

16/7/25 Wednesday

Islamic Studies

Hw # 1

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What is Islam? Elaborate the salient features of Islam.

Officially beginning in the 7th century B.C., Islam is the fastest growing religion (or deen) in the world and ranks at second place according to world population.

True Meaning of Islam

The literal meaning of the word 'Islam' comes from the Arabic root 's-l-m' meaning: peace, submission, and obedience. Viewing it from a contextual point of view, it alludes to submitting to the will of 'Allah' by entering peace and deserting desires and sins. The old name for Islam (before it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)) was Deen-e-Hanif, implying a monotheistic religion based on Abrahamic teachings and standing/originating from Hazrat Adam (AS).

The Quran declares Islam as the one true religion of believers and even mentions it by name 10 times.

It is mentioned in Surah Ali'Imran,

"Whoever seeks a way other than Islam, it will never be accepted from them, and in the Hereafter they will be among losers".

Religious scholars (including Non-Muslims) have time after time described the nature and true meaning of

2) The Last Definitive Prophet

Belief in Abrahamic prophets is a concept shared by people of the Books namely, Muslims, Christians and Jews, however, belief that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the last Messenger of Allah is mostly an Islamic one.

Believing that Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) was the last or the 'Seal of the Prophets' after Hazrat Isa (AS) is a very prominent and repetitive theme in the Quran.

Allah mentions in Surah Al-Ahzab,

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

This reinforces the belief that Messengers are prophets of God, sent by Him for the purpose of spreading the Islamic message and Prophet (PBUH) in particular was sent as a final, last one. The Quran also stresses that the Message is from God and not from anyone else.

As can be seen in this verse of Surah Najm discussing the Prophet (PBUH),

"Nor does he speak of his own whims
It is only a revelation sent down to him"

Tied to the belief that he is the last prophet, is that he serves as a perfect example of what a Muslim should aspire to be like in all spheres of life.

Surah Al-Ahzab validates this point,

"Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for whoever has hope in Allah..."

3) Humans as Dignified, Superior Beings

According to Islam, Allah's most superior creation is Man, even more so than the Angels and Jins. As such, Human beings, regardless of faith, gender, social standing, ethnicity, race, are all given the same respect and dignity. All humans are considered equal in Islam.

It is stated in Surah Al-Isra,

"Indeed, we have dignified the children of Adam, carried them on land and sea, granted them good and lawful provisions, and privileged them far above many of our creatures".

This establishes how the children of Adam have been granted dignity on earth and power over other ~~its~~ creatures from Allah, which shows the amount of care that went into the creation of humankind and emphasizes how every life is important.

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4) Islam as the Complete Code of Life

Islam is a truly unique religion as it guides its followers in every sphere of life. Even the way it has shaped 'Sharia' or Islamic Law is impressive.

On an individual level, it instructs a person what to do when a child is born, ~~to~~ ^{and} take the example of reciting Azan in the ear of a newborn, to how their upbringing should be done, to the importance of education, earning halal money, marriage and rights of a family. From the birth to the death, Islam gives us a comprehensive guide for an individual's life.

The collective level sees institutions such as Justice, Politics, Global Affairs and the Society as a whole be the focal point. Here, rights of others and a society are encouraged.

In Surah Maidah, it is mentioned,

"... There certainly has come to you from Allah a light and a clear Book through which Allah guides those who seek His pleasure ...".

5) Authenticity of the Word of God

Unlike other Scriptures and Holy Books that with time were tampered with and edited, Quran remains entirely preserved as it once was revealed. Not even a single word of Allah has been changed in the Quran.

This claim is validated by Surah Al-Hijr,

"It is certainly We who have revealed the Reminder, and it is certainly We who will preserve it".

This promise by God remains steadfast as one can pick up copies of the Quran centuries apart and still find not a single difference making its authenticity undebatable. God has promised to preserve the Quran through the end of time.

6) Moderation is the Way

Moderation is a very important concept encouraged in Islam. This differs from other religions where levels of extreme devotion are considered "more proper way of practising the religion" ^{for instance} e.g., Nuns who are cloistered and never marry or Jews who do not believe that Jesus (AS) was a Messiah. Teetering on either end of the extremity is discouraged, rather a Muslim should be Moderate in the way he practices Islam, while maintaining a healthy life balance and fulfilling his obligations to his loved ones as well.

In fact, Surah An-Nisa mentions a warning from Allah,

"Do not exaggerate in your religion".

It's important to remember, however, that Islam places encourages Moderation or a middle ground in all matters such as spending money, eating, working, and not just in religion. A Muslim should live his life practising the word of God without becoming extreme in any arena of life.

