'*. (Quran 2:153)
3. FASTING: is observed daily for one month every year during the month of Ramadaan. This means abstention from food, drink and marital intimacy from dawn to sunset, and also from all evil intentions and desires. It teaches love, sincerity and devotion. It develops a sound social conscience, patience, unselfishness and willpower. When we fast by choice, God remembers our sufferings.
4. ZAKAAT: payment annually of 2.5% of ones net savings as a purifying sum to be spent on the poor and needy. Zakaat implies that everything man possesses belongs to God and therefore anyone in need has a share in it.
5. PILGRIMAGE (Hajj) to Makkah, once in a lifetime provided one has the means to do so. Hajj implies Man's temporary suspension of all worldly activities and his realization of himself as a naked soul in front of God.

ARTICLES OF FAITH

1. ONENESS OF GOD
Islam enjoins faith in the oneness and sovereignty of God, which makes man aware of the meaningfulness of the Universe and of his place in it. This belief frees man from all fears and superstitions by making him conscious of the presence of Almighty God and of his obligation towards Him and believe in one God and of his obligation towards Him. Belief in one God requires that we look upon all humanity as one family

irrespective of colour, class, race or territory, under the Omnipotence of God-the Creator and Nourisher of all. Islam rejects the idea of a chosen people, making faith in God and good action the only way to Heaven. Thus a direct relationship is established with God, open to all alike, without any intercessor.

2. BELIEF IN THE ANGELS

The true Muslim believes in the angels of God. They are purely spiritual and splendid beings whose nature requires no food and drink or sleep. They have no physical desires of any kind nor material needs. They spend their days and nights in the service of God. There are many of them, and each one is charged with a certain duty. If we cannot see the angels with our naked eye, it does not necessarily deny their actual existence. There are many things in the world that are invisible to the eye or inaccessible to the senses, and yet we do believe in their existence. Belief in the angels originates from the Islamic principle that knowledge and truth are not entirely confirmed to the sensory knowledge or sensory perception alone. The Holy Quran says: *"We send not the angels down except for just cause."* (Quran 15:8)

3. BOOKS OF GOD ALMIGHTY

God Almighty revealed His books to various Prophets for the Guidance of their Nations. The four main books that were revealed were Taurat (Old Testament), Zaboor (Psalms), Injeel (New Testament) and the Holy Quran. These 4 books were revealed to the respective Prophets namely; Prophets Moosa, Dawood, Esa and Muhammad (Peace be upon them all). Each of these books were revealed at once except the Holy Quran which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) over a period of 23 years. The Holy Quran has been memorized by thousands since time immemorial. As Muslim we also believe in the other three books, as the Quran says (2:136) *"We believe in God and the revelation given to us and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and that which was given to all Prophets from their Lord. We make no discrimination between them and we bow to God"*. However, God Almighty has safeguarded the text of the Quran against corruption of all kinds as God Almighty says in the Quran (15:9) *"Verily we have without doubt sent down the Quran and We will assuredly guard it"*.

Thus the Quran was the final book of God Almighty and it still pure and clear from any change or alteration. Thus it is given to the Muslims and humanity at large as the standard or criterion by which all other books are judged.

4. PROPHETHOOD IN ISLAM

Prophethood is not unknown to other religions, such as Judaism and Christianity. According to Islam, God Almighty created us for a noble purpose: to worship Him and to lead a virtuous life based on his Guidance. Thus, God had chosen from every nation a Prophet to convey His Message to the people. Every Prophet of God Almighty serves as the model in his community, morally, intellectually and spiritually. This is necessary because it is one of the ways how God's message can be proclaimed to the people in a practical and physical manner. It is on this basis that the Muslims make no discrimination among the Prophets and accept their teachings as consistent and complimentary. On the chain of Prophets, Muhammad (PBUH) is the last and seal of all Prophets. He was sent as a universal Messenger to humanity. As the Quran says. *"We have not sent thee but as a (messenger) to all mankind, giving them glad tidings, and warning them against sin, but most men know not."* (34:28)

5. LAST DAY

This world will one day come to an end and nobody knows the exact date and time except GOD. However some of the signs for this day as explained by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) include:

1. When people start disrespecting and disobeying their parents
2. Breach of trust
3. Singing, music, and dancing will be the order of the day
4. Illiterate people will become leaders and unworthy people will be given high posts. On this day all the things and creatures on this earth will cease to exist. And man will remain with nothing except the deeds he offered to God Almighty and he will either be punished or rewarded accordingly. On this day nothing will escape GOD'S judgement however big or small, and wherever Man will be, this day will find him, and surely he will have to die.

