

* Introduction:

According to the Holy Book revealed to Muhammad (PBUH), Islam is the only true religion professed by all Prophets from Adam to Muhammad, the last Prophet. The basic concept of Islam is that the whole universe was created by Allah and He created man and appointed for each human being a fixed period of life that he is to spend upon the earth.

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One who chooses to follow the code revealed by Allah become a Muslim (believer) and one who refuse to follow it becomes a Kafir (Disbeliever).

Literal Meaning of Islam:

The word "Islam" is derived from an Arabic word "slm" which means "to surrender, submit or yield". It means to resign one's self to the will of God. Islam also means "peace" that has been mentioned in the famous book of Syed Ameer Ali i.e. "The Spirit of Islam".

Contextual Meaning of Islam:

As a Islam means complete submission and obedience to Allah. Such a life of obedience brings peace of the heart and establishes real peace in society at large. As Allah (SWT) said in The Holy Quran:

"Such are the ones who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Surely in Allah's remembrance do

hearts find peace".

- Al Quran, 13:28

In a similar way, Imam Lagib al-Isfahani says in his *Al-Mufradat fi Gharab al-Quran* that:

"Islam, in law, is of two kinds: one is a simple confession with the tongue. The other is that along with confession, there is a belief in the heart and a fulfillment in practice, and resignation to God in whatever he brings to pass or decrease."

Islam is a Deen:

Islam, unlike other religions, is a Deen which does not only deal with worship and prayers. Instead, it is a complete code of life and is supreme in all aspects of life. Its objective is to shape the life of every individual human being according to the teachings of Holy Quran and Sunnah.

As Allah stated in the Holy Quran:
"This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed my favour on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion".

- Al Quran, 5:3

God, Prophethood, The Quran & The Sunnah:

Prof. Khurshid Ahmed, in his famous book, "Islam: its message and meaning", stated that Islam enjoins man to:

- 1, Believe that God is One, Omniscient and Omnipresent. He begetteth not, nor is He begotten.
- 2, believe further that man is the vicegerent of God on Earth and has freedom of choice.
- 3, believe that as he has freedom of choice, he may go astray and therefore needs guidance from time to time so that he may know how to realize his greatness and that is why God sent his messengers from Adam to Muhammad (PBUH) and completed this process during the life of Muhammad (PBUH).
- 4, know and act upon the ideal preserved in collection of sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) and the reports of his actions i.e. the Sunnah or the traditions of the Prophet.

Features of Islam

Some of the major characteristics of Islam are discussed below:

1. Islam - a Universal Deen:

The message of Islam is for the entire human race. God, in Islam, is the God of all the world and the Prophet is the messenger for the whole of mankind.

Allah stated in the Holy Quran:

"We have not sent thee but as a (source of) mercy for all the nations."

-Al Quran, 21:107

In Islam, all men are equal irrespective of their colour, language, race, or nationality. Islam removes all the barriers of race, status and wealth and proclaims the idea of the whole of humanity being one family of God. As the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said:

"All creatures of God form the family of God and he is the best loved of God who loveth best his creatures."

2) A complete way of life:

Islam is a complete way of life, catering for all the fields of human existence. It provides guidance in all walks of life - individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, national and international. In Quran, Allah said,

"(Muslims are) those who if we give them power in the land, establish Salat and Zakat and enjoin virtue and forbid vice and evil."

- Al Quran, 22:41

Also, Allah stated further that:

"We verily sent our messengers with clear proofs and revealed with them the Scripture and the Balance, that mankind may observe justice and the right measure."

- Al Quran, 57:25

3) Balance between the Individual and Society:

Islam establishes a balance between individualism and collectivism. It believes in the individual personality of man & holds everyone accountable personally to God.

It does not subscribe to the view that man must lose his individuality in society or in the state. According to the Quran:
"Man shall have nothing but what he strives for."
— Al Quran, 53:39.

"God does not change the condition of people unless they first change that which is in their hearts."
— Al Quran, 13:11

And this balance can perfectly be seen in the form of "Jihad" in Islam that has been made obligatory as well. It determines that the individual should, when the occasion arises, offer even his life for the defence and protection of Islam and the Islamic state. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said;

"The believer in God is he who is not a danger to the life and property of any other."

