

Question:

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

Answer:

Introduction:

The word 'Islam' is an Arabic word which occurred for the first time in the Holy Quran. It is the name of the religion that Muslims follow all around the world believing it to be the word of Allah Almighty that was delivered by the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) through Quran and hadith. The word 'Islam' itself has two meanings, one is the literal meaning and the other is the contextual.

Literal meaning:

The root word of Islam is **SLM** which is an Arabic word. It means "to surrender", "to yield", and "to submit". Another shade of meaning of this root word is "to make peace". In this way, the word Islam also means submission and peace.

Contextual meaning:

The conventional or contextual meaning of Islam is to enter in peace by submitting to the will of Allah Almighty or the submission of desires to the will of Allah. This signifies that a person can achieve real peace of body, soul, and mind only through submission and obedience to Allah.

Concept of Islam:

The divine teachings of Holy Quran and the sayings of Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) reveal the real concept of Islam. These sources explain how the submission and obedience of Allah is essential and how Islam as a religion deals the complexities of ethics, moral, social, cultural, and individual and collective life spheres of humans.

In addition to this, Islam enables a man to make peace with himself and his community on one hand and with Allah Almighty on the other hand. It is a trusted source of guidance that brings forth the truths of material life and the metaphysical realm. It caters to the material as well as spiritual needs of a human. It is said in the Holy Quran,

ذلك الكتاب لا ريب فيه هدى
للمتقين - (القرآن)

"There is no doubt in this book - a guidance to the pious, who believe in the Unseen".

(Surah Baqarah 2:2)

The essence of Islamic concept is the establishment of Allah's sovereignty in spiritual beliefs and the mundane domains of personal and collective life. which is achieved by total ascendancy of the Quran and the Sunnah of Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H).

Salient features

There are few eminent features of Islam that make it a unique religion amongst all other religions in the world. It is a complete code of life that addresses all the essential aspects of life. Following are the few features that make Islam stand out the most:

1. Tauheed (Belief in Oneness of Allah):

The foremost important feature of Islam is tauheed. It is mandatory for a believer of Islam to have unqualified and unconditional belief in the oneness of Allah. A muslim has to testify through his tongue and heart that he believes that the existence of Allah is unsharable and indivisible. It is said in the Quran,

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ
اللَّهُ الْقَدِيمُ لَمْ
يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ
وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ
كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

→ Say, 'O Prophet,' "He is Allah - One and Indivisible - Allah - the Sustainer [needed by all] - He has never had offspring, nor was He born - And there is none comparable to Him"

(Surah Ikhlas 112:1-4)

Moreover, the first part of 'kalma' also highlights the oneness of Allah that is the main essence of tauheed. It is also the first pillar of Islam to declare solid belief in the Oneness of Allah and finality of Prophethood, the Last Prophet, Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H).

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُحَمَّدٌ رَّسُولُ اللَّهِ

→ There is none [worthy of worship] except Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

Allama Shibli Nomani writes in his book, *Sirat-un-Nabi* that Islam is like a fort and the gate of that fort is Tauheed.

2. Prophethood:

Islam puts much emphasis on the beliefs of Islam to acknowledge the finality of prophethood. Allah chose Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H) as His last messenger and through him, He guided all the mankind to the right path. It is evident in the second part of first kalma, also saying there that he is the messenger of Allah.

In Surah Ahzab, Allah clearly states that the process of sending prophets to humans is ended and Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is the last of them.

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

(Surah Ahzab 33:40)

It is beneficial for Muslims to follow the footsteps of Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) and his lifestyle that is called 'Sunnah'. It is because he is the best among all the mankind and was sent as a teacher to them for leading them to the straight path. He is the embodiment of piety and truth. As the last Prophet of Allah, the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) has taught every aspect of human life to people and provided guidance to them that was sent by Allah. In Quran it is said,

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ۗ

→ Nor does he speak of his own whims.

إِن هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ ۗ

It is only a revelation sent down [to him].

This way, Allah has ended the succession of prophets on the Holy Prophet and gave His message to him to preach; hence, it is essential for Muslims to believe in prophethood and finality of prophethood.

3. A complete code of life:

The guidelines or teachings that Islam gives to humans are so profound that one generation passes it to the next. It is because these teachings possess a complete framework that helps people to shape their personal and collective lives in accordance to it. From the matters of childbirth, his upbringing, and character to the public dealings, societal norms, and global affairs, all is taught by Islam to the Muslims. Every aspect of a human's life is explained by Islam and it provides opposite guidance about

every matter to everyone.

Furthermore, Islam highlights the rights and duties that every person has to fulfill and indicates the importance of personal and communal affairs.

Allah Almighty says in the Holy Quran,

→ "To each of you We have ordained a code of law and a way of life."
(Surah Al-Maida 5:48)

The Quran clearly states the instructions and guidelines that aid Muslims to shape their lives in a good manner and Islam provides them with a complete code of life to help them stay on the right path.

