

Q What is Islam? Elaborate the salient features of Islam?

start with the summary of the answer as introduction.

• **DEFINING, ISLAM THROUGH ITS LITERAL MEANING:**

Islam is an Arabic word which means act of resignation to God. The root word of Islam is 'S-L-M' pronounced as 'salm' which means peace.

From salm comes the word 'Aslama' which means he submitted, he resigned himself. The term Islam has been used in the Quran itself.

Preceding the use of the term Islam, the term **Deen-e-Hanfi** was used where Hanfi means monotheistic. Thus by tracing the definition of Islam through its literal meaning, we can define Islam as to surrender or submit completely to Allah Almighty. This submission and obedience to Allah Almighty becomes a source of mental peace, stability in individual life and harmony in society.

• **THE CONTEXTUAL MEANING OF ISLAM:**

Islam is in its essence submission to the will of Allah Almighty. When an individual enters into the spheres of Islam he forgoes his yearnings and desires. Instead he submits his desires to Allah Almighty. The term Muslim itself means 'a follower'. This symbolizes how Islam asks for resignation to God and to follow his

his divine commandments. Islam thus signifies submission and obedience to Allah Almighty not only in matters of belief but also in ethics, morality, politics, culture, social behaviour, law, economics as well as national and international affairs. The concept of Islam is premised on the notion that the whole universe is created by Allah Almighty. Islam is thus a divine code of life prescribed to human kind without any compulsion to adhere to it. In Surah Al-kafir Allah says

فَلَوْ مِنْ شَاءَ فَلَيَسْ - جَلَوْ مِنْ (۱۸:۲۹) شَاءَ فَلَيَسْ

"Whosoever wants, he should believe: and whosoever wants, he should disbelieve."

(Al-kafir 18:29)

keep the description of a single argument a bit brief.

Islam thus is the name of surrender to Allah's will and adherence to his commandments out of one's own accord and not compulsion.

• MEANING OF ISLAM THROUGH THE LENS OF SHARIAH:

Islam is submission to the rulings of Allah Almighty. The Quran mentions Islam as 'the paths of peace',

"Subul al-Salam" (al-Maidah 5:16). Islam raises the banner of reconciliation, "Sulh" (an Nisa 4:128) and states that God abhors disturbance of peace "fitnah" (al-Baqarah 2:205). The ideal society according to the

Quran is 'Dar-al-Salam' which means abode of peace (Yunus 10:25). Islam thus is the way of life essential for peace in society.

In Surah AL-kafirun Allah Almighty says

عَلَيْكُمْ سَبِيلٌ

"To you is your religion, and to me, my religion."

(Al-kafirun 109:06)

Allah Almighty thus defines Islam as the religion bestowed upon men by Allah Almighty. The religion of Islam is thus dictated by Allah Almighty. Allah further defines Islam as his provision and the only true way. In Surah

Al Imran, Allah says
one reference is enough for a single argument.

اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِإِيمَانِ الْإِنْسَانِ

"Certainly Allah's only way is Islam"

(Al Imran 03:19)

In Surah al-Maidah, Allah Almighty describes Islam as "My Favor upon you". He defines it as a religion chosen by him that has been perfected serving as a complete code of life.

الْيَوْمَ أَكَلَتْكُمْ بَنِيَّ وَاتَّحَدْتَكُمْ وَرَفَعْتَكُمْ ... إِنَّمَا دَيْنَنَا

"This day I have perfected for you your

religion and completed my favor upon you
and have approved for you Islam as your
religion."

(Al-Ma'idah 05:03)

Allah Almighty in surah Al Mu'minun further defines Islam as the lynchpin of a community. Islam is the guiding principle of the community of Muslim called the Ummah. Islam thus serves as the commonality that binds his community together. Allah Almighty emphasizes on oneness of God and for this community to fear only him. Allah defines Islam as only one religion that does not bifurcate into varying branches.

وَإِنْ طَرِيقًا لِّمَنْ يَرِيدُ وَاحِدَةً وَإِنَّا رَبُّكُمْ فَإِنَّا نَقُولُ

"Surely this religion of yours is 'only' one and I am your Lord, so 'fear Me 'alone'."

