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Question: What is Islam? Enlist the Salient Features of Islam.

The word Islam is derived from an Arabic root "SLM" which means peace, surrender and submission. The contextual meaning is submission of desires to the will of Allah, i.e. that Islam is a religion which brings peace to mankind when man commits himself to the will of Allah. According to the Holy Book revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), it is the only true religion professed by all Prophets from Adam (AS) to Muhammad (PBUH). A Muslim is one who believes in faith of Islam.

Islam is a universal deen that guides in every aspect of life. Its guidance is for everyone till the day of Judgement and not for a limited time, not confined for a specific geography or ethnicity.

Salient Features of Islam

(1) The Concept of Tawheed :

The Concept of Tawheed or Monotheism is the core concept of Islam, all other beliefs, commands and laws of Islam stand firm on this foundation.

It is ~~one~~ the first part of Kalma Tayyaba, where we

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affirm that,

"There is no worthy of worship except Allah and Muhammad (PBUH) is the messenger of God"

Tawheed means believing in oneness of Allah, affirming that there is only one Supreme Lord of the universe. He is Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Sustainer of the world and mankind. The flawless plans in this Universe, its immense beauty and harmony in operation would not be possible without a creator or a planner. In Quran, Allah mentions in Surah Ikhlaas about his oneness,

"Say, 'He is God, the One. God, the Absolute. He begets not, nor was He begotten. And there is nothing comparable to Him'"

Another Ayat in Quran relating to oneness of Allah has been mentioned in Surah Al-Baqara as following,

"Your god is one God, there is no god but (Allah); the Most Merciful; the most Compassionate"

Tawheed is the root of all beliefs. One can not be a Muslim without believing in Tawheed. It is said in Quran that,

"Surely, disbelievers are those who said, 'Allah is the third of three'. And there is no god except Allah. And if they do not desist from what they are saying, there will surely afflict the disbelievers among them a painful punishment"

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In Surah Al-Imran, it is mentioned in verse 18 that,
"Allah witness that there is no deity except him and (so do) the angels and those of knowledge [that he is] maintaining in justice. There is no deity except him, the Exalted in Might, the wise."

Allama Shibli Nomani in his book "Seerat un Nabi (SAW)" has quoted a few ahadith of Holy Prophet (SAW) regarding Tawheed,

- "Tawheed is the first chapter of Islamic Syllabus"
- "Islam is like a fort and the gate of that fort is Tawheed"

(2) Prophethood:

Prophethood, the second part of Kalma Tayyaba, indicates that believing in prophethood is also a basic part of our faith. Allah has revealed His guidance through his prophets and Muhammad (PBUH) was the last prophet. To believe in prophets mean to believe in their message, their laws and teachings as well. because the mission of all prophets was to translate the guidance of Allah into their lives and practice.

In Quran, Allah has mentioned,

"Every messenger who was sent by Us, was sent for the purpose that he should be obeyed under the

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Sanction of Allah "

Believing in the finality of Prophethood is also an important part of our faith. As a Muslim, it is a need of our faith to believe that Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the last prophet till Qiyama. and no other prophet will come after him.

" Muhammad [PBUH] is not the father of [any] one of your men, but [he is] The Messenger of Allah and last of The Prophets "

Believing in prophethood teaches us a lot of important things necessary to lead a meaningful life. This code of conduct is the way of way life and by following his Sunnah, we can live our life according to the will of Allah.

You have an excellent model in The Messenger of Allah, for all who put their hope in Allah and The last day and remember Allah much (Surah Ahzab : 21)

~~From Prophet (PBUH) life.~~

Prophet (PBUH) has been sent to educate us, to guide us to the straight path about which Allah has willed. He guides only by commands of Allah.

In Quran, Allah has mentioned,

" Nor does he speak of his own whims. It is only

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a revelation sent down to him" (53:3-4)

Holy Prophet (PBUH) had said,

"Verily I have been sent as a Teacher to Mankind."

So, believing in his (PBUH) teachings is or the prophets before is another unique feature of Islam.

(3) Complete Code of Life

Islam is not just a religion but it is a complete code of life. It guides us in every aspect of life. It is complete ~~in its own~~ on its own and is a universal deen unlike any other religion.

~~Not~~ In Quran Allah says,

"I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion" (05:03)

Being a complete code of life, not only it guides about individual life but also teaches about the affairs of the collective life. Regarding individual life, Islam guides about each and every aspect from birth till death, about the way ^{a person} should be leading his life, about his character building, about educating himself, his rights and duties, responsibilities, his role as a father / child / brother / son and all other.