7) The Five Pillars of Islam

The five components that metaphorically 'uphold' each muslim's link with Islam are called the Five Pillars.

These include 'The Shahadat', 'Salat (or Supplication)', 'Zakat (or charity)', 'Fasting', and 'Hajj (Pilgrimage)'.

The Shadah is a declaration that reinforces the concept of Tawheed and couples that with the finality of the Prophet (SAW) as the last Godsent Messenger. Converts to Islam have to recite this short verse to enter into the fold of Islam.

"There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah".

Salat is the act of praying five obligatory daily prayers to Allah, to retain a strong spiritual connection with him, while facing the direction Galaxy

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of Ka'abah. The importance of Salah in Islam is so profound that it is the first thing which will be questioned by every person on the day of Judgement.

Surah Baqarah references Salat in the following way,

"O believers! Seek comfort in patience and prayer. Allah is truly with those who are patient".

Zakat involves giving a $\frac{1}{20}$ of your total net wealth towards charity, in the name of Allah. Allah promises to increase the wealth of the one who gives to the needy for his sake.

The following hadith of the Prophet (SAW) reaffirms this,

"The wealth of a person does not decrease by paying Zakat".

Finally, Muslims fast from Dusk to Dusk in the Holy month of Ramadan every year, in an effort to empathize with the poor and develop a stronger bond with Allah.

Surah Baqarah states,

"... Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you so that you will become mindful of Allah".

Finally, Hajj is a unique religious pilgrimage ⁱⁿ Islam, undertaken by those physically and mentally fit, as well as financially sound, and is another obligatory part of faith to be completed at least once in a Muslim's lifetime.

Surah Al-Hajj explains how Muslims Circumambulate the Ka'abah in a practice called Tawaf during Hajj,

"Then let them end their untidiness and fulfill their vows and perform Tawaf around the ancient House".

8) Justice and Equality

Every Muslim and Non-Muslim is considered equal under the light of Islam, so it stands to reason that they all deserve equal rights to justice as well.

Surah Al-Maidah touches upon this topic,

"... Do not let the hatred of a people lead you to injustice. Be just! That is closer to righteousness..."

Islam was also the first religion to give rights to women and people of color and explicitly state that them.

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) even spoke on this matter,

"... No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, no colored person to a white person, or a white person to a colored person except by Taqwa (piety)."

9) Accountability and the Balance of Scales

Muslims believe every human will be accountable for their actions and answerable to God. All the good and bad deeds - regardless of how insignificant - will be weighed to decide a person's eventual eternal resting place.

Surah Az-Zalzalah discusses this very statement,

"So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it. And whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it."

10) Belief in the Hereafter

Islam lays out a clear cut distinction between heaven and hell, Resurrection and The Day of Judgement, which differs from other Monotheistic religions. This belief in Heaven and Hell guides Muslims to reflect on their actions as that will determine where they end up.

Muslims believe that the Hereafter is their true eternal home, as explained in Surah Ankabut,

"And this worldly life is not but diversion and amusement. And indeed, the home of the Hereafter - that is the life, if only they knew."

11) Power of the Ummah

Islamic brotherhood, or the Muslim Ummah, describes unity among Muslims all over the globe. This unity is based on ~~harat~~ mutual support, acceptance and standing up for each other's rights.

Holding their Muslim identity as ~~a~~ the thing that fosters relations with others is & certainly a strength that the Muslim community can boast of.

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) even said, regarding the Muslim Ummah,

"Verily, the believers are like bricks of a building, each part strengthening the other".

12) Confirmation of Previous Holy Books

Most other Abrahamic faiths do not claim or acknowledge the presence of other Holy Books, than the one they prescribe to. An example of this is that not a single Christian denomination believes Quran is the word of God, nor do they believe that the Zabur was a separate Book revealed to Hazrat David (AS).

Islam, on the contrary, believes that God sent 4 Holy Books over time, which are, the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel and

Quran. It is important to note, however, that Muslims no longer abide by the first 3 as they think their Holy Message has been tampered with over time.

Surah Al-Maidah confirms this,

"Then in the footsteps of the prophets, we sent Jesus, son of Mary, confirming the Torah revealed before him. And we gave him the Gospel containing guidance and light and confirming what was revealed in the Torah - a guide and the lesson to the God-fearing".

Conclusion

The word Islam has numerous meanings, but they all point towards the same theme - submitting yourself to God. And while there aren't any set salient features of Islam, the ones listed give a quick overall view of Islam as a religion and what it has to offer for Muslims and Non-Muslims.