(Al Mu'minun 23:52)

- DEFINING ISLAM THROUGH THE WORDS OF HOLY PROPHET (PBUH):

Umar Ibn al-Khattab reported that they were sitting with the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) when a man appeared with very white clothes and very black hair. He sat in front of the Prophet and placed his hands on his thigh. The man said: "O Muhammad, tell me about Islam." The Prophet (PBUH) replied to the man:

"Islam is to testify there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to establish prayer, to give charity, to fast the month of Ramadan, and to perform pilgrimage of the House if a way is possible."

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) that defines Islam as a declaration of oneness of Allah, belief in Prophet (PBUH) as Allah's messenger, to pray five times a day, to give Zakat, to fast and to perform Hajj. Dr. Hamidullah in his "Introduction to Islam" defines Islam as a monotheistic religion revealed upon the Holy Prophet (PBUH) by Allah Almighty.

• ISLAM AS DEFINED BY SCHOLARS AND AUTHORS

In his book "Introduction to Islamic Ideology" the author Anwar Hashmi describes Islam as

"[...] a straight path which has not the slightest wedge, which is free from the excess and is characterised by harmony and balance: it is a combination of kind and just."

Ishrakid Ahmed in his book "Islam and Its Meaning" defines Islam as

"Islam is a complete code of life. It

integrates man with God, awakens in him a new moral consciousness and invites him to deal with all the problems of life - individual and social, economic and political, national and international in accord with his commitment to God."

Imam Ghazali a great Muslim thinker defines Islam as a collection of rights of Allah and rights of people. In his book "Islam at a glance", **Malana Sadruddin Islahi** describes Islam as a collection of faith and her worship.

Shahab Ahmed in his work "What is Islam?" proposes that Islam is the hermeneutical engagement of human self with the Pre-Text, Text and Con-Text of the Revelations ^{Prophet} to ²⁵ Muhammad (PBUH).

He defines Pre-Text as the Unseen or Higher Domain of reality from which revelation issues. The Text refers to the scripture of Holy Quran whereas Con-Text refers to all historical products and expressions produced by Muslims which include rituals, exegesis, philosophy, theology, law etc.

SALIENT FEATURES OF ISLAM:

Following are some of the salient features of Islam

1 THE DISTINGUISHING CONCEPT OF TAUHEED:

Tauheed refers to the absolute oneness and uniqueness of Allah. Tauheed makes up the very first part of our kalma. The kalma is to be recited by every individual who wishes to accept Islam.

... لا إله إلا الله

"There is no God but Allah..."

Islam sets forth the belief in the oneness of Allah Almighty as the prime requisite to be adopted by Muslim. It highlights the monotheistic nature of the religion. In Surah Az-Zariyat Allah says

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ أَجْنَانَ وَالْأَنْسَسَ إِلَّا يَعْبُدُونَ -

"And I (Allah) created not the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me (Alone)."

(Az-Zariyat 51:56)

Allah Almighty says in Surah Ikhlas

قُلْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَنْعِيشُ مَنْ يَرِيدُ مَوْتًا وَلَا يَمْرِغُ مَنْ يَرِيدُ حَيَاةً

"Say" He is Allah (who is) one, Allah the self-sufficient (one). He neither begets nor is born, Nor is there to Him any equivalent."

(Surah Ikhlas)

Allah Almighty thus defines the concept of oneness and absoluteness of God as the core of Islam. Unlike other religions such as Christianity, Hinduism etc where God is seen as having children, in Surah Ikhlas Allah underscores how there is no equivalent to him and that he begets no children. This monotheism which highlights Allah Almighty as having no children or equivalent is what sets it apart from other monotheistic religion such as Christianity. The Holy Prophet himself said

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

2- THE FINALITY OF PROPHET (PBUH) :

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) unlike the previous prophets were not sent as Allah's messenger to a specific group of people or a specific region. He is instead a source of guidance for entire humanity. Allah Almighty designated the Holy Prophet (PBUH) as the final prophet. In Surah Ahzab Allah says,

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

(Surah Ahzab 33:40)

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) gave Muslims 'Sunnah' as a source of guidance such that they could

(Allah is the greatest) A:Majid

fallow the exemplary conduct of the Holy Prophet (PBUH)

In Surah Ahzab Allah says

"Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for whoever has hope in Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah often."