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Islam has told us ~~to~~ how to be a good person, have a good character, a good behaviour, etc.

Holy Prophet (PBUH) had said,

"The best amongst you are those who have the best manners and character."

He (PBUH) also taught us about educating ourselves,

"Seeking knowledge is a duty upon every Muslim"

Regarding collective life, Islam has given us a set of rights and obligation by which we are expected to live. Islam is a comprehensive way of life to bring true peace and Justice at family, social and global levels. Islam protects the honour, chastity, purity and lineage of the family, it teaches us how to treat our spouse better, how to respect for parents and elder and how to behave with children.

"And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them, but address them in terms of honour [17:23]"

Holy Prophet (PBUH) said,

"As and when the elder of a community or a nation meets you, honor him and respect him"

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Similarly Islam asks every Muslim to keep his social spirit fully alive and hold dear the collective interests. It calls upon every individual to be responsible to all other members of the society and the society to be responsible to all individuals.

(4) Simple, Rational and Practical Religion

Islam is a simple and practical religion. Its teachings are simple and free from irrational beliefs and superstitions. There is no hierarchy of priests and no complicated rites and rituals. ~~Everyone~~ It is a religion without any mythology. The truth of Islamic principles follows logically from the belief in unity and oneness of God. If God is One, all human beings are the creatures of the same God and are equal in His sight and His Divine Relations are for moral and spiritual needs of a man. The Quran says,

Those who believe and act righteously, joy is for them, and a blissful home to return to (13:29)

Prophet (PBUH) 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"

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Islam brings the man out of the world of superstitions and darkness and initiates him into the world of knowledge and light. The Quran advises the man to pray,

"O, my Lord, Advance me in knowledge" (20:114)

"Those who have no knowledge are not equal to those who have it (39:9)

"Those who do not observe and understand are worse than cattle (7:179)"

An Irish playwright, and a critic. George Bernard Shaw studied Islam and ^{political activist.} said,

"I believe that if a man like him (PBUH) were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he (PBUH) would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring it much needed happiness and peace."

(5) Life of Hereafter

According to Islam, this world is a place of trial and one day it will come to an end and after that a new world be resurrected. It will be the life of here after where a man will give account to all of that he does he in this world.. Those who live in present

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world according to the will of Allah, will enjoy an eternal bliss in the hereafter and those who disobey will have to bear the punishment. According to Quran, "Every soul will taste death, then to Us you will be returned (29:57)"

"Verily, We shall indeed bring the dead back to life, and We shall record whatever [deeds] they have sent ahead, and the traces [of good and evil] which they have left behind: for all things do We take account in a record clear (36:12)"

"Say: "Shall I tell you of better things than these, with which the righteous will be rewarded by their Lord? These will be gardens beneath which rivers flow, where they will live forever with spouses of perfect chastity and the good pleasure of Allah". (3:15)

Believing in the day of Judgement is one of the core Islamic Beliefs. Those who focus only on the life of this world will miss out on the reality which is the Hereafter life, which will never end. In the Quran, Allah said,

"The life of this world is merely an amusement and a diversion, the true life is in the Hereafter, if only they knew (29:64)"

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(6) Universality

The message of Islam is Universal. It is for the entire human race and not for some specific ~~with~~ ethnicity or region. The Prophet (PBUH) is a Messenger for the whole mankind. In the words of Quran,

"O People! I am the Messenger of God to you all."
(7:158)

"And we have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the whole world."

According to Islam, everyone is equal regardless of their color, race, religion. Universal religion is the one which is prevalent all over the world and its followers are found in various nations and countries. A religion that existed from the beginning of the creation of man on this earth and continues its existence until man exists on this planet and thus in this sense, Islam is the only Universal religion.

The religion of Islam was completed and perfected at the end of the mission of Holy Prophet (PBUH). In the last chapter that was revealed to the Prophet (PBUH), Allah stated that,

"This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." (5:3)

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(7) Only Religion Accepted and Blessed by Allah :

Islam is the religion that is directly ~~not~~ revealed by Allah through His words to all His Prophets through the Angel Jibreel. Through the changing of Prophets and messengers, the word of Allah is passed down to the next prophet with more refinement and improvement each time. The words of Allah came to Holy Prophet (SAW) as the last messenger till the end of time, with such greater refinement which makes Islam a perfect religion. This perfection is acknowledged by Allah himself, so Islam becomes the only religion that Allah acknowledges.

