

ISLAMIC STUDIES

Assignment # 1

QUESTION:

What is Islam? Elaborate the salient features of Islam.

ANSWER:

Concept of Islam:

The term "Islam" is derived from the three-letter Arabic root, S (س) - L (ل) - M (م), which generates words with interrelated meanings, including "peace," "submission," "surrender" and "commitment." Islam refers to the monotheistic religion revealed to Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) between 610 and 632 AD. The word "Islam" has been used first time by Allah Almighty in the Holy Quran, the sacred scripture revealed to Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH).

The contextual meaning of "Islam" is "to enter in peace by submitting to the will of Allah" or "the submission of desires to the will of God." According to

Sharia, "Islam" can be defined as "to voluntarily enter in peace by submitting to the will of Allah." The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has defined Islam as to bear witnesses to Allah and His Messenger, and to establish and practice the pillars of faith.

Dr. Hamidullah defines Islam as a monotheist deen revealed upon the Prophet (PBUH). According to Imam Ghazali, it is "the combination of the rights of Allah and the rights of people." According to the Oxford Dictionary, "Islam" is the combination of three things; to accept monotheism, to embrace prophethood and to practice Muslim culture.

Salient Features of Islam:

- Unique Concept of Touheed:

Touheed is the first and the core pillar of Islam. Touheed means that there is One Supreme Lord of the universe. He is Omnipotent, Omnipresent and the Sustainer of the world and of mankind. It is the first part of Kalma. Allama Shibli Nomani mentions in his book "Sirat-un-Nabi" that

the Holy Prophet (SAW) has said "Islam is the fort and the gate of that fort is tauheed".
 Allah says in the Quran:

"Say: He is Allah, the One and Unique;
 Allah, Who is in need of none and of
 Whom all are in need; He neither begot
 any nor was He begotten, and none is
 comparable to Him." (112: 1-4)

• Prophethood:

Prophethood means to believe in the finality
 of Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) as the last
 messenger of Allah. It is the second part of
 Kalma. Allah says in the Holy Quran:

"Muhammad is not the father of [any]
 one of your men, but [he is] the Messenger
 of Allah and last of the prophets.
 And ever is Allah, of all things, Knowing."
 (33: 40)

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has been sent
 as a model to mankind. He has practically
 implemented and showed us what Allah has
 ordered us ^{to do} in the Holy Quran. In other words,
 his way of life, or Sunnah, acts as a guidance
 for mankind. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has said,

"Verily I have been sent as a teacher."

- Complete Code of Life:

Islam is a complete, holistic way of living that covers every aspect of life. It provides guidance for all walks of life - individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, national and international. For instance, in individual life, Islam guides about birth, upbringing, character building, education, livelihood and family life. In collective life, it stresses on the mutual coexistence of people and provides guidance about the social life, political system, financial system, system of justice, administrative system, etc.

- Universality in Time and Space:

Islam is a universal deen. It is not confined to a specific time, geographical region or ethnicity unlike the previous divine religions. It is for all times and for the entire mankind irrespective of their race or region. It is an ideal system of living for the whole humanity. In the words of the Quran:

"O people! I am the Messenger of God to you all." (7:158)

• Islam promotes humanity:

Humanity can be defined as the natural instincts of love, care, welfare, empathy, tolerance, etc without any discrimination. Islam promotes humanity by promoting the good character of the believers. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has said:

"The most complete of the believers in faith, is the one with the best character among them."

Secondly, Islam has ordered the believers to pay charity. Allah says in ayat 177 of Surah Baqarah that Muslims are those who give wealth in spite of love for it. Thirdly, Islam encourages social work and medical services. ^{Moreover,} it lays emphasis on the fulfilment of human rights, animal rights as well as environmental protection. The Prophet (PBUH) has said:

"Planting a green tree is the best charity."

- Protection of Book:

Another salient feature of Islam is the protection and preservation of the Book of Allah, the Holy Quran, in its original form as opposed to the holy books or treatises of earlier religions that have either disappeared or have been changed with the passage of time. This is because Allah has promised to protect the Quran from any alteration:

“We have sent down this message (Quran) and we shall safeguard it.” (15:9)

- Concept of Life after Death:

The world, according to Islam, is a place of trial and man shall be judged for his deeds. He will have to give an account of his deeds and misdeeds in the hereafter or the life-after-death. Those who follow the right path will enjoy eternal life of peace in heaven while those who disobey the commands of Allah will be punished and sent to hell.

- Din of Moderation:

Unlike the religion of Moses (A.S) which is too strict and the religion of Jesus (A.S) which is too soft, Islam is neither too strict nor too soft and thus provides a path of moderation to its followers. It adopts a moderate approach in dealing with both spiritual and material life. It neither promotes monasticism nor materialism rather it takes a complete middle line where a follower of Islam will live his life according to the teachings of God while still being at the glory of spiritual life. Allah says in the Quran:

"There is no compulsion in religion." (2:256)

• Direct Relation of Individual with God:

Unlike other religions, Islam does not teach or recognize any intercessors to God. The concept of class dominance in Hinduism, use of idols in Buddhism as intercessors and the concept of Trinity in Christianity has been rejected out rightly by Islam. Allah says in the Quran:

"The intercession of their intercessors will be of no benefit to them." (74:48)

• Balance between the Individual and Society:

Islam 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. It makes the proper development of the personality of man one of the prime objectives of its education. It does not subscribe to the view that man must lose his individuality in society or in the state.

• Practical and Rational Religion:

Islam is a practical and rational religion. The teachings of Islam are simple and straightforward. They are based on reason and sound logic. Islam is free from myths, superstitions and irrational beliefs. There is no hierarchy of priests, far-fetched abstractions, and complicated rights and rituals. Everybody may approach the Book of Allah directly and translate its dictates into practice. Islam awakens the faculty of reason in man, and exhorts him to use his intellect and see things in the light of reality.

• Unique Political and Economic Model:

Islam gives the message of true pluralistic democracy rather than dictatorship. Allah says in the Holy Quran:

“Their affairs are based on consultation among them.” (42: 38)

The consultation will be in accordance with the teachings of Islam. The ruler of the state will be appointed by the public on the condition that he will abide by the fundamental teachings of Islam. Moreover, the economic system introduced by Islam provides a path of moderation between capitalism and communism by not letting elites to usurp poor's rights and by not letting society to become a purely materialistic society.

Conclusion:

In the light of the above discussion, it can be concluded that Islam means submission to the will of Allah. It is a universal din which provides guidance in all aspects of life. It has ^{been} sent for all people and ^{all} times. It is unique from other religions in terms of practicality, moderation, individualism, political, economic and social systems, etc.