6. LIFE AFTER DEATH

The world according to Islam, is a place of trial and man is being Judged in it. Man is accountable to God Almighty for all his deeds. Life on earth will one day come to an end; and after that a new world will be resurrected. It will be in this Life after death that man will be rewarded or punished for his deeds and misdeeds. God will judge man on the Day of Judgement and send him either to Heaven, a stage of existence which leads or eternal blessings, or to Hell, a stage of suffering and punishment.

CONCEPT OF WORSHIP

Islam does not teach or accept mere ritualism. It emphasises intention and action. To worship God is to know Him and love Him, to act upon His laws in every aspect of life, to enjoin goodness and forbid evil and oppression to practice charity and justice and to serve Him by serving mankind. Islam seeks to implant in man’s heart the strongest conviction that his every thought and action are with God, Who sees him at all times and in all places. The Quran presents this concept in the following sublime manner:

“It is not righteousness that you turn your faces to the East or the West, but righteous is he who believes in God and the Last Day and the Angels and the book and the Prophets; and gives his wealth for the love of Him to his kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observe proper worship and pay the Zakaat, and those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are those who are sincere. Such are the God fearing.” (2:177)

ISLAM IS A COMPLETE WAY OF LIFE

1. SOCIAL LIFE

The social life of a Muslim is based upon supreme principles and designed to secure happiness with prosperity for the individual as well as society. Nowhere in Islam can you find any mention of superiority on account of class, origin, race or wealth. Islamically, humanity represents one family, as in Quran (49:13) “O Mankind we created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other...”

2. ECONOMIC LIFE

The economic life of Islam is based upon solid foundations and divine instructions. Earning a living through decent labour is a great virtue and dependence on somebody else is a social stigma. Islam permits honest trade but forbids interest, cheating, hiding defects of merchandise from the dealers, exploiting the needs of the customers, monopoly of stocks to further ones prices. As in Quran (55:7-9) “... and He has set up the balance... ..so establish weight with Justice and fall not short of the balance.”

3. POLITICAL LIFE

The Political life of a Muslim is based on sound spiritual and moral foundations and is guided by divine instructions. It is neither theocratic nor proletariat, its sovereignty neither belongs to the state nor does it belong to the people, but it belongs to God, and the Quran acts as the constitution. As the Quran says “...And those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation...”. It can be observed here that in Islam does not necessarily mean the majority, provided their rule is based on justice and equality.

STATUS OF WOMAN IN ISLAM

No discrimination is made on the basis of gender. But Islam makes one realize that the spheres of potential capabilities and hence responsibility of men and women are equally important in themselves but not exactly the same. The roles of men and women are complementary to each other.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Marriage is a very important and sacred bond of a relationship between man and woman and a step towards a better, purer and happier life. Islam gives both men and women full right to divorce. Nevertheless divorce is discouraged and is allowed as the last resort. Islam allows limited polygamy only as a remedy subject to certain strict conditions.

MAN THE FREE AGENT

Man is the highest creation of God and chooses his own way. Created with the highest potential, man is left relatively free in his will, action and choice. God has shown him the right path and the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) provides a perfect example. Man’s success and salvation lies in following them. Islam teaches the sanctity of the human personality and confers equal rights upon all without any distinction of race or sex.

The law of God, enunciated in Quran and exemplified in the life of the Prophet, is supreme in all cases. It applies equally to the highest and the lowest, the prince and the peasant, the ruler and the ruled.

CONCLUSION

What is the state of the world today? Has man freed himself from all superstitions, imbecilities and absurd beliefs? Has he discovered the man from within himself? Has he liberated himself from the yoke of worldly tyrants indulging in the exploitation of man by man? If such a millennium has not been achieved despite all developments in science and technology, then Islam has still a great and glorious part to play. Islam shows the way to total freedom.■

If you would like more information on Islam, please contact us at:



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