

Arooba Kashif (OB 54)

Question: What is Islam and what are the salient features of Islam?

What is Islam?

Literal meaning of the word "Islam":

The word Islam has been derived from three root letters of Arabic origin, "SLM" which relate to the meaning of peace. The word literally means

"to surrender" or "to submit". The word was first used in Quranic text. The old name of Islam was

"Deen-e-Hanif" which means "Monotheistic religion." or Hanif refers to the one traversing the straight path - or *Sirat e mustaqeem*, and the one on this path is called

a "Muslim". Since this word also is composed of the root words "SLM" it also relates to the word Islam literally or linguistically and contextually to ^{universal} ideology of peace.

Contextual meaning; understanding ISLAM:

• Surrender and submission:

The literal meaning of Islam that is submission and surrender actually mean to "Submit to the commandment of Allah or the moral imperatives of one and only God".

Surrender implies; "to surrender one's will to the will of Allah SWT." This means that laying down one's will in front of the mighty deity and putting his will above all that a man's heart desires. Just like a camel submits to the will of his master, a muslim submits his conscience or "Nafs" to Allah's will.

• The embodiment of peace / the religion of peace:

The concept of peace relates to Islam as when a person enters Islam by submission to Allah's will, he/she becomes a propagator of peace, because submission to God is the guarantor of peace in this world. The desires of a man originate from the "Nafs" which has been called a "wild horse" in Islam. It means that "nafs" if left untamed can be really dangerous like a wild horse and lead one astray along with the ^{spread of} evil in society. So when the person binds the untamed nafs to Allah's commandments and boundaries, it becomes aligned with piety, subtlety & goodness thus spreading peace within the society and also fighting against vices or evil if ever encountered. This shows that the deep meaning of entering into Islam is to enter into peace, achieving peace within and striving to spread peace outside.

• Submission to Allah leads to peace:

Submission to Allah simply means to start obeying the commandments of Allah. By design, the commandments of Allah have been designed if acted upon, ultimately lead to peace in the human world.

⇒ Example of Jihad:

Allah ordered Muslims to do Jihad against terrorism. As said in Quran;

"Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress, indeed Allah does not like transgressors."

(Al-Quran)

If the soul purpose of Jihad is fulfilled then it will consequently lead to eradication of terrorism and maintain peace.

⇒ Example of Zakaat:

Allah has placed a commandment and a pillar of Islam as paying charity.

Allah says in Quran

"Establish prayer and give zakaat..."

The system of zakaat regulates the flow of money through the society seeping deep at the individual level & addressing their financial needs. Financial stability saves an individual from a lot of socioeconomic dilemmas ultimately leading to peace within the society. (Al-Quran)

Islam according to Shariah:

Shariah has been given to mankind through Quran and Sunnah of Prophet PBUH and at multiple places we find it describing the core concept of Islam.

Voluntary submission of desires to Allah's will is Islam according to Shariah: the unique element according to Shariah is that there is no compulsion or use of force.

• Concept of voluntary submission:

Allah says in Surah Baqarah that there is no use of force in dem.

"لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ"

"There is no compulsion in religion (Al-Quran).

Similarly in Surah Kafiron Allah hinted upon the same practice.

"For you is your religion & for me is my religion."

So according to Shari'ah, when a person enters into Allah's submission by his own choice & will, it is Islam's core concept because Islam doesn't relate to force or imposition in any form be it ideological or physical. At another point the Prophet PBUH said.

"Kindness is the mark of faith, whoever is not kind does not have faith."

The Prophet PBUH's words imply the necessity of element of one's willingness to join Islam by heart & forbiddance of any sorts of impositions or compulsion.

Concept of Islam explained by Prophet PBUH:

Hadith e Jibrael explains the concept of Islam in Prophet PBUH's own words as follows.

Jibrael AS asked Prophet PBUH;

"What is faith?"

The Prophet PBUH replied,

"To believe in Allah, His angels, meeting with Him, His apostles and belief on the day of resurrection."

Jibrael AS further asked;

"What is Islam?"

Prophet PBUH replied;

"To believe in worship Allah alone & none else..."

"So the Prophet PBUH rendered sole worship of Allah as core of Islam."

