

Question:

What is Islam? Enlist the salient features of Islam?

Introduction:

Islam is a religion, followed by Muslims. It is the embodiment of the code of life which Allah, the creator and Lord of the universe, has revealed for the guidance of mankind. So, here we will discuss the interpretation and definitions of Islam by various dimensions and its salient features.

Lexicology:

Islam is an Arabic word. Allah used it before anyone else in Qur'an. Old name of Islam was "Deen-e-Haneef". Islam is made up of three letters S-L-M, which means 'Peace' and 'To submit or surrender'.

Opposite of Islam:

The opposite of S-L-M is K-F-R which means "Rejection", rejection from supremacy of Allah and refusal to submit.

Secular definition of Islam:

According to Merriam Webster:

"The religious faiths of Muslims, including belief in Allah as the sole deity and in Muhammad (IBUH) as his prophet".

Islamic definition of Islam:

From Islamic point of view, Islam has several meanings:

"Submission of desires to the will of Allah"

"To enter in peace by submitting to the will of Allah Almighty."

If we write a comprehensive definition then, Islam is:

"The way of life (deen) that Allah Almighty has revealed for humanity so they may attain peace and success in this world and hereinafter."

As per Shariah:

As per Shariah, voluntarily submission of desires to the will of Allah is Islam, as Allah said in Verse: 03, Surah Maida, in Quran:

اليوم اكملت لكم دينكم و اتممت عليكم نعمتي و رضيت لكم الاسلام ديناً

"Today! I have perfected for you your religion; Completed upon you, my favour; And chosen for you Islam as deen."

Definition of Islam by Holy Prophet (PBUH):

As mentioned in Hadith-e-Tibraat, Holy Prophet (PBUH) described Islam in following words:

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"Islam is that you witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad (PBUH) is the messenger of Allah, and you establish the prayer, and you give Zakat, and you fast Ramadan, and you perform the Hajj of the House if you are able to take a way to it" also, as iterate in Sahih Muslim.

"It is only the prayer that creates a distinction between a believer and a non-believer".

Other definitions of Islam

Dr-Hamidullah has defined Islam in following words:

"Islam is a monotheist deem revealed through Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) only"

Another definition of Islam by a scholar, Imam Ghazali is as under:

"Islam is a combination of rights of Allah and rights of people"

Definition by Constitution of Pakistan

Pakistan's constitution makes a distinction between Muslims and non Muslims in following words:

"The one who do not accept Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as last prophet is not muslim"

Salient Features of Islam

So far we have discussed different definitions of Islam and have observed how every definition is distinct in its nature and shows new aspect of Islam. This is due to diverse features of Islam, let's discuss each of them one by one.

1- Islamic Concept of Tawheeds

Tawheed is core pillar of Islam. Unlike other religions, all faiths of muslims including Quran, prophets, worships are due to Allah. As Allah himself say in Surah Fatihah in Quran:

اِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَايَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

"You alone we worship and
You alone we ask for help"

The concept of Tawheed is so strong in Islam that due to Allah, muslims follow his sayings in this world as well. As muslims follow all rituals, implements all political, social, financial, judicial systems in accordance with sayings of Allah Almighty.

Tawheed that means the belief of "Oneness of Allah" is first part of Kalma, that reads:

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

"There is no worthy of worship
except Allah"

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The concept of Tawheed is explained by Allah Himself in Surah Al-Ikhlās of Quran, as follows:

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ
وَلَمْ يُولَدْ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

“Say, He is Allah, who is one. Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born. Nor is there to Him any equivalent.”

Finally, if we see how Tawheed is explained by Allama Shibli Noumani in his book *Surah-Tun-Nabi*, then it is:

“Tawheed is the first chapter of Islamic syllabus”

Further;

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

2. Prophethood

The second part of Kalimah signifies that Allah has not left man without any guidance for the conduct of his life, this part reads:

مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ

“And Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah”

To translate Allah's commands towards humanity, guidance is revealed through prophets. So, prophet guides humanity through way of life, which is

called "Sunnah". A prophet's life gives educations as after ~~with~~ prophet hood, prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said,

"Verily I have been sent as a teacher to mankind"

Prophet guides in rules of life. In other words, a prophet decodes and translates rules defined by Allah, so that humanity can understand. As Allah say in Surah Najm, Verse 3-4:

"Nor does he speak from (him own)

'inclination. It is not but a revelation revealed."

So a prophet's life guides towards a straight path.

For instance, Allah commanded in Quro'an to pray Salah five times a day but prophet (PBUH) told us practically that how that is to be done. So, it is very crucial to follow prophet to be on "Seerat-e-Mustaqeem."

3 - Complete Code of Life

Islam is a complete code of life, as it guide from one generation to another in every aspect of life. The guidance ranges from individual to collective life. The "Hidayat" is in the way to say Azan, child upbringing, character building and many other aspects. Even Islam guides towards compulsion of education, as Hadith says:

"Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every muslim men and women"

Along with the individual life, Islam guides in social, political, financial and other dealings of global world too.

4- Islam and humanity

"World's biggest religion is humanity"

As the above quotation says, so Islam being the universal religion guides humanity till the day of judgement. Islam is the only religion of the world that has been the flag bearer of humanity for the last 1400 years. Islam guides human in what's right and wrong, as Allah says in Surah Al-Maidah, verse #04:

"lawful for you are (all) good foods and (game caught by) what you have trained of hunting animals which you train as Allah has taught you. So eat of what they catch for you, and mention the name of Allah upon it, and fear Allah"

Islam teaches humanity in various aspects including the positive character building, welfare of mankind, charity, fulfillment of human rights, taking care of animal rights, environment protection and many others. Dr. Wasiullah M. Abbas, a scholar from Al-Azhar university in Egypt, writes in his book "Key features of Islam":

"Key feature of Islam is practice of social services"

5- Universality in Islam

As Allah calls himself "Rab-ul-Adameen" in Surah Fatihah, that means "Lord of all worlds" this shows universality of Islam. Islam is not time bound, not confined for a specific ethnicity, not for a certain geography, it is for everyone. Islam does not recognize any cast, creed, race or any national borders. Islam stands for Ideal System of Living for All Mankind, so Allah says in verse 32 of Surah Maidah

"Whoever takes a life unless as a punishment for murder or a mischief in the land - it will be as if they killed all of the humanity; and whoever saves a life, it will be as if they saved all humanity."

6- Guarantee of Protection and Authenticity:

This is a very unique feature of Islam. All religions suffered alterations in its message but Islam still has its original book for last 1400 years. This is because Allah himself has taken a responsibility for its preservation in Verse 09 of Surah Hijr:

إِنَّا نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَكَاثِبُونَ

"Verily, we have revealed the Quran and verily we will protect it."

7- Moderation and rationality:

Islam is a religion having simple and intelligible teachings, free from irrational beliefs, and superstitions. Basic articles of faith of Islam are based on sound logic and are simple and straightforward. All Faraiz (obligations) are easy and do-able. Along with the obligations, Islam guides about moderation between Dunya and Akhirah. In short, Islam neglects neither the individual nor the society, and establishes a harmony and a balance between the two.

8 - Unity of Matter and Spirit:

Islam seeks to establish an equilibrium between these two aspects of life, unlike other religions. Islam's teachings cater to the spiritual as well as temporal needs of man. Overall, Islam serves as a middle path and aims to produce a moral man in the service of a just society.

Conclusion:

Islam is a "din" that has many distinctive aspects that distinguish it from other religions. These aspects which we discussed include: Tauheed, prophethood, complete code, humanity etc. After going through this we come to know that Islam is diverse and a "complete code of life".