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What is Islam? Elaborate the salient feature of Islam?

### Concept of Islam (Contextual and Literal meaning)

The word Islam is derived from "Salam", which is an Arabic word. This word has three possible meanings: peace, submission, and surrender. The contextual meaning of Islam is to enter into peace by submitting to the will of Allah Almighty. It also involves the submission of desires to the will of Allah. If we define it with reference to Shamiah, it is defined as voluntarily entering into peace by submitting to the will of Allah.

The foundation of Islam are also intricately linked to its holy scripture. Allah says in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 2:256: "Let there be no compulsion in religion; the truth stands out clearly from falsehood." In Surah Al-Kafirun, verse 6 (109:6), Allah states: "For you is your religion, and for me is my religion."

Several Hadiths provide further context interpretation of Islam. In the Hadith of Jibreel, the prophet Muhammad defined Islam as bearing witness to Allah and his messenger and establishing or practicing the pillars of Islam. The pillars include establishing prayer, paying Zakat, fasting during Ramadan, and performing Hajj. This Hadith serves as a concise summary of the core meaning and practices of Islam.

In addition to verses and Hadiths, Muslim scholars have also defined Islam in their own terms. Dr. Hameedullah, in his book "Introduction to Islam", defined Islam as a monotheistic Deen, revealed upon prophet Muhammad. Another Muslim scholar, Imam Ghazali, defined Islam as a

a combination of two things: the rights of Allah and the rights of people. He emphasized the relationship of creation with Allah and Allah's relationship with his creation. For him, religion is built upon two foundations: the rights of the Creator and the rights of the creation, as both aspects are essential for the fulfillment of Islam's core concept.

Moreover Maulana Sadruddin, in his book "Islam at a Glance", highlighted Islam as a combination faith and worship.

Islam is a universal Deen. It guides in every aspect of life because it is not limited to a specific time period, not confined to a specific geography, and not limited to a specific ethnicity as well. Islam is for the entire mankind. It provides and guides an ideal system of living for all mankind.

In Surah Al-Maidah (5:32), Allah says: "Whoever kills a soul, unless for a soul or for corruption in the land, it is as if he had slain mankind entirely, and whoever saves one, it is as if he had saved mankind entirely." Islam is a complete way of life. It guides in every aspect of life, including minorities, women, ethnicity, politics and economy.

## Salient Features of Islam

### Belief in the Oneness of Allah (Tawheed)

Tawheed is the core belief of Islam. It is the essence and foundation of Islam, and the entire concept of Islam revolves around it. The uniqueness of Allah is highlighted in Surah Al-Ikhlās, where Allah Almighty says: "He is Allah, (who is) one; Allah, the Eternal Refuge; He neither begets nor is born, nor is there to Him any equivalent." This surah emphasizes the oneness and uniqueness of Allah.

It is also mentioned in Seerat-un-Nabi by Allama Shibli Nomani that Tawheed is the first chapter of Islamic syllabus. Islam is like a fort, and the gate of the fort is Tawheed. Tawheed is the foundation of all aspects of Islam. All other Islamic <sup>rituals</sup> ~~belief~~ such as (Azaan, Aqeeqah, funeral, prayer) exist because of Allah. Belief in the prophet and the Hereafter, as well as all forms of worship, rituals, systems are fundamentally derived from Tawheed.

### Belief in finality of prophethood

The second salient feature is the belief in prophethood, which forms the second part of the Kalimah. A critical element of this is the belief in the finality of prophethood. In Surah Al-Ahzab, verse 33:40, Allah states that Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the messenger of Allah and the seal of the prophets.

The prophet provides a complete way of life (Sunnah), teaching how to act as a husband, father, neighbor, <sup>and</sup> head of state. The prophet's life also acts as a primary source of education and law. In a hadith, the prophet states: "Verily, I have been sent as a teacher to mankind."

In Surah An-Najm, verses 3 and 4 affirms that prophet Muhammad is a true messenger of Allah, speaking only what is revealed to him. This is emphasized by Allah stating from him. In this Surah, Allah has also validated the prophet's life as a source of education and law by stating that the prophet only speaks what is revealed to him by Allah. The prophet's life is a source of guidance and a role model for ordinary people.