4. Islam promotes humanity:

One of the most beautiful feature of Islam is its emphasis on serving humanity. It teaches all the Muslims to be empathetic towards all people without any discrimination. It promotes virtuous attributes like care, welfare, sympathy, and patience to all people without any prejudice and bigotry. It is said in the Holy Quran,

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ
بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ -

→ "You are the best community ever raised for humanity - you encourage good, forbid evil, and believe in Allah."
(Surah Ali-Imran 3:110).

It promotes humanity by teaching a person how his conduct and character should be. It puts much focus on character building so that every person is well aware of their behaviour and conduct. Our Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) said in a hadith,

"The most complete of the believers in faith, is the one with the best character among them."
(Jami'at - Tirmidhi).

Similarly, Islam encompasses an important component of faith in it which is Zakaat or charity. To help the poor and needy, it teaches us to spend our money on the ones who are in need. It is so essential that **Hazrat Abu-Bakr had done jihad against those who didn't give zakaat.** Islam makes charity an important factor of the faith as this part of the faith not only helps the Muslims but also the people who are needy and impoverished. It brings forward charity as a way to serve humanity. Islam says that first right on monetary help or Zakaat is of close relatives, then neighbours, and then state without any difference.

In addition to this, Islam talks about fulfillment of human rights, protection of animal rights, environmental protection, and providing medical services. In the final sermon, the Holy Prophet narrated human rights and the compulsion to fulfill those rights. He talked about rights of women, slaves, servants and all humans and established an end to **racism and nationalism.** Moreover, Islam schools people to be kind and gentle towards all

animals as they are also creatures of Allah.

Abdullah Bin 'Umar narrated that the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) said,

"A woman was tortured and was put in Hell because of a cat which she had kept locked till it died of hunger."

(Sahih al-Bukhari 2365)

Islam speaks about providing all help to people in need without any discrimination. It encourages to sympathetic and helping to any sick person and to save anyone from any ailment or suffering. It is said,

"Allah shows displeasure for a person who never visits a sick person".

(Hadith-e-Qudsi).

It also discusses environmental protection that is important to sustain a healthy nature. It is a humanitarian act to plant trees, look after natural resources and stabilize environment which is promoted in Islam. Planting a green tree is also considered an act of charity. The Holy Prophet said in a hadith,

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

(Sahih al-Bukhari 2320).

Islam talks highly of humanitarian activities and services and teaches people to serve human-kind and all other creatures in any way possible.

5. Divine ideology:

Islam is a religion that is revealed to the Muslims by Allah through the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H). Its ideology, the code and system or beliefs that it teaches, is also revealed divinely. It is said in the Holy Quran,

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ ۗ

→ "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam."
(Surah Ali-Imran 3:19).

6. Simplicity and Rationality:

The teachings of Islam are very simple and easy that do not require any arduous labour to decode them. Islam shuns all superstitious outlooks on life and provides intelligible arguments. Islam directly talks to every individual with its comprehensible articles of faith that make it a simple and understandable.

Concurrently, another feature that Islam deals with is rationality. Islam, with its didactic and simple guidelines, pushes a person who use his intellectual capabilities and brings him to light. It puts learned people on a pedestal because they are able to see reality and follow truth which is Islam. In Quran, Allah Almighty says that all around the world, all the systems and dynamics hold portents that signal towards His presence and existence but it can only be understood by those who use their logic and intellect.

Allah says,

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ -

→ "Surely in this are signs for those who understand."
(Al-Baqarah Nahl 16:12).

7. Practicality of Islam:

All the guidance and lessons in Islam come down to their practical implementation as well. It is not just verbal service that Islam promotes, rather it puts emphasis on the practical doing of the lessons taught. Every teaching that enlightens a person in Islam has a practical demonstration as well and it leads to righteous conduct and character building. Islam is a religion of practicality that highlights the essentiality of pious and virtuous actions. In fact, practicality is more appreciated than verbal assertions in Islam. The Quran says,

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ طُوبَىٰ

لَهُمْ وَحُسْنُ مَأْوٍ -

→ "Those who believe and act righteously, joy is for them, and a blissful home to return to."

(Ar-Raad 13:29).

So, actions and deeds and practicality are a necessary features of Islam that highlights the importance of Islam's viability.

8. Amalgam of material and spiritual life:

A unique feature of Islam is that it doesn't separate life into little compartments of matter and spirit. It acts as a mediator between material life and spiritual life. It does not ask a person to neglect spiritual reality to achieve a blissful materialistic life, nor does it drive a man to lead a virtuous and spiritual life avoiding all of the material dealings of the world.

Resultantly, it talks about life being an amalgamation of material and spiritual realities. In a hadith, the Prophet (P.B.U.H) said,

"A Muslim who lives in the midst of 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."

(Sunan Ibn Majah 4032).

9. Congruence between Individual and society:

There is a constant effort by Islam to build congruence and agreement between an individual and a society. It establishes the fact that every person is accountable to Allah individually. It guarantees him fundamental rights and duties and does not allow to be irresponsible in this regard when living in a society.

Similarly, Islam highlights the dynamics of a society and awakens a social sense of responsibility in man. It encourages an individual to maintain

societal disciplines, creating harmony between both.

