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What is Islam. Elaborate
Salient features of Islam.

Islam:

The word Islam has been derived from the Arabic word SLM (سلم) which means "to surrender", "to submit" or "to give one's self up".

On vertical level (God-to-Man relationship) it means submission to the moral imperatives of God. Moreover, the other major shade of the meaning is "to become reconciled with one another" or "to make peace", signifying horizontal (Man-to-Man) aspect. According to Imam

Raghib al-Isfahani :-

"Islam means entering into Salam; and Salam and Silm both signify Peace."

Contextual Meaning :-

The contextual meaning of Islam is "to enter in peace by submitting to the will of Allah". This signifies that one can achieve real peace of

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body and mind only through submission and obedience to Allah. Similarly, from Shariah's perspective, Islam means the voluntary submission of one's desires to the will of Allah and entering into peace by obeying His commands.

Concept of Islam :-

Islam signifies obedience and submission not only in the belief and mode of worship but also in all aspects of life, including ethics, morality, politics, culture, laws, social behaviour, economics, national and international affairs both in individual and collective spheres. This enables a man to make peace with himself as well as with human community, fostering harmony.

On similar accounts, the fundamental concept of Islam is premised on the notion that the whole universe is created by Allah and He has prescribed a divine code of life for man, granting him freedom to follow this code or not.

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Allah says in Quran :-

"Let there be no compulsion in religion, for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood". (Al-Quran)

Another reference of Quran suggests :-

"Whoever wants, he should believe; and whoever wants, he should disbelieve".
(Al-Quran)

Salient Features of Islam :-

Islam is the religion of truth which embodies the code of life which has been revealed by Allah for the guidance of mankind. It implies that Allah has not only catered the material needs of man, but also provided for his spiritual, social and cultural needs by revealing a code of life known as Islam.

George Bernard Shaw called Muhammad (PBUH) the "Savior of Humanity" in his book "The Genuine Islam".

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"I have always held the religion of Muhammad (PBUH) in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality."

(Shaw: The genuine Islam)

This signifies that Islam possess various distinctive characteristics that have won millions of followers to the faith, making it so appealing for the modern age. Some of the characteristics are as follows :-

1. Revealed Ideology :-

Islam is not a manmade ideology, rather it has been divinely revealed on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the last Messenger of Allah. Holy Quran says :-

"Certainly Allah conferred a benefit upon the believers when he raised among them a messenger from among themselves, reciting to them His communications, and purifying them, and teaching them the Book and the wisdom, although before that they were surely in manifest error."

(Al-Quran)

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2. Simplicity, Rationality and Practicality:-

Islam is a religion without any mythology, superstitions and irrational beliefs.

The core concepts of its Faith, including, the oneness of God, the Prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH), and life after death are all based on reason and logic. Moreover, its teachings are simple and intelligible.

There is no hierarchy of priests, no far-fetched abstractions, and no complicated rites and rituals. And thus, anyone can approach the Quran directly and translate its teachings into practice.

Similarly, Islam awakens the faculty of reason in man and enjoins him to see things in the light of reality, motivating him to question things. The Quran says:-

"Say: Are those who know and those who do not know alike"? (Al-Quran)

The Prophet (PBUH) said:-

"To seek knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim."

(Ibn Majah and Bayhaqi)

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3. Unity of Matter and Spirit :-

A unique feature of Islam is that it does not admit any separation between "material" and "moral", "mundane" and "spiritual" life.

Rather, it motivates man to devote his energies to the fulfilment and reconstruction of life on healthy moral grounds. It holds that spiritual salvation and elevation is to be achieved by living piously in the rough and tumble of life, not by renouncing the world and adopting asceticism.

Allah advises in Quran :-

"Our Lord! Give us something fine in this world as well as something fine in the Hereafter".

The Prophet (PBUH) 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."

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This concept is further rightly emphasized by Allama Iqbal as :-

فرد قائم در با ملت سے ہے شہریاں کج نہیں
صحت ہے دریا فتن اور بیرون دریا بے فتن نہیں

4. Islam - A Complete Code of life:-

Islam is not a religion that confines itself to one's private life. It is a complete way of life that provides guidance in all aspects of life ranging from individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, and national and international.

For instance, its guidance starts from instructing ^{about} things to do after birth, character-building (lessons of truthfulness, charity, modesty, honesty etc), to follow the footsteps of Prophet (PBUH), upbringing of children, education in individual life.

As Quran suggests :-

"My Lord! Increase me in Knowledge". (Al-Quran)

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5. Balance between 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 a man and that it should not be lost in society or state. As Allah says in Quran :-

“And that man shall have nothing but what he strives for - And that his striving shall soon be seen” (Al-Quran)

On the other hand, it also awakens ~~social~~ sense of social responsibility in man, organizing human beings in state or society. And enjoins man to subscribe to social good. For instance, to inculcate social discipline among men, Islam suggests to pray in congregation.

6. Islam Promotes Humanity :-

The message of Islam is that of harmony and humanism. Its approach does not admit any distinctions based on colour, clan, caste, and territory. It believes in the natural instincts of humans such as

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compassion, love, welfare, sympathy, empathy, human rights, animal rights, and environmental protection etc. It promotes the concept of characterfulness. As the Prophet (PBUH) said:-

"The Perfect among the believers are those who are best in character."

7. Permanence and Change:-

Islam provides eternal guidance given by the Lord of the Universe. The God has revealed only some broad principles and has given freedom to man to apply them in every age in a way suited to the spirit and conditions of that age. For instance, Ijtihad is a way to apply divine guidance to the modern problems. So, the basic guidance is of permanent-nature, while the method of application changes according to peculiar needs of every age.

As laid down in Quran:-

"And to those who exert
We show Our path."

(Al-Quran)

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8. Universality and Teachings Preserved:

The message of Islam is for the whole of human race. God, in Islam is the God of all world, and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the Messenger of all Mankind. In addition, the teachings of Islam have been preserved in their original form without any adulteration. In the words of

Quran:-

"Verily, we Ourselves have sent down the Reminder (the Quran) and verily we, (Ourselves) will be its Guardian." (Al-Quran)

Conclusion:-

These are some of the salient features of Islam that establish its credentials as the religion of man - the religion of today and of tomorrow. According to Will Durant, the rise and fall of Islamic civilization was a great event in history. He writes in his book "The History of Civilization" that during five centuries (700-1200 AD), Islam was the world precursor of power, discipline and expansion of its realm, good manners, fair human laws, religious leniency, scientific research in medicine and philosophy etc, which reflects the greatness of Islam.