### Ensuring Dignity to mankind

In past, many civilization such as the Romans, Greeks, and pre-Islamic societies in the subcontinent treated slaves, women and minorities unjustly. Islam, however, granted dignity and respect to all human beings. In Surah Al-Baqarah 2:30 Allah declares humans as His vicegerents (Khalifa) on Earth and in Surah At-Tin, He states that human are created in the best of forms (Ahsan-e-Taqweem), showing their special status.

Islam reinforces the dignity for all people. In Surah Bani Israel 17:70 Allah says, "certainly, we have honored the children of Adam," This highlights the dignity across four dimensions. Honor is given to all children of Adam, establishing humanity, not religion, as the baseline criteria for dignity. There is also the concept of protection of minorities, they are granted full dignity and respect. It also raised the status of women, giving them rights and respect, at a time when they were not valued in society. Moreover, since all human are descendants of Adam, Islam grants dignity and right to every individual without discrimination.

Islam not only gives honor but also protects it. In Surah Al-Imran 3:26, Allah <sup>has</sup> mentioned that honor and disgrace are in the hands of Allah. This shows that dignity is a divine gift and it must be respected and protected in society.

### A complete code of life

Islam provides a complete way of life, guiding every aspect of both individual and collective existence. For instance, it offers clear guidance for individual life from the very beginning. It provides direction immediately after birth through rituals such as Azaan and Azeegah. It also outlines how to raise a child and emphasizes strong character building. Islam teaches individuals to distinguish truth from falsehood and strongly condemns arrogance and jealousy. Moreover, it places great importance on acquiring knowledge: for example, the prophet (PBUH) said in a Hadith, "seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim".

In addition, Islam guides believers to earn a halal (lawful) livelihood. It also clearly outlines the rights and responsibilities of spouses, as well as those of parents and children.

## Promotion of Humanity

Humanity is often considered another name of Islam. Islam prioritizes humanity & defines it as the fulfillment of human rights and the expression of positive natural instincts such as love, mercy, and tolerance. It promotes humanity through character building, charity, medical services, social work, the protection of human rights and animal rights, and environmental protection. In Surah Al-Hujat and Surah Al-Humzah, backbiting and taunting are strictly condemned. Moreover, Surah Al-Baqarah (verse 177) states that true righteousness includes spending wealth out of the love of Allah.

Islam also strongly emphasizes social responsibility. Dr. Wasiullah Muhammad Abbas, in his book *Key Features of Islam*, notes that one of the greatest features of Islam is the practice of continuous social services, such as providing water, food and shelter to those in need. Furthermore, Islam places great importance on the protection of human rights. During the last sermon (Khutbah Hajjat-ul-wida), the prophet (PBUH) firmly upheld the rights of women and slaves and eliminated all forms of racism and nationalism by declaring that no white person is superior to a black, and no Arab is superior to a non Arab.

Islam is ideal and practical:

Islam hones and gears for perfection, granting their needs, not ignoring them. This Islamic feature promotes mankind with due consciousness of his nature, reality interest and desire.

In general, there is moderation more than exaggeration or excessiveness, but it still gives and satisfies each one with his needs.

This is best exemplified when Islam orders muslim to pay charity or Zakat ~~due~~ and at the same time it cautions man against his human instinct of chenshing money to the point of getting enslaved to it.

Almighty Allah says in verse 25:67<sup>10</sup> And let not your hand be tied (like a miser) to your neck nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach (like a spendthrift).

Islam nurtures, moulds, guides and polishes man without necessarily forgetting and renouncing his earthly whims and caprices.

## Conclusion

Islam is not a religion in the ordinary and distorted sense, for it does not confine its scope to one's private life. It is a complete way of life and is present in every field of human existence. Islam provides guidance for all aspects of life individual, social, material, moral, economic, political and national and international. The teachings of Quran enjoin man to embrace Islam without any reservation and to follow Allah's guidance in all areas of life.