

**Question - What is Islam? Elaborate salient features of Islam.**

Islam is the second ~~largest~~ largest and fastest growing religion in the world. It is a monotheistic religion that is revealed to people through prophets. The meaning and concept of Islam can be understood in various ways.

**Literal meaning:**

Islam is an Arabic word that originates from the root SLM (س ل م). Its meaning is surrender and submission. Other words like Salam and Muslim come from the same route and mean peace and the one who surrenders respectively. Since Islam, Salam and Muslim come from same route, their meanings are interconnected.

**Contextual meaning:**

Contextually, Islam means to submit oneself to the Will of Allah. It refers to giving up one's desires and inclinations for the sake of Allah and living according to the ways ordered by Allah.

**Meaning in Shariah:**

Through the lens of shariah, we can understand the meaning of Islam in such way that the submission to Allah is only out of willingness. A Muslim embraces Islam and live for Allah only by his choice. Allah, in essence, says in Quran ~~41:17~~ "Let there be no compulsion in religion. (Baqarah)".

**Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s explanation of Islam:**

Narrated by Abu Huraira:

"Once Angel Gabriel came and asked: what is ~~Islam~~ Islam? Messenger Replied: To worship Allah alone and none else,

to offer prayers perfectly, to pay compulsory charity and observe fasts during Ramadan.

Dr. Hameedullah's explanation.

Dr. Hameedullah, an eminent scholar of Islam, explained that Islam is a monotheistic religion. All Muslims worship one God "Allah" and there is no deity equivalent to Him.

## Salient Features of Islam

Islam is a complete, comprehensive religion. Its <sup>characteristics</sup> teachings and ideas are vast, some of them are mentioned discussed below.

### 1. Tawheed

The most important feature of Islam is Tawheed. Tawheed refers to "Oneness of Allah". When a person is to enter Islam, he utters the words "I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and I bear witness that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is the messenger of Allah." By saying this he accepts that all his actions, worships, efforts and desires are only for Allah alone. Islam preaches that Allah is the sole Creator of everything and there is no one as great and as powerful as Allah is. Allah Himself stresses upon the oneness of Him in Quran in Surah Ikhlas:

"Say, He is Allah, the One. Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born. Nor is there to Him any equivalent (Surah Ikhlas)."

## 2. Finality of Prophethood

3

Allah revealed the message of Islam to humans through prophets. Adam, Nuh, Jesus, Moses, Muhammad (PBUH) were all Allah's messengers who carried taught Islam to people. The process of revelations started from Prophet Adam and concluded on Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was the last prophet of Allah, through him Allah completed His message of guidance to humanity.

It is stated in the Quran that prophet Muhammad (SAW) is not a father to any of your men. He is the Messenger of Allah.

## 3/ Complete code of life

Islam is complete code of life. It guides humans in all aspects of life whether ~~they~~<sup>it</sup> be their individual or communal life. Islam teaches how to

## 3. Complete Code of life:

Islam is a complete code of life. It has guidance and teachings for all aspects and areas of life. It provides duties and practices that are fulfilled from the time a human is born to his death like when a baby is born, ~~and~~ his parents give aqeeqah and remove hair from his head. Same way, when a muslim dies, his dead body is given ghusal and wrapped in shrouds.

Moreover, Islam has rights and duties to humans for their different roles in life as parents, children, teachers, citizen, ruler, etc. By performing their duties <sup>and acquiring rights</sup>, muslims create a system of interdependence that leads to an efficiently functional society.

#### 4. Humanity

Among other prominent features of Islam, humanity holds a significant position. Islam teaches the lesson of humanity like no other religion. If we try to explain humanity, we can think of it as a gesture that comes originates from positive instincts of a human being. Though a human's environment play an important role in curating his nature, there is a core nature i.e. fitrah (فطرة) that defines his true essence and that is with him since birth. Humanity is rooted in the pious fitrah of human being.

Islam praises those muslims who are kind, generous, charitable and gentle - All traits of humanity. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said that - **best among momins is the one who is good to his family.** Likewise, there is a hadees-e-qudsi that says, **Allah does not like that person who does not tend to an ill person.**

Serving humanity and being helpfull to the poor, orphans or troubled is repeatedly ordered by Allah. In Quran, Allah ~~mentions orders to give zakah and offer prayer.~~ In Quran, Allah has mentioned the orders of giving zakah and offering prayer together repeatedly. Alleviating human suffering is so much appreciated that Allah mentioned (in Quran).

**"Because of that, we decreed upon the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for ~~some~~ 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....."**  
(Al maida)

### 5. Equality Dignity to mankind

Islam ensures dignity to all humans regardless of their religion, cast, creed, social status or gender.