He (PBUH) also said;

"Live together, do not turn against each other, make things easy for others and do not put obstacles in each other's way."

Thus, in short, Islam creates a harmony between an individual and a society.

4) Permanence and Change:

Islam presents an ideology which satisfies the demands of stability as well as of change. Too much emphasis on permanence makes the system rigid and robs it of flexibility and progress; while lack of permanent values and unchanging elements generate moral relativism, shapelessness and anarchy.

However, Islam, on the other hand, maintains an equilibrium. Permanence in Islam consists of articles of faith, basic laws and Shariah. While, change consists of flexibility in law in modern times via **Ijtihad** as per the need of the hour.

An American judge, Mr. Justice Cardozo rightly says:

"The greatest need of our time is a philosophy that will mediate between conflicting claims of stability and progress and supply a principle of growth."

5) Having a Complete Record of Teachings Preserved:

The teachings of Islam have been preserved in their original form and God's guidance is available without any kind of adulteration of any kind. Detailed accounts of the life of Prophet of Islam and his teachings are available in their pristine purity.

Judaism and Christianity have been subject to alterations but Islam is and will remain pure. Men with pure hearts and sincere longings for truth will always continue to say:

"I affirm that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, that He is the one, Sharing His authority with no one; and I affirm that Muhammad is His servant and His Prophet."

6) Unity of Matter and Spirit:

A unique feature of Islam is that it does not divide life into the water-tight compartments of matter and spirit. It stands not for life denial, but for life-fulfilment. It always holds equilibrium between materialism and spiritualism. Allah says in The Holy Quran:

"Say (to them): By whose order have you denied yourself those amenities which God has created for His people and those good things to eat and use (which He has made for you)?"

- Al Quran, 7:32

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said:

"Keep fast and break it, and stand in prayer and devotion, and have sleep - for your body has its rights over you, and your eyes rights over you, and your wife has a claim upon you, and a person who pays a visit has a claim upon you."

Even Islam believes that:

"Eat and drink, but do not exceed"

- Al Quran, 7:31

7) Simplicity, Rationalism and Practicalism:

Islam is a religion without any mythology. Its teachings are simple and intelligible. It is free from superstitious and irrational beliefs. The unity of God, the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH) and the concept of life-after-death are the basic articles of its faith. They all are based on reason and sound logic. The Quran advised man to pray:

"O, my lord! Advance me in knowledge."
- Al Quran, 20:114

Everybody may approach The Book of God directly and translate its dictates into practice. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said

"To seek knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim."
"He who leaves his home in search of knowledge walks in The path of God."

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) also said,

"God does not accept belief, if it is not expressed in deeds, and does not accept deeds, if they do not conform to belief."

Similarly, Allah stated in The Holy Quran:

"Those who believe and act righteously, joy is for them, and a blissful life home to return to."

- Al Quran, 13:29

Thus, Islam is a simple, rational and a practical religion.

8) Respect of Individual and Social life:

Respect of Individual and his social life is among the fundamental beliefs and principles of Islam, on which The Holy Prophet (PBUH) could not and did not adopt a compromising attitude. Allah says in The Holy Quran:

"Invite to the way of your lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord

is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is (rightly) guided."

- Al Quran, 16:125

9, Freedom of Thoughts:

Islam provides man freedom in faith, worship as there is no coercion of faith in Islam. Allah says in Holy Quran:

"O people, if you're in doubt as to my religion— then I do not worship those which you worship besides Allah; but I worship Allah; who causes your death. And I have been commanded to be of the believers."

- Al Quran, 10:104

10, Islam - A Peaceful Religion:

The teachings of Islam invites people to live a peaceful life; based on justice and purity. Peace in Islam is an eternal constitution. Even the nature of war in Islam is a defensive one, not an offensive one. Because the principle of Islam is peace and coexistence, not conflict, violence and war. As Allah says in Holy Quran:

"And when he goes away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein and destroy crops and animals. And Allah does not like corruption."

- Al Quran, 2:205

★ Conclusion:

Hence, these are some unique features of Islam and establish its credentials as the religion of man; the religion of today and the religion of tomorrow. These aspects have appealed to hundreds of thousands of people in the past and the present and have made them affirm that Islam is the religion of truth and the right path for mankind.