(Surah Ahzab 33:21)

3 ISLAM A SOURCE OF EQUALITARIANISM:

Before the advent of Islam, the Arab society was stuck in quagmires of inequality. Injustice prevailed as masters beat their slaves, female infanticide kept become a norm and women ^{were} objectified. Islam came to such a despair-ridden society as hope of equality and a source of dignity. Islam and its egalitarian principles appealed to these people who were deprived of basic dignity either because they belonged to a lower class or on basis of their gender. Islam distinguishes itself from other religions such as Hinduism who believe in rigid caste-systems. It was this very caste-system that facilitated the spread of Islam in the sub-continent. In Surah Bani Israel Allah Almighty refers to the entire mankind instead of people of a particular region or religion. This highlights the egalitarianism at the very core of Islam

"Indeed, We have dignified the Children of Adam, carried them on Land and sea, granted them good and lawful provisions, and privileged them over many of Our creatures." (Surah Bani Israel 17:70)

4- ISLAM: A COMPLETE CODE OF LIFE

Islam serves as a guiding principle not only for our individual lives but also our collective lives. Islam underscores how an individual's upbringing must be in accord with Islamic teachings. It teaches us the differences between right and wrong, halal and haram. It further underscores that an individual must maintain a balance between his world and his religious practice.

Education is also a core part of its teaching. Islam guides us not only about how to live our lives individually but also collectively.

Islam has provided the world with social, political, financial and judicial system. Unlike other religions Islam isn't concerned only with worship; rather it outlines how the various systems in our societies must operate. Take for example the financial system which abolishes the interest system. This very system was at the core of the 2008 economic crises titled "**The Great Depression**". The political system in Islam preaches the concept of democracy as it shuns dictatorships by placing the sovereignty in Allah's jurisdiction. Islam further outlines laws to be followed by the society. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said

"I am leaving behind two wings, you will never go astray as long as you hold fast to them - i.e. the Quran and Sunnah."

(Sahih Muslim, 2408)

5. UNITY OF MATTER AND SPIRIT

A unique aspect of Islam is that it does not divide life into matter and spirit. It stands not for the denial of life but rather its fulfillment. Islam does not believe in 'asceticism' which is preached in various other religions such as Christianity. Friedrich Nietzsche in his work "Anti-Christ" critiques the very asceticism promoted by Christianity calling it an attempt of subjugating populations by making their poverty seem appealing. This makes such individuals focused on the aesthetic spirituality of their circumstance rather than working to actively alleviate their poverty. Islam on the other hand

(i) does not preach asceticism or renouncing the material aspects of the world. Instead, it teaches its followers to maintain a balance between the material and spiritual. It asks for its follower to strive to be better than to solely rely on Allah's provision. In Surah Ar-Raad Allah says:

اللَّهُ لَا يَغْيِرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يَغْيِرُوا مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ -

(Ar-Raad 13:11)

"Surely, Allah does not change the condition of people until they change their own condition."

(Ar-Raad 13:11)

6. THE TIMELESS NATURE AND UNIVERSALITY OF ISLAM

The teachings of Islam came to us 14,00 years ago yet its teachings are still very

much relevant today. Islam's message of equality still appeals to millions who are treated as sub-human due to their race, ethnicity, skin color or class. Islam furthermore has exemplified its idea of universal brotherhood through "Mutajir" and "Ansor". In today's world, where anti-immigration sentiments are on the rise, Islam teaches us the lesson of tolerance and empathy. In Quran Allah Almighty says

- جَاءَكُم مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ وَالْأَجْنَبَاءُ إِنَّمَا يُنَاهَا عَنِ الْمُحْمَدِينَ

"The believing men and believing women are the allies of one another."

(Surah At-Taubah 9:71)

Islam's message is of universal nature that transcends time and eras. It is relevant to every age. Islam's social system of welfare based on Zakat, is being implemented successfully in the west. Islam thus has permanence in the nature of its teachings.

add more arguments in this part

Conclusion:

Islam means surrender or submission to Allah's will. This submission to the commandments of Allah; belief in his oneness and finality of prophet is what sets it apart from the prevailing polytheistic religious systems. The universal nature of Islam message which promotes equality, brotherhood, justice and a balance between the worldly affairs and religious life is one of its most striking features.