Quran tells in Surah Al-Isra:

"And we have certainly ordered honored the children of Adam and carried them on land and sea and provided for them of good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with preference". (Al-Isra)

Allah has bestowed superiority to humans over all of his creations and made him entitled to a kind and fair treatment for being a human. This feature of Islam dismisses all the ill treatment done to humans in the ~~name~~ <sup>form</sup> of sacrifices to <sup>stone</sup> gods or brutalities of the rich over the poor.

### 6. Equality

Where Islam preaches the <sup>basic</sup> rights of humans whether muslims or non muslims, it instructs muslims to practice equality among themselves. Islam categorizes all muslims as equals whether poor, rich, slave, master, man or woman. Allah says in Quran:

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you.... (Al-Ajorati)

There is no privilege for noble families, ~~no~~ distinguished tribes or specific creeds. All are treated and judged by same rules and regulations given by Allah.

Prophet (SAW) said:

"All of you are children of Adam and Adam was created from dust, that people might stop boasting of their fathers lest they become more insignificant to Allah than the dung of a beetle."

Many examples can be found from the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) that highlight the status of equality in a muslim society. From such examples is the incidence of a woman who was of Banu Makhzum who ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> being punished for theft. She belonged to a noble tribe, so people asked Usama ibn Zayd to intercede. The prophet responded to that, "Do you intercede regarding one of the laws of Allah? Those before you were destroyed because they used to spare the noble but punish the weak. By Allah, if Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, were to steal, I would cut off her hand." This incidence clearly indicates that all human beings are equal in the light of Islam.

## 7. Universality

Though there are many religions other than Islam, some of them are from same monotheistic chain of religions as Islam and some are made up by humans out of their superstitions. However, none of the other religions are eternal in their teachings. They are for specific people <sup>and</sup> for specific limited time periods, only Islam is applicable for all of humanity and for all eras until the Last Day. Quran states the saying of Prophet (SAW):

"O people! I am but a Messenger from God to you all."

In different situations and in different times, scholars can interpret the teachings of Quran and Sunnah to ~~make them~~ apply them according to the situation, this is called ijtihad. Sometimes an interpretation becomes widely accepted among muslim scholars and gets followed by all muslims. It must be known that the interpretation remains truthful to the essence of the Quran and Sunnah.

## 2. Preservation of Original teachings

Islam remains applicable throughout time and region because its source i.e. the Quran and sunnah remains preserved in their original form.

Quran was revealed to prophet Muhammad (SAW) periodically. Dr. Hamidullah explains in his book, "Introduction to Islam" that how carefully Quran was recorded using both writing written and memory method. During the time of the Prophet (SAW), there were written records of Ayats (Verses) and hafiz-e-qurans (individuals who memorized Quran). After prophet, all ~~verses were sep~~ scattered written verses were compiled to make one copy - the Mushaf during the reign of first caliph Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (R.A). Placement of verses in surahs and arrangement of surahs were already taught by Allah to prophet (SAW). Most importantly, Quran is divinely protected. All scriptures revealed to previous prophets had been changed by humans. Only Quran remains unchanged because Allah is protecting Quran Himself.

Indeed, it is We who sent down the Reminder (the Quran), and indeed, We will be its guardian.  
(Al-Hijr)

In addition to Quran, Hadees and Sunnah are also important in understanding and learning Islam. Sahabas, who knew the importance of Prophet's actions and words, had either written them or remembered them through practice. This precious knowledge has also been carefully collected and preserved for later generations.

## 9. Balance of spiritualism and materialism.

A human being is a combination of both worldly desire and spiritual longing. For a complete fulfilled feeling, it is necessary to satisfy both desires. Sometimes a human ~~can~~ may seclude himself from the world to get closer to God, on the other hand, he can become totally lost in the luster of ~~the~~ the material world. Islam provides a perfect balance of both spiritualism and materialism. Islamic worships and practices satisfy both needs.

Dr. Hamidullah in his book, "Introduction to Islam" beautifully explains how fasting, praying and giving Zakah benefit humans dually. An empty stomach and prohibition of eating, drinking and sinful acts push the man away from the thoughts of this world. At the same time, it has scientifically proven health benefits for body. Same way, giving zakah helps <sup>needy</sup> people in materialistic way and develops the will of sacrificing for Allah in spiritual way. The list can go on and on, <sup>awakenings</sup> ~~be~~ briefly, Islam maintains a balance of spiritual and worldly gains to give a balanced fulfilled life.

## 10 - Tolerance

## 11 - Prohibition of Monasticism

## 12 - Comprehensive political and economic system.