Islam^{as} explained by scholars:

• By Dr Khurshid Ahmed:

Dr Khurshid Ahmed in his book "Islam, its meaning and message" has explained Islam as the name of harmony between a man's faith, action and realization. According to him man is vicegerent of Allah on earth and he should live his life aligned to Allah's orders & boundaries provided by Quran and Sunnah and should strive his entire life to shape his character in accordance with these rulings. This strife would be his jihad which has been defined as the natural corollary as the pillars of Islamic faith.

• By Dr Hamidullah:

Doctor Hamidullah defined Islam as;

"Islam is the monotheistic religion revealed by the Prophet PBUH."

Since there are other claims of true revelation like the one that comes from the origin of Ahmadi school of thought, Doctor Hamidullah has clearly defined the source of actually true revelation which is Prophet PBUH.

• By Imam Ghazali:

Imam Ghazali defined Islam as;

"Islam is the combination of rights of Allah & rights of people."

He hinted at the definition of peace-making via "Hakookullah" & "Hakookulibad" which when align in a man's head, create peace in the society.

- By Imam Raghīb al Isfahani:

Imam Raghīb defined Islam as;

"Islam means entering into salam and Salam and Silm both signify peace."

Imam Raghīb also talked about Islam as the religion that contains peace within and spreads peace outside in the society.

SALIENT FEATURES OF ISLAM; what makes it special and divine!

The core of Islam is distinct: At the core of Islam lie its basic beliefs & fundamental rituals.

- Belief of Tauheed

The concept of tauheed or 'Monotheism' is the part of first kalimah of Islam which is the gateway to Islam.

"لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ"

"There is not deity worthy of worship except Allah."

Monotheism encircles entire Islam because each and every aspect, dimension, rulings and preachings connect to it. This theory differentiates Islam from other religions as only Allah is the soul master and no other being according to Islam. The belief of Christianity renders ESA AS and that of Judaism renders Zuhair AS as the son of God. Today the scholars of all other religions have had their beliefs proved incorrect except Islam. Entire life of a man as guided by Islam revolves around pleasing Allah with the monotheistic belief in heart

All the prayers and worships are for Allah.
as stated in Surah Fatiha.

“ اِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَ اِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ”

“It is you we worship and you we ask for help.”

Man can either be in a state of worship when he is not in need of any worldly help or he is in state of the one requiring help. In both states, has Allah inclined the direction of man towards Himself.

The Prophet PBUH said;

“Islam is like a fort and the gate of that fort is tauheed.”

So the fact that Islam is tauheed centric makes it distinct from all the other religions.

• Belief of Risalah (Prophethood)

A rather unique aspect of Islam is the practical guidance provided by Prophet PBUH. The Prophet PBUH has been called with names such as “Uswatul Hasanah” or “The best example” and “Siraj am Munira” or “The guiding star”. It is a distinction of Islam that it has provided its followers a complete practical example in the form of Prophet PBUH's life so as to take it as guidance in any matter.

As referred to Surah Ahzab.

“Prophet PBUH is not the father of any of your men, but he is the messenger of Allah and the seal of Prophets.”

This belief is also the second part of Kalimah stated

as

محمد رسول الله

“Prophet PBUH is the messenger of Allah.”

The Prophet PBUH's life can be consulted by any follower of Islam or a non-muslim who chooses to follow it, for any sort of matters of life.

- **The complete and final book Quran:**

Over a period of time, holy books of other religions have been changed and have lost their authenticity.

But Quran is the authentic most book available to mankind as a guiding light. Any person in the world can open it and seek guidance from it.

- **The five pillars:**

Another salient feature of Islam that lies in its core is the five pillars namely Kalimah, Salah, fasting, Zakaat & pilgrimage to Mecca. These pillars are obligatory to be fulfilled & all are unique in their own nature of worship towards Allah SWT.

The unique derivations from Islam:

A salient feature of Islam is that some distinct thoughts are extracted out of it, which no other religion provides.

