

ASSIGNMENT- ISLAMIC STUDIES

TOPIC: What is Islam? What are the salient features of Islam?

ISLAM

Islam is a monotheistic religion that originated in the 7th century in the Arabian Peninsula. It is based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who is considered the last and final messenger of Allah (God). The literal meaning of the word "Islam" is "to submit" or "to surrender," indicating the core belief that Muslims have in submitting themselves to the will of Allah. The contextual meaning of Islam is 'to enter in peace by submitting to the will of Allah'.

Islam is centered around the belief in the oneness of Allah and the guidance provided through the holy book of Islam, the Quran. The Quran is believed to be the literal word of Allah, revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) over a period of 23 years. Islam encompasses a comprehensive code of life, providing guidance for individuals and societies in various aspects, including faith, worship, morality, social interactions, and governance.

- The Islamic scholar, Amir Ali deems Islam as an amalgamation of three thoughts: 1- Accepting monotheism. 2- Enjoining right and forbidding wrong. 3- Fulfilling human rights.

- Dr. Hameed Ullah defines it as, "Islam is a monotheist religion revealed through Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)."

- Imam Ghazali says, "Islam is the name of the amalgamation of 'The Rights of Allah' and 'The Rights of People!'"

- In his book 'Islam Aik Nazar', Sadar-Uddin-Islahi states, "Islam is the name of the unification of faith and worship rituals."

SALIENT FEATURES OF ISLAM

1. Tauheed

One of the salient features of Islam is the concept of Tauheed, which forms the first part of the Kalma and is emphasized in the Surah Ikhlas. It stands as the core pillar of Islam, shaping our faith, worship, rituals, and systems. Islam revolves around the belief in and devotion to a single divine entity, Allah. To better understand the significance of Tauheed, Allamah Shibli Nomani described it as the first chapter of the Islamic syllabus and likened Islam itself to a fortified structure, with the gate of that fort being Tauheed. This concept underscores the fundamental unity and oneness of Allah, providing a strong foundation for the faith and guiding Muslims in their spiritual journey.

2. Prophethood

Prophethood stands out as a salient feature of Islam, encompassing the second part of the Kalma and emphasizing the finality of prophethood. The verse 33:40 from Surah Al-Ahzab states, "Muhammad is not the father of [any] one of your men, but [he is] the Messenger of Allah and last of the prophets." This declaration solidifies the belief that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the seal of prophethood, marking the end of divine revelation. As the last messenger, he serves as a guide for all Muslims, and his teachings are enshrined in the Sunnah, forming an integral part of the Islamic way of life. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) described himself as an educator, stating, "Verily, I have been sent as a teacher to mankind." His role as a teacher is crucial in disseminating knowledge and guiding humanity towards the righteous path. The Prophet's teachings and actions, known as the Sunnah, serve as a source of rules and guidance, complementing the Quran as the sources of Shariah. The Quran, being the theoretical foundation, finds its practical application through the Prophet's actions, illustrating the interplay between the Quranic principles and the Prophet's practical implementation. Thus, prophethood in Islam represents a fundamental feature, with Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) serving as the ultimate exemplar and teacher, providing guidance and leading Muslims on the straight path.

3. Complete Code of Life

Islam encompasses a comprehensive code of life, guiding individuals in every aspect of their lives. It provides guidance for various stages and situations, such as the adhan (call to prayer) after childbirth, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and thanking Allah for the blessing of a new life. Islam also offers principles for the upbringing of children, focusing on instilling strong moral character and values in them. Education is highly emphasized in Islam, as evidenced by the Hadith stating, "Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman." The religion further emphasizes earning a livelihood through lawful means, as it is considered an act of worship.

Islam also provides guidelines for family life, emphasizing the rights and responsibilities of family members, including husbands, wives, parents, and children. Moreover, Islam extends its guidance to collective aspects of life, encompassing social interactions, political systems such as the concept of Khilafat, and financial and judicial systems. It provides principles for establishing a just and equitable society.

