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Question: Describe the salient features of Islam

Introduction to Islam :

Islam is an Arabic word that denotes submission, surrender and ultimate obedience. The other literal meaning of the word "Islam" is peace. Combining the literal and contextual meaning gives the idea that Islam means submission and peace. Submission to the commandments of Allah and through this submission one can achieve real sense of peace and contentment. It is the code of life which Allah has revealed for the guidance of mankind.

Allah says in the Holy Quran; in "Surah Al-e-Imran; verse number Nineteen :

“ إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ ”

“ Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam ”

The verse cited is the clear indication of Islam as the only accepted religion in the sight of Allah. And the fact that it is indeed the favour of Allah upon mankind that he has given human beings a way of living a peaceful life where their individual, social, cultural and politico-economic aspects are well addressed and taken care of. Allah revealed in the Holy Quran; Surah Al-Maidah :

” اليوم اكملت لكم دينكم واتممت
عليكم نعمتي رفيت لكم الاسلام
دينا ”

” This day I have perfected
your religion for you and
Completed my favor on you
and have chosen for you
Islam as your religion ”

Thus, it can be clearly concluded that Allah has chosen Islam as the only saviour of mankind - only

in the path of Islam; man can find eternal peace and prosperity.

But to submit is to understand and bow your head in obedience. This requires a complete and honest understanding of features of Islam. While embarking on the journey of complete submission; realization of first and foremost pillar of Islam is of utmost importance.

Tawhid : The bedrock of Islam

Tawhid 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 omnipotent and omnipresent, the sustainer of the world and the mankind. No one is worthy of obedience, devotion and worship except Allah. To enter the bounds of Islam, Tawhid is the foremost component. The first part of Kalima says:

“ لا اله الا الله ”

“ There is no God truly
worthy of worship except
Allah ”

Allah says in the Holy
Quran; Surah Al-Ahad .

” قُلْ صَوَّأَللَّهُ أَخَذَ - اللَّهُ السَّمْعَ
لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ . وَلَمْ
يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ ”

“ Say; He is Allah the one,
Allah is eternal and absolute
None is born of him and nor
was He born, And there is
none equivalent to him ”

The message of Tawhid is
a universal one which was preached
by all the prophets of all times.
It is not merely a concept but a
dynamic belief that there is only
one God; Allah and all creatures
submit to him; hence all are
equal before him. The belief in

oneness of Allah, therefore sets a man free from the shackles of many worldly Gods. This is the very first step that if taken enters the man in the fort of Islam.

Allama Shibli Nomani in his famous book "Seerat-un-Nabi" quotes the Hadith from the prophet PBUH, it says:

"Islam is like a fort and the gate of that fort is Tawhid"

Hence, Tawhid is the single most fundamental belief and feature of Islam. It is now of importance to discuss the other vital belief of Islam. i.e. Aaveeda Risalat - Phophethood.

Aaveeda-e-Risalate : Prophethood

The belief in the prophethood is the second part of the Kalima that makes a person

a Muslim. The full Kalima can be quoted here to reiterate the fact :

“ لا اله الا الله . محمد رسول الله ”

“ There is no God worthy of worship except Allah ; and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the messenger of Allah ”

To believe in a prophet means to believe in the revelation revealed onto him by Allah which means the prophet is the ultimate source of guidance from Allah. Thus the second basic postulate of Islam is to believe in the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH) to accept the religion that he presented and to follow his commandments and his example. The guidance of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through his actions is called **Sunnah of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH)**. It tells the way of life in Islam.

The life of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the source of Shariah ; comprising of revealed Quran and Prophet's sayings in the form of Hadiths. It is through the belief in the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH) that man is able to find the right path. In the Holy Quran ; it is stated in Surah Al-Fatiha :

“ اِقْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ”

“Guide us to the straight path ”

The awareness of this straight and right path is created by the teachings of prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

Another important feature of Islam is the belief in Life after death.

Aqeeda-e-Akhirat : Life after death

The belief in Oneness of Allah and the finality of prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH) as the last messenger of Allah ; brings a man to the third postulate of Islam

which is believe in the consequences of good and bad actions in life in the hereafter. The world according to Islam is a place of trial. Allah says in the Holy Quran in Surah Al-Mulk:

”الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاتِ
لِيَتْلُوَكُمْ أَلِكُم آخِسُنْ مُجَدًّا
“It is [He] who created
life and death to test
you (as to) which of you
is best in deed”

This verse gives a complete paradigm shift to the concept of life of this world, which in the words of Allah is only a test; the accountability and consequences of that test to be borne in the hereafter, if not immediately in the worldly life. This belief is a powerful reminder by Allah to keep things in order whether it is on individual levels or in the broader aspect of socio-economic life.

Islam as a complete code of life:

Islam is not only a religion of Allah but the most striking feature of Islam is being "Deen Allah" which literally means to attain supremacy, dominion and status; the contextual meaning being the complete code of life.

It means that Islam covers all aspects of human life catering to the individual needs of human beings to the social and communal aspects of life.

Islam gives a "Shariat" for following the commandments of Allah in all spheres of life, be it rituals, social functions, political and financial systems, system of justice and ways of good governance.

Islam emphasizes these individual and collective role of human in the form of "Haqooq-Allah and

Haqooq-ul-Ibad" which stresses the vitality of fulfilling rights of worship towards Allah as well as rights of society upon man.

Islam emphasizes upon the fulfillment of rights of others onto the human being. In a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) it is narrated that :

“ The best among you (believers) are those who are best to their families ”

The above display of assertion on dealings with family, is a testament to the core essence of Islam as a Complete Code of life.

In the words of George Bernard Shaw :

“ I have always held the religion of Muhammad in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion which appears to me to possess that assimilating capacity to the changing phases of existence ”

Here the question arises, what are those characteristics of Islam which have won millions of followers

to the faith in the past and which makes it so appealing to the modern age. The answer lies with the **Universality, rationality and practicality of Islam.**

Islam is a religion of rationality and gives practical answers to the issues of contemporary world. This feature of Islam makes it free of superstitions and false dogmas. The oneness of Allah; the prophethood of Muhammad (SAW) as the last messenger and believe in life after death being basic articles of faith for all Muslims across the globe make it a universal religion. A universality that binds all Muslims as one Ummah. No superiority is considered of an Arab over a non-Arab; hence fostering a cordial relationship of kindness and unity across all Muslims. These are some of

the features of Islam that establish its credentials as the one true religion of today and the day to come. And it teaches mankind the same spirit of goodness for a sustainable and prosperous society.

Allah says in the Holy Quran in Surah Al-Ra'ad :

” الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ طُوبَىٰ لَهُمْ وَحَسُنَ مَا أَتَىٰ ”

“ Those who believed and have done righteous deeds, A good state is theirs and a good return ”