

What is meant by Islam? Enlist the salient features of Islam.

• Meaning of Islam :

• Literal Meaning

Islam is an Arabic word and denotes "submission, surrender and obedience".

As a religion, Islam stands for complete submission and obedience to Allah - that is why it is called Islam.

The other literal meaning of Islam is "peace" and this signifies that one can achieve real peace of body and of mind only through submission and obedience to Allah. Such a life of obedience brings peace of the heart and establishes real peace in society at large.

"Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah - indeed it is in the thought of Allah alone that the heart of man really finds rest - those who believe and act righteously, joy is for them, and a blissful home to return to." (Al-Quran 13: 28-29)

• Contextual Meaning:

The contextual meaning of Islam is to enter in peace by submitting to the will of Allah. It means submission of one's desires to the will of Allah. Allah says in the Glorious Quran:

“And Allah invites to the abode of peace, and leadeth whom He will to a straight path.” (10:25)

This message of Islam was preached by all the prophets of Allah, who guided man to the right path. The last of these prophets was Muhammad (P.B.U.H), who presented Allah's guidance in its final form and arranged to preserve it for all time.

• Salient features of Islam:

Islam is the religion of truth. It is the embodiment of the code of life, which Allah, Lord of the universe, has revealed for the guidance of mankind. The salient features of Islam are as follows:

(1) Tauheed:

Tauheed is a revolutionary concept and constitutes the essence of the teachings

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of Islam. It means that there is only One Supreme Lord of the universe. He is Omnipotent, Omnipresent and sustainer of the world and of mankind. Tauheed is the core pillar of Deen Islam. The first part of kalma presents the tauheed (unity of Allah).

“There's no God except Allah; Muhammad is His prophet.”

Allama Shibli Noumani Quoted 2 hadith about tauheed in his book *Sisrah tun Nabi* :

1. “Tauheed is the first chapter of Islamic syllabus.”
2. “Islam is like a fort and gate of

We witness a superb, flawless plan in the universe, can it be without a planner?

We see great enchanting beauty and harmony in its working, can they be without a creator? All these things point towards one fact: there is a God, Lord of Universe, Allah. Truly, Allah said in Quran :

“O, Mankind: worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, so that

you may ward off evil. Who has appointed the earth a resting place for you, the sky a canopy? and who causes water to pour down from the heavens, thereby producing fruits as food for you? So, do not set up rivals to Allah, when you know better." (2: 21-22)

2. Prophet hood :

The second part of Kalima, on the other hand, signifies that God has not left man without any guidance for the conduct of his life. He has revealed his Guidance through his prophets and Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was the last prophet. And to believe in a prophet means to believe in his message, to accept the law which he gave and to follow the code of conduct which he taught.

Thus, the second basic postulate of Islam is to believe in the prophet-hood of Muhammad (P.B.U.H), to accept the religion which he presented and to follow his commands. This message is clearly delivered in Surah Ahzab :

"Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the messenger of Allah and the seal of the prophets."

And about the last prophet it is explicitly stated that:

"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 headache." (4:65).

3. Complete code of Life:

Islam is not a religion in the common, distorted meaning of the word, confining its scope to the private life of man. It is a complete way of life, providing guidance for all walks of life: individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, national and international. It teaches the honesty in every aspect of life. Allah Al-mighty says in the Quran:

"O you who believe! stand out firmly for Allah, as witness to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you, make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that you do." (Quran 5:8).

From above verses, we can conclude that Allah teaches us about doing justice in all aspects of life whether it is business or any other thing. We should be careful while doing trading, buying and selling in our daily life so that we are not doing unjust with anyone.

4. Islam and Humanity:

The message of Islam is for the entire human race. Allah, in Islam, is the Lord of ^{all} the world (Al Quran 1:1) and the Prophet (P.B.U.H) is a messenger for the whole of mankind. In Islam all men are equal, whatever be their color, language, race or nationality. Islam addresses itself to the conscience of humanity and banishes all false barriers of race, status and wealth. It plays a great role in character building. Allah says in Quran:

“Woe to every fault-finding backbiter.”
(104:1)

The prophet (P.B.U.H) said:

“The perfect among the believers are those who are best in character.”

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Islam teaches the great lessons of humanity. Allah says in Quran:

"And he who saves a life shall be as if he has given life to all mankind". (5:3).

5. Balance between the individual and Society:

Another unique feature of Islam is that it establishes a balance between individualism and collectivism. It believes in the individual personality of man and holds everyone personally accountable to God. It guarantees the fundamental rights of the individual and does not permit any one to tamper with them. It does not subscribe to the view that man lose his individuality in society or in the state. According to Quran:

"Man shall have nothing but what he strives for." (53:39).

and

"Verily Allah does not change a people's condition unless they change their inner selves". (13:11)

"For us are our deeds and for you are yours." (2:286)

On the other hand, it also awakens a sense of social responsibility in man, organizes human beings in a society and a state and enjoins the individual to subscribe the social good.

Prayer, in Islam, is offered in congregation which inculcates social discipline among the Muslims.

The holy prophet said:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ﴾

"Live together, do not turn against each other, make things easy for others and do not put obstacles in each other's way."

"He is not a believer who takes his fill while his neighbor starves."

In short, Islam neither neglects the individual nor society - it establishes a harmony and a balance between the two and assigns to each its proper due.

6. Simplicity, Rationalism and Practicalism:

Islam is a religion without any mythology. Its teachings are simple and intelligible. It is free from the superstitions and irrational

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beliefs. All the teachings of Islam are simple and straight forward. Everybody may approach the Book of God directly and translates it into practice. Islam awakens in man the faculty of reason and exhorts him to use his intellect. Allah says in Quran:

“That those who have no knowledge are not equal to those who have.” (39:9)

The prophet (P.B.U.H) said:

“To seek knowledge is obligatory for every muslim.”

This is how Islam brings man out of the world of superstition and darkness and initiates him into that of knowledge and light. Then, Islam is a practical religion and does not indulge in empty and futile theorisings. Deen Islam is something to be lived, and not an object of mere lip-service. The Quran says:

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

7. Unity of Matter and Spirit:

A unique feature of Islam is that it does not divide life into water-tight compartments of matter and spirit. It stands not for the life-denial but for life-fulfilment. Islam does not believe in asceticism. It does not ask man to avoid things material. It holds that spiritual elevation is to be achieved by living piously in the rough and tumble of life and not by renouncing the world. The Quran advises us to pray as follows:

"Our Lord! Give us the good in this world and the good in the hereafter." (2:201).

The holy prophet (P.B.U.H) said:

"A Muslim who lives in the midst of the society and bears with patience the afflictions that come to him is better than the one who shuns society and cannot bear any wrong done to him".

Islam teaches man that moral and material powers must be welded together and spiritual salvation can be achieved by using material resources for the good of man in the service of just ends, and not by living a life

of asceticism or by running away from the challenges of life.

8. Permanence and Change:

Islam presents an ideology which satisfies the demand of stability as well as of change. The Quran and Sunnah contain the eternal guidance given by the Lord of the universe. The principles of individual and society revealed by Allah are based on the reality and are eternal. But Allah has revealed only broad principles and has endowed man with the freedom to apply them in every age in the way suited to the spirit and conditions of that age. It is through the "Ijtihad" that people of every age try to implement and apply divine guidance to the problems of their times. Thus, the basic guidance is of a permanent nature, while the method of its application can change in accordance with the peculiar needs of every age. This is why Islam always remain as fresh and modern as tomorrow's moon.