Allah himself said in Quran,

“Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam. And those who were given the Scripture did not differ except after knowledge had come to them”
(3:19)

“And whoever desires a religion other than Islam, then it will never be accepted from him. And he will be amongst the losers in the hereafter (3:85)”

Not only it is abundantly clear in the Holy Quran and blessed Sunnah that Islam is the only true religion, but that was the entire mission of Holy

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Prophet (SAW). The ~~the~~ Holy Prophet (PBUH) spent his life in bringing people from other religions to Islam. He (PBUH) would not have done this if all religions were acceptable.

(8) Islam and Humanity

Loving, caring, sympathizing every person ir-respective of their color, race or gender, without any discrimination is humanity. Islam has taught us about humanity about 1400 years ago. Not only fulfilling the rights of humans, but protection of animal rights and our environment is also included in humanity. Treating others with respect and kindness, fulfilling their rights ~~with~~ and be tolerant with. ~~Islam is the~~ Holy Prophet (PBUH) had said, "The Perfect among believers is the one who is perfect in character."

Modern day psychology also proves that good character is good humanity. According to ~~Quran~~, another Hadith, "The best among you is the one who doesn't harm others with his tongue and ~~hands~~ hands."

Holy Prophet (PBUH) in his last sermon said, "No Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab; no white man has any superiority over a black man or black man over white man. You are all the children of Adam and Adam was created from clay."

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Another form of humanity is giving charity. Charity is done for public benefit, relief and to provide assistance to people at times of need in any part of the world. Giving charity is highly favoured in Islam and is a unique characteristic of this religion that supports providing help to the needy. Allah mentioned in Quran;

“Those who give, out of their possessions, by night and by day, in private and in public will have their reward with their Lord” (2:274)

Animal rights are also included in humanity. and according to Islam, animals are conscious of God, they praise Him. Baiting animals for entertainment or gambling is prohibited. It is forbidden to kill any animal except for food and to prevent it from harming people. Islam provides considerable support for the importance of animal welfare. Holy Prophet (PBUH) had reprimanded a man because his camel was thirsty. In one hadith, Prophet (PBUH) said, “A good deed done to an animal is as meritorious as a good deed done to a human being, while an act of cruelty to an animal is as bad as an act of cruelty to a human being”

Protection of environment is also a form of humanity. Finding ways to reduce, reuse and

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recycle resources can help protect the environment. Planting more trees and not cutting the green trees is for protection of environment. Islam is the only religion that teaches us to protect our environment and not waste any resources. Allah has created a perfectly balanced world and that must be maintained by man acting moderately, thoughtfully and justly.

According to a hadith;

"There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, but is regarded as a charitable gift."

In another hadith;

"Do not cut green trees even if you are in case of war"

(9) Unity of Matter and Spirit

Another unique feature of Islam is that it stands for life-fulfilment. It seeks to establish an equilibrium between the two aspects of life, the matter and the spiritual. Islam does not admit any separation between 'material' and 'spiritual life' and encourages the man to devote all his energies to the reconstruction of life on healthy moral foundations. Islam enjoins man to purify his soul and also to reform his daily life, both individual and collective.

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and to establish the supremacy of right over might and virtue over vice. Quran advises us to pray as follows,

"Our Lord! Give us in this world that which is good and in the Hereafter that which is good." (2:201)

Another According to a hadith,

"Observe fasting and break it [at proper time] and stand in prayer and devotion (in the night) and have not sleep, for your body has right over you and your eyes have right over you and your wife has a claim upon you".

Islam says that, anything in this world is for man, but man was created to serve a higher purpose; the establishment of moral and just order according to the will of Allah and Islam is the only religion to enjoin this.

(10) All of the teachings of Islam are preserved

All of the teachings of Islam are preserved from start to end and are available without any adulteration is another distinct aspect of Islam

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The Holy Book Quran, which was revealed fourteen hundred years ago, is still in its original form. Detailed accounts of life of Prophet (PBUH) and all his teachings are available in their pristine purity. There has not been a single change in any any kind of record. During the time of Holy Prophet (PBUH) when Quran was revealed, he (PBUH) had the whole text of divine messages from the beginning to the end committed to writing by scribes of revelations. Many of the companions learned the whole text of Quran, every syllable of it by heart.

In Quran Allah has mentioned,
"Absolutely, We have revealed the reminder, and, absolutely, we will preserve it" [15:9]

From this verse it is clear that Allah himself have taken the responsibility of preserving his own teachings. And Islam is the only religion which is being preserved by Allah himself. All other religion's teachings, got changed over time.

