

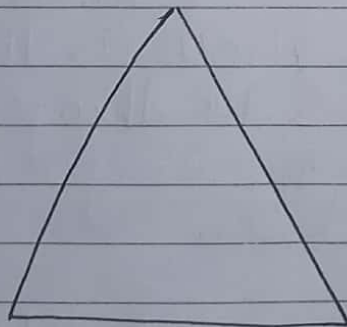
Q. What is Islam? Enlist the salient features of Islam.

INTRODUCTION

Islam is the final deen that Allah Almighty sent down till the end of time. It is a universal deen, way of life, which is an ideal system of living for all of mankind. There are certain attributes that differentiate Islam and are its core features such as the Islamic concept of Tawheed, the belief in Prophethood and Prophet Muhammad SAW's finality and seal of prophets, its guidance on the complete code of life, humanity and its focus on rationalism, practicalism and permanence making it distinct for its comprehensive yet simplistic nature.

The meaning of Islam

LITERAL



CONTEXTUAL

ACCORDING TO SHARIAH

In its literal understanding, Islam is an Arabic word which means the act of resignation to God. The root word is SUM which means peace.

Contextually, Islam means to enter into peace by submitting to the will of Allah. Therefore, a

Muslim, a person who follows Islam, submits his or her desires to the will of Allah.

According to Shariah, Islamic law, Islam entails voluntary submission to the will of Allah as each individual has been created with the freedom to choose to submit to Allah and we are all accountable for it,

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

For you is your religion, and for me is my religion.

[Quran, 109:06]

The Holy Quran also says,

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ

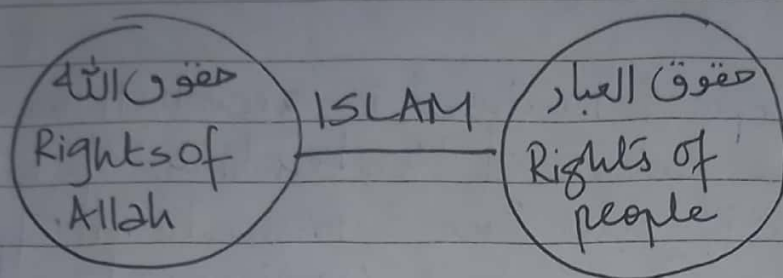
Let there be no compulsion in religion.

[Quran, 2:256]

The Holy Prophet SAW tells us that Islam is an aggregate of, two things, to bear witness of Allah and His messenger and to establish the pillars of Islam.

According to Dr. Hamidullah, Islam is a monotheistic religion revealed through the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

Imam Al Ghozali states that two things bind Islam together, rights of Allah and rights of people and establishing the two.



ISLAM AS THE UNIVERSAL DEEN

Allah swt revealed to the Prophet SAW on the Day of Arafah, 9th Dhul Hijjah and he SAW in his last sermon on that day said,

“This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.”

[Quran, Al-Maidah, 5:3]

Islam guides us in every aspect of life from individual to collective. It is not for a limited time period but for all of time, space, till the end of time. It is not for a specific geography nor confined to a specific entity. It is for all of mankind and jinns as the ideal system of living for all of it.

THE SALIENT FEATURES OF ISLAM THAT DIFFERENTIATE IT FROM OTHER RELIGIONS

Tauheed

The Islamic concept of Tauheed is a revolutionary concept and constitutes the essence of the teachings of Islam. It means that there is only One Supreme Lord of the universe who is the Omnipotent, Omnipresent and the Sustainer of the world and mankind

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

Say: "He is Allah, the One"

اللَّهُ الْقَادِمُ

"Allah, the Self Sufficient."

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

"He begets, nor is He begotten."

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

"And no one is equivalent with Him"

[Al-Ikhlâs, 112: 1-4]

The Holy Prophet SAW is reported to have said

“Tauheed is the first chapter of Islamic syllabus.”⁹⁵

“Islam is like a fort and the gate of that fort is tauheed.”⁹⁵

[Sirat un Nabi, Allama Shibli Naumani]

Tauheed is the basic tenet to which Prophet SAW asked humanity to adhere. It points to the supremacy of the law in the cosmos, the all-pervading unity of Allah behind His manifest diversity.

Tauheed as an equaliser of all humanity

Tauheed or the belief in the Oneness of Allah, reaffirms our understanding that all men are the creatures of one God - they are all equal. The universe is integrated under Allah as the Creator, the Sovereign and man is His Vicegerent on Earth.

إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً ...

“Indeed I will make upon the Earth a successive authority.”²²

[Al-Baqarah]

So the first part of the Kalima encompasses the notion of Tauheed

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

There is no deity, but Allah

Prophethood and Prophet Muhammad SAW as the
Seal of Prophets - خاتم النبيين

The second part of the Kalimah signifies that Allah has not left man without any guidance for the conduct of his life. He has revealed His Guidance through His Prophets and Muhammad SAW was the last prophet.