- **Shariah law and Fiqah:**

Shariah law is derived from Quran, Hadith and Sunnah of Prophet PBUH, which is a complete guidance towards legal implications of any crimes and provides a system of justice. All the punishments and laws defined under the Shariah are completely logical, rational and have deep hikmahs hidden. They are not based upon emotional grounds but based upon hikmah and rational and a broader picture of society. Also Islam gives a system of "Fiqh"

which enables people to derive a conclusion based on sharia rulings, specifically for the problems which have not been directly addressed by the Prophet (PBUH). The entire ummah ^{can} reflect upon the modern issue keeping the sharia in mind and derive a conclusion. In this way many sort of ^{worldly} problems can be addressed by Fiqah making Islam the most inclusive and universal and timeless religion.

• Concept of Jihad:

No other religion has given the importance to fight and strife in the way of God, as much as Islam has by associating it with jihad. To simply put together, jihad means to go out of the way and consciously make an effort to curb one's desires or fight any evil that comes a man's way for the sake of Allah. To strive in the way of knowledge acquisition, curbing the desires of nafs, fighting against oppression and terrorism are all the different paths referred to as the path of jihad. This concept is unique to Islam and has given the strength and fearlessness to a muslim, due to its immense reward.

• Concept of Martyrdom:

In Islam, when a muslim lays down his life for the sake of his country or loses his life while fighting for it, he'll be a martyr and reward and status of a martyr is unmatched in the eyes of Allah. For this very reason throughout the history, muslims have always been fearless and ever ready to fight for their cause and embrace shahadah.

• A complete code of life

One of the most beautiful and wholesome feature of Islam is that it guides man in every aspect of his life. It completely teaches how to live in this world so as to earn maximum benefit in terms of reward. Man's individual life includes all the aspects related to his individuality like rights and duties, morals, etiquettes of dining, language etc. Islam has deeply taught rights and duties of everyone like those of spouse, parents, neighbours, slave, relatives etc. Islam apart in addition to a person's individual life also has shed light on the collective life of people which includes its guidance on all the social systems like political, financial, system of trade and business etc. Right when a child is born, Islam has its guidance ready to enlighten the infant's life ^{an} with Islamic start upto the day he dies.

Distinctive temperament of Islam:

• True spirituality and revelation

Islam is the truest revelation and actual ^{bearer of} spirituality. It is the concept that both body and soul have their needs, Islam addresses both of them. Islam forbids from the vices which actually damage the soul. For example;

"Prophet PBUH prohibited adultery, alcohol and musical instruments"

All these have shattering effects on one's soul and Islam by encouraging abstinence from such evils, allows the soul to acquire the level of best spirituality.

• Simplicity, rationality and practicality.

Islam is a religion based on rationality. Any non muslim when sets start on the quest of learning the truth, comes across best rationale about creation of universe as not a mere coincidence or accident, rather a logical design by one and only God that exists. Also when one enters islam, one has to abide by all its rulings. Today science proves the scientific logics and benefits that are linked to Allah's commandments but science is nascent and Allah's rulings are divine. Islam is devoid any superstitions or mythologies. Its teachings are simple and clear. Islam is practical. Any person in the world can open up Quran and start applying it in his/her life. Mahatma Gandhi while admiring islam talked about simplicity of Prophet PBUH as driver of islam.

• Detailed teachings of good morals.

Islam provides detailed guidance regarding good morals which polish individual's personalities like a diamond and present them as best of the people who radiate as well as attract goodness. Prophet PBUH said;

"God has sent me to perfect good manners..."

According to islam bad morals are born (Al-Quran).
out of ignorance and shirk, adultery and rage.

Allah says in Quran.

"Indeed association with Him is the biggest injustice"

"And do not commit adultery"

Just like these and many other verses reflect Allah's orders to stay away from such evils.

"A person requested Prophet PBUH him to advise him and the Prophet PBUH asked him to shun his rage."

Most of the evil emerges out of rage and anger.

Islam also guides about which morals to adopt.

Goodness is born out of patience, valour and chastity.

Allah says in Quran.

"Indeed Allah is with those who are patient."

(Al-Quran).

• Concept of brotherhood and Ummah:

The unique feature of ummah unites any muslim all over the world under a single bond of brotherhood and ties all up together under a single roof of islam. This bond demands all muslims to be brothers, and share pain and love.

"The Prophet PBUH told that believers are like a single body, when one organ suffers, the entire body reacts with fever & restlessness."

Conclusion:

These are few of the features which together form islam and work in harmony to make islam shine out of the other religions. The salient features of islam are unique and distinct rendering islam the most inclusive and timeless religion.