Islam's comprehensive nature extends to global affairs as well, offering guidance on matters that affect the global community. Muslims are encouraged to uphold justice, fairness, and respect for others in their dealings with people from different nations and backgrounds.

Thus, Islam serves as a complete code of life, offering guidance in individual and collective aspects, including personal development, family life, education, livelihood, social interactions, political systems, financial and judicial systems, and global affairs. It provides a holistic framework for Muslims to navigate and thrive in every aspect of their lives, fostering a harmonious and just society.

4. Islam and Humanity

Humanity is a core idea in Islam, promoting equality, love, care, welfare, tolerance, and the fulfillment of human and animal rights. Islam teaches its followers to embrace the principles of humanity in various ways. Firstly, it emphasizes character building, with the Hadith stating, "The perfect among believers are those who are best in character." This encourages Muslims to cultivate virtuous qualities and conduct themselves with kindness and compassion.

Islam also emphasizes the welfare of mankind, as highlighted in the book "Key Features of Islam" by Dr. Wasiullah M. Abbas, a professor at Al-Azhar University in Egypt. Muslims are encouraged to actively engage in social services and contribute to the betterment of society.

Charity is another important aspect of Islam, with the Quran (2:177) stating, "Muslims are those who give wealth despite their love for it." Muslims are encouraged to be generous and selfless in their financial contributions to uplift those in need.

The provision of medical services is highly valued in Islam, with caring for the sick being considered a sacred form of worship. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "When a Muslim visits his sick Muslim brother, he is harvesting the fruits of Paradise until he returns" (Sahih Muslim). This highlights the importance of visiting and providing support to those who are sick.

Islam also upholds human rights, with the Quranic teachings emphasizing equality and justice for all. In his farewell sermon, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) explicitly denounced racism and nationalism, promoting the idea of unity and equality among all people.

Furthermore, Islam emphasizes the rights of animals and the protection of the environment. The incident in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) scolded a companion over mistreating a thirsty camel illustrates the importance of animal rights in Islam. Additionally, various Hadiths highlight the significance of environmental protection, encouraging the planting of trees, preservation of water, and the avoidance of unnecessary waste.

In conclusion, humanity is deeply ingrained in the teachings of Islam. It emphasizes the development of noble character, the welfare of mankind, charity, provision of medical services, human rights, animal rights, and environmental protection. By adhering to these principles, Muslims are encouraged to cultivate a sense of compassion, justice, and responsibility towards all aspects of creation, promoting a harmonious and inclusive society.

5. Five Pillars of Islam

The Five Pillars of Islam are integral to the practice of the faith and serve as a fundamental framework for Muslims to establish a strong connection with Allah and lead a righteous life. Each pillar holds deep significance, representing key acts of worship and devotion.

The first pillar, Shahada, is the declaration of faith, affirming the belief in the oneness of Allah and the prophethood of Muhammad. It serves as the foundational principle upon which the entire Islamic faith is built.

Salah, the second pillar, refers to the obligatory prayers performed five times a day. It provides a means of direct communication with Allah, fostering spiritual connection and promoting mindfulness and gratitude.

Sawm, the third pillar, involves fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. Muslims abstain from food, drink, and other worldly pleasures from dawn until sunset. This pillar encourages self-discipline, self-reflection, and empathy towards the less fortunate, while deepening the spiritual connection with Allah.

Zakat, the fourth pillar, involves the giving of alms to the needy and less fortunate. It is a mandatory act of charity, purifying one's wealth and reminding Muslims of their responsibility to support those in need. Zakat promotes social cohesion, empathy, and the equitable distribution of resources within society.

The fifth pillar, Hajj, is the pilgrimage to the sacred city of Mecca, a once-in-a-lifetime obligation for those who are physically and financially able. It symbolizes unity, equality, and the culmination of the Muslim community's devotion to Allah. The pilgrimage involves various rites and rituals that commemorate the actions of Prophet Ibrahim and his family, fostering a deep sense of spirituality and connection with the Islamic heritage.

