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## Islamic studies

Q. What is Islam and list its salient features.

Answer Islam is an Arabic term, first mentioned in Al-Quran and means to submit ~~to the~~ <sup>oneself</sup> one's self to the Will of God (Allah) in order to attain peace of mind and body. The term flows ~~from~~ <sup>flows</sup> from the word "SLM" which signifies peace. According to Al-Quran (3:3-4), it is the only true Din and has been professed by all Messengers of God, from Prophet Adam, the first messenger to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the last messenger. The fundamental pillar of this Din is the ~~doctrine~~ <sup>doctrine</sup> of Tawhid which can be found in the first clause of the Shahada, and in the Kalma which provides that "There is no God except Allah; Muhammed is His Prophet." While this doctrine is not explicitly mentioned in the Quran, Allah (SWT) has on 13 occasions stated that He is the "Sole divinity" and on another 29 instances that "there <sup>is</sup> no divinity other than He" (a variation of Shahada's first clause). Additionally, some Muslim scholars and jurists have even referred to Islam as "ahl al-tawhid" (the way of unity).

Tawhid as reflected in the Kalma, means that there is only one true God (Allah) and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is His last ~~mess~~ <sup>Messenger</sup>.

However, this notion is not merely limited to the rejection of idols and believing in



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Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), but also contains a negation that nothing should be put in the way of the divine rule. Cragg, by drawing upon the geographical locus of the Holy Kaabah as the point where the emotional focus of every Muslim is directed in prayer (Namaz), describes Muslims as the "People of the Point." This is because, it creates a geometric pattern of humans all facing towards one point - a unique feature in world's religious history which shows the oneness of Allah (SWT) manifested in human affairs to establish unity. Therefore, Allah (SWT) is one, and so has He created one Din, 'Islam'.

Islam does not make distinctions based on nation, tribe, culture, language, foods or customs, but unites humans through their relationship with God. For example, while it does not forbid individual prayer, it encourages Muslims to pray in a communal setting (mosque) five times a day with all Muslims gathered in rows, shoulder to shoulder, faced towards Makkah. Similarly, during the sacred month of Ramadan (the month of Quran's first revelation), all adult Muslims around the globe fast from dawn to dusk. This unity is further strengthened by the concept of 'Zakat' (charity) and 'Hajj' (pilgrimage) with the former requiring Muslims to provide for the needy, and the latter consisting of



Millions of Muslims, white and black, men and women, rich and poor, of all nations and cultures surrendering their will and individual identity to Allah (SWT) by wearing the same dress (white cloth) and shaving their heads (men only) in performing the ritual acts. These acts reflect the uniqueness and awesomeness of Allah (SWT), uniting every Muslim and bridging the fictional barriers created by mankind such as race, status, wealth, ethnicity, culture and like factors.

While Allah (SWT) provides humans freedom of choice due to which they are capable of doing both the good and the evil, He has not left them without guidance. He has sent Prophets throughout most of history as teachers for mankind with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the last and final of them. To believe in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the second fundamental principle of Islam as reflected in second part of the Kalma. Allah (SWT) asserts in the Quran, "Nay, O Muhammad: by your Lord, they will not be believers until they accept you as the final arbiter in all their disputes and submit to your decision whole-heartedly without any heartache" (Al-Quran, 4:65). The life of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) thus, serves as a guiding light for all of humankind which every Muslim ought to follow.



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Moreover, the teachings of Islam, as Khurshid Ahmad elucidates, are "simple, free from superstitions, and irrational beliefs." All Islamic rules come from the fundamental principles, that Allah (SWT) is one, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is His final Messenger, and that there is life after death. There are no complex rituals and no hierarchy of priests. There is one Book of Allah (SWT), open to everyone, and free from all adulterations. As Allah (SWT) says in the Quran (15:9), "Verily, We ourself have sent down the Reminder (the Quran) and verily We, will be its Guardian."

The uniqueness of Islam is also evident from the fact that it covers all aspects of human life - from individual to social, economic to political, legal to cultural and so on. At the same time, it teaches Man to strike a balance between material and spiritual life and maintains that spiritual elevation is to be attained not by abandoning the world, but by leading a pious life. "Eat and drink, but do not exceed (the limits of moderation and decency" elucidates the Quran (7:31). Therefore, for Muslims, there is no separation in 'material' and 'spiritual', and life must be reconstructed on the basis of ~~healthy~~ <sup>healthy</sup> moral principles.

Finally, the ~~Din~~ <sup>Din</sup> of Allah (SWT) is



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not rigid but flexible, and can satisfy the demands of different periods of time. The message of Allah (SWT) is to stay till the end of ~~the~~ times, and only lays out <sup>general</sup> broad principles which can be applied freely by Man to meet the demands of his time. Thereby, while the basic guidance is permanent, its application is flexible and capable of being applied whenever and wherever. As Khurshid Ahmad has rightly stated, "That is why Islam always remains as fresh and modern as ~~the~~ tomorrow's man."

In conclusion, Islam <sup>means</sup> ~~means~~ to believe in the sovereignty of Allah (SWT) and ~~accept~~ <sup>accept</sup> that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is His last Messenger. It is a Din which allows humans freedom of choice, but at the same time, has sent Prophets from time to time to show humankind the true path of Allah (SWT). It covers every dimension of human existence and discards the fictional barriers created by mankind. Its membership is open to everyone and is here to stay till the end of times. Islam, therefore, is a unique Din, and ~~as~~ as such, the true word of Allah (SWT).