10. Universality of Islam:

The message of Quran and Islam is for the entire human race. It does not subject one particular race or creed to follow it or teaches moral ascendance to one group, rather it addresses the whole mankind. It does not discriminate people on the basis of colour, blood, or region as was the case before the advent of Islam. In addition to this, Allah does not have any biasness towards anyone. He is equal in mercy and existence to all. Quran says,

→ "One may be rich or poor, Allah is better caretaker of both"
(Surah An-Nisa 4:135).

Furthermore, Allah sent the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) to bring all humankind towards the right path. So, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is a beacon of guidance for everybody and his teachings are also universal that address every single human. In Quran, it is said,

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ -

→ "We have sent you [O Prophet] only as a mercy for the whole world!"
(Surah Al-Anbiya 21:107).

11. Concept of Ijtihad:

All around the world, different cultures and multiple ideologies are subjected to criticism because of inclination towards either permanence or change. Enforcement of any one approach, either permanence or change, can create rifts in society and individuals. A strong emphasis on permanence can cause rigidity and stagnation of societal system and spread inflexibility on one hand. On the other hand, too much flexibility or change can make an ideology unreliable and shapeless that ultimately leads to an anarchic situation. However, Islam is the religion that promotes a fusion of both these elements through ijtihad.

The word ijtihad means "effort" and it is used in Islamic jurisprudence as an **intellectual effort to arrive at the truth**. The most unique thing about Islam regarding this concept is that the teachings of Islam are of a permanent nature as they do not alter with time but they are flexible in their application when dealing with a contemporary issue or any matter. The guidance they provide is wholesome and balanced that they can be used to derive relevance with them at any given period of time. This way, Islam coalesces permanence and change to create a stable society.

12. Role of women:

Women have always been an essential participant in Islamic spheres. That made them a very significant member of society and much regard and importance is given to them in Islam. By inclusion of women in all fields of life, Islam promotes gender equality.

In addition to this, women have been encouraged and acknowledged to participate in every domain of personal and public life. Islam propagates **spiritual, familial, educational and intellectual, economic, and influential role of women** in society by providing them equal rights as men. The Quran says,

→ "Women have rights similar to those of men equitably, although men have a degree [of responsibility] above them."
(Al-Baqarah 2:228).

13. Emphasis on justice and equality:

There is much stress on maintaining fair-play and justice in Islam as it leads to build a harmonious society. It creates balance and equality among all individuals of any society. Islam has given humans a just system of governance that ensure the safeguard of all people and provides stability and peace.

It is said in the Holy Quran,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ

شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ

وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ -

→ "Believers! Be upholders of justice, and bearers of witness to truth for the sake of Allah, even it may be against yourselves or against your parents and kinsmen -"

(Surah An-Nisa. 4: 135).

This ayat shows the importance of justice in Islam that one must observe it even one has to go against everybody to prevail it.

14. Quest for self-discipline:

Self-discipline is achieved by anyone who tries to be reflective and productive. Islam makes a person reflective so that he sees his own viles. It instills resolve and will in a person to fight from evils when he evaluates himself. This leads to self-conditioning and a person tries to guard himself from all evils that ultimately takes him to straight path of self-discipline and perseverance. In this journey to attain self-discipline, steadfastness is the virtue that is applauded the most. So, the person who

he practices self-discipline, brings regularity and steadfastness in his actions. Islam invites a person to five times' prayers each day, good deeds to be done regularly and maintaining character and good conduct in everyday life. In this manner, it brings discipline and consistency in one's living style. The actions that are righteous and are done regularly are also very appreciated in Islam. The Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) said,

"The acts most pleasing to Allah are those which are done continuously, even if they are small!"

(Sahih Muslim: 783).

15. Preserved religion:

An astonishing feature of Islam is that it is an eternal religion of guidance that is present for the last 1450 years. Not a single word of it has any changes or alteration. The teachings in the Holy Quran and the lessons or hadiths collated from the life of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) have been preserved meticulously. All of those guiding principles are till date functional and useful. The Quran is said to be the word of Allah Almighty and has been passed down to us in its authentic and original form and so is the case with the Sunnah of Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H).

The Holy Quran is a compact historic record that is very significant for Muslims as it is the direct message from Allah. The duty of its protection is taken by the gracious Allah, Himself. He says in the Holy Quran,

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ.

→ "Indeed, It is We who sent down the Quran and indeed, We will be its guardian."

(Surah Al-Hijr 15:9).

Hence, immense care and dedication is given while dealing the work of copying and printing of Quran and ahadith so that the same teachings are passed on to all humankind and the religion stays preserved.

Conclusion:

The religion and deen of Islam means submission to Allah and peace and harmony among people. It encompasses the ideology that one must submit to Allah and His beloved Prophet (PBUH) to obtain peace. It entails features like Oneness of Allah, finality of Prophethood, code of life, promotion of humanity. Similarly, it is a divine revelation that enforces simplicity and rationality with practicality, balances materialistic and spiritual needs of humans, and protects an individual and society. It also expounds role of women in society, self-discipline and many other characteristics, making it a universal and unique religion.