These five pillars are the core of the deen and focus on moral practices. Allah says in the Quran, "indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds and establish prayer and give zakah and they believe in Allah and the Last Day - those are the [rightly] guided" (2:27-7). In summary, this Quranic verse encapsulates the essence of the five pillars of Islam, emphasizing the importance of faith, prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage. It highlights that true believers are those who not only have faith but also engage in righteous actions, establishing a holistic approach to worship, spirituality, and moral conduct.

6. Modesty and Morality

Islam promotes modesty and morality in various aspects of life. Muslims are encouraged to dress modestly, maintain honorable behavior, and uphold ethical values in their interactions with others. In the Holy Quran, Allah says, "Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them. And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do." This verse emphasizes the importance of modesty and moral conduct for both men and women in Islam and promotes a sense of decency, restraint, and respect in Muslims. Hence, the Islamic teachings on modesty and morality serve as a means to cultivate self-discipline, purity of heart, and a virtuous character.

7. Community and Brotherhood

Islam fosters a sense of community and brotherhood among Muslims. The faith encourages unity, cooperation, and mutual support within the Muslim ummah (community). The Quran emphasizes the importance of community and brotherhood in several verses, and one of the notable verses that highlights this aspect is: "The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah that you may receive mercy." (Quran 49:10) This verse underscores the sense of unity, brotherhood, and mutual support among believers in the Islamic community. It highlights that all believers are bound together as brothers and sisters in faith, regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, or social status. Therefore, Muslims are encouraged to build strong bonds, help one another, and work collectively for the betterment of society.

8. Quran and Hadith

The Quran and Hadith hold immense significance as salient features of Islam, serving as authoritative sources of guidance and wisdom for Muslims.

The Quran, the holy book of Islam, is believed to be the direct word of Allah, revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) over a span of 23 years. It is a comprehensive guide, addressing matters of faith, worship, ethics, social interactions, and governance. The Quran serves as a timeless and unaltered source of divine revelation, offering Muslims a blueprint for leading a righteous and fulfilling life.

Complementing the Quran is the Hadith, which consists of the sayings, actions, and approvals of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Compiled by scholars over generations, the Hadith provides practical examples and explanations of how to implement the teachings of the Quran in various aspects of life. It offers insights into matters not explicitly mentioned in the Quran, covering a wide range of topics, including personal conduct, spirituality, family life, social justice, and governance. The Hadith helps Muslims understand the application of Islamic principles in everyday situations and provides valuable guidance for individual and communal affairs.

Together, the Quran and Hadith form the foundation of Islamic theology, ethics, and jurisprudence. They provide a comprehensive framework for Muslims to navigate the complexities of life, offering guidance on matters of faith, worship, morality, and social interactions. The Quran and Hadith embody the divine wisdom and mercy of Allah, offering Muslims timeless guidance to seek spiritual enlightenment, cultivate virtuous character, and establish a just and compassionate society. They are revered as the primary sources of Islamic teachings and remain central to the lives of Muslims worldwide.

9. Continuous Learning

Islam emphasizes the pursuit of knowledge as a lifelong endeavor. Seeking knowledge is regarded as a religious duty for both men and women. The Messenger of Allah

(peace be upon him) said, 'Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim' (Hadith).

Therefore, Muslims are encouraged to acquire knowledge in various fields, including religious sciences, humanities, sciences, and practical skills, with the intention of benefiting themselves and others.

10. Balance and Moderation

Islam promotes a balanced and moderate approach to life. Muslims are encouraged to avoid extremes, whether it be in matters of faith, worship, personal conduct, or worldly pursuits. Islam emphasizes the importance of maintaining a harmonious equilibrium, upholding the principles of justice, compassion, and moderation in all aspects of life. A hadith narrated by Sahih Bukhari states that, "Verily, this religion is easy, and no one burdens himself in religion but that it overwhelms him." This hadith reminds Muslims that Islam is a religion of ease and moderation. It serves as a reminder to avoid extremism or excessive hardships in religious practices, as going to extremes can lead to burdens and difficulties that go against the balanced nature of Islam.

These salient features of Islam collectively shape the beliefs, practices, and values of Muslims, guiding them in their spiritual journey, moral conduct, and social interactions.