This is the second basic postulate of Islam

مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ
And Prophet Muhammad SAW
is His Messenger

To believe in the prophethood of Muhammad SAW, to accept the religion which he presented and to follow his commands leads us to build our relationship with Allah

مَنْ يُطِيعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ

He who obeys the Messenger,
obeys Allah."

[Surah An-Nisa, Ayah 80]

The Holy Prophet SAW is Allah's best creation who has been sent to the world and created as Mercy for all of the universes, so it is pertinent for believers to follow his path.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

And we have not sent you [O Muhammad]
except as a Mercy to all the worlds
[Quran 21:107]

In Surah Al Qalam, verse four, Allah describes
Prophet SAW's character as the best of all human beings

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ

And you are truly a man of outstanding
character.

[Quran 68:4]

In Islam, believing in all the prophets and messengers
of Allah is a fundamental requirement of valid
faith and Muhammad SAW as the last prophet.

Allah says,

“Muhammad is not the father of [any] one of
your men, but [he is] the Messenger of Allah
and the last of the prophets. And Ever is
Allah, of all things, Knowing.”³⁵

[Quran, 33:40]

Islam as the complete code of life and humanity

Individual

Birth
Upbringing of children
Character building
Education
Livelihood
Family life

Collective

Political system
Financial system
Global Affairs
Economic system
Social Life

ISLAM

Humanity

Environmental protection
Good ethics
Charity
Animal rights
Rights of children

From individual to collective lives and human rights, Islam guides us in every aspect.

Guidance on notions such as birth rights and rituals, for instance when a child is born to blow Azaan in his or her ear and to give a good name are all part of Islamic teachings.

An ideal way for the upbringing of a child is also detailed in Islam with the mother as the first institution for a child and then his position in family, society and country.

With regard to education Islam provides a comprehensive emphasis on its importance and need for every human, regardless of gender.

“Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman.”⁹⁵

[Prophet Muhammad SAW]

The focus on acquiring knowledge, Ilm, is so much in Islam that it is given preference over being a martyr.

“The ink of a scholar is more sacred than the blood of a martyr.”⁹⁵

[Prophet pbuh]

Islam guides us on the rightful ways of livelihood and places immense importance on fair trade. It guides us to follow Prophet (SAW)'s principles of trading and that rightful earning is worship in Islam.

The Prophet SAW said,

“The truthful and trustworthy businessman will be in the company of prophets, saints and martyrs on the Day of Judgment.”

(Tirmidhi)

Islam guides us in the best manner to live our collective lives well. It provides guidance on financial, political and international systems. Our social lives and global lives should all be according to Islam to fully reach Allah's Will.

Islam talks about humanity and incorporates rights of every single person in its guidance, from children to animals.

Mercy with children

In one exchange, al-Aqra ibn Habis ra became perplexed at Prophet SAW's elaborate display of affection, upon seeing the Prophet SAW kiss his grandchild. The Prophet SAW responded,

"And what do I possess (to help you) if Allah has plucked mercy from your heart?"

[Sahih Bukhari]

The Prophet SAW emphasised to focus on the child's emotional need for expressions and uplift their spirits.

Empathy with the pain of animals and charity

The Prophet SAW would tell his followers about sinners of the past who were forgiven by God for climbing down into a well to a well to retrieve water for a parched dog

[Al-Bukhari]

He stated on another occasion,

"In every living creature is an opportunity for charity"⁹⁵

[Sahih Al-Bukhari]

He saw taught that sharpening one's blade is a necessary part of the kindness due to a sacrificial animal [Sahih Muslim] and forbade that a harmless animal be killed for sport or for other than consumption.

He saw would reprimand his followers for overworking their camels in the fields, and for not relieving their riding mounts of the loads they carried promptly after reaching their destination. He once warned them of a woman who was bound for the hellfire due to trapping a cat without food. [Al-Bukhari].

Care for nature and environmental protection

Islam places a great deal of emphasis on taking care of the earth's resources and natural environment. Preservation of environment is at the core of Islamic faith.

Prophet saw said,

"Do not waste water even if you were at a running stream"⁹⁶

Islam is against the cutting or destruction of plants and trees unnecessarily without justification. According to the Quran, preserving the environment is a religious duty, in addition to a social obligation.

SIMPLICITY, RATIONALISM AND PRACTICALISM

Islam's teachings are simple and intelligible. It is free from superstitions and irrational beliefs.

Islam awakens in man the faculty of reason and exhorts him to use his intellect. It enjoins him to see things in the light of reality.

The Quran advised man to pray:

'O, my Lord! Increase me in knowledge'
(20:114)

It asserts that those who have no knowledge are not equal to those who have (39:9); that those who do not observe and understand are worse than cattle (7:179).

CONCLUSION

Thus, Islam is a practical religion and does not indulge in empty and futile theorising. Faith (إيمان) is the very mainspring of life.

The prophet pbuh is the best guide and Messenger of Allah that helped spread the message of Islam and to follow its divine guidance.

For every single aspect, challenge and problem in life, we have Islam to seek guidance from and that is possible due to its distinct salient features.