

# Islamic Studies

## Assignment #01

### Question:-

What is Islam? Elaborate the salient features of Islam?

### → Answer Outline:-

#### ① Introduction

- ↳ Etymology and definition of Islam  
(Arabic root :- Sim / Salima)
- Islam as the final, universal religion  
(Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:3)
- Islam as a complete way of life - Thesis statement.

#### ② Historical and Theological Context of Islam

- ↳ Prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH) & revelation of the Quran.
- Islam as the culmination of Abrahamic tradition.
- Surah Al-Baqarah 2:136 - universal chain of prophethood.

#### ③ The Oneness of Allah - Tawhid as the Foundational Pillar

- ↳ Definition and centrality of Tawhid
- Surah Al-Ikhtas (112:1-4) - the purest declaration of monotheism
- Scholar: Ibn Taymiyyah on Tawhid

#### ④ The Five Pillars - The Structural Framework of Islamic Practice.

- ↳ Shahada, Salah, Zakat, Sawm, Hajj
- Hadith of Ibn Umer (Bukhari & Muslim) - the five pillars.
- Pillars as individual and social obligations.

#### ⑤ The Quran and Sunnah - Twin Foundations on Islamic Law and Ethics.

- ↳ The Quran as the eternal, verbatim Word of Allah.
- Surah Al-Hijr [15:9] - divine preservation of the Quran.
- The Sunnah as practical interpretation - Hadith of Imam Malik.

#### ⑥ Islam as a Complete and Universal Way of Life (Deen)

- ↳ Deen vs. Religion - holistic governance of life.
- Surah Al-Maidah [5:3] - perfection of the faith.
- Dr. Israr Ahmed on the comprehensiveness of Deen.

#### ⑦ Social Justice, Equality and Brotherhood

- ↳ Islam's radical egalitarianism - no racial or tribal superiority
- Surah Al-Hujurat [49:13] - equality of all mankind.
- The farewell sermon of the Prophet (PBUH).

## ⑧ The middle Path - Islam's Principle of Moderation (Wasatiyyah)

- ↳ Ummatan Wasata - the balanced nation
- Surah Al-Baqarah [2:143]
- Yusuf al-Qaradawi on wasatiyyah.

## ⑨ Islam's Emphasis on Knowledge, Reason and Civilization Progress

- ↳ first revelation : Iqra - command to read and reflect.
- Surah Al-'Alaq [96:1-5]
- Imam Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun on knowledge.

## ⑩ Conclusion

- ↳ Recapitulation of Islam's definition and core features.
  - Islam as the definitive answer to human spiritual and worldly needs.
-

## Answer

Q) What is Islam? An Elaboration on its salient features.

### Islam: meaning, Origin and Universal Mission

The word 'Islam' is derived from the Arabic root 'Silm' or 'Salima', which carries the primary meaning of peace, submission, safety and wholeness. Etymologically, Islam denotes a voluntary, conscious surrender to the will of Allah, the One True God, and the attainment of inner peace that flows from such surrender.

It is not merely a religion in the conventional, institutional sense, but rather a comprehensive, divinely ordained system of belief, worship, ethics, law and civilisation that governs every dimension of human existence. With over 1.9 billion adherents across the globe today, Islam stands as the world's second-largest and fastest-growing faith, yet its claim is not rooted in numerical might but in divine authority and the universality of its message.

Islam is the final link in the chain of Abrahamic prophecy. It was revealed in its complete and perfect form to the last of all Prophets, Sayyiduna Muhammad Ibn Abdullah, in seventh-century Arabia, through the medium of Angel Jibreel, over a period of approximately

twenty-three years. The culmination of this revelation is marked by the divine proclamation of the Holy Quran: "This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favour upon you and have approved for Islam as religion." (Al-Qur'an, 5:3). This verse encapsulates the very definition of Islam - a faith perfected by God Himself, not evolved by human intellect.

## The Abrahamic Continuum: Islam as the Culmination of Divine Guidance

A proper understanding of Islam necessitates situating it within the grand continuum of divine guidance. Islam is not a new religion in the philosophical sense; rather, it is the final and most complete manifestation of the same primordial message that was conveyed to every people through their respective Prophets. The Quran declares: "Say, [O believers], we have believed in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the descendants and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him" (Al-Qur'an, 2:136). This verse situates Islam as the universal heir of all prior revelation, affirming continuity of divine monotheism across history.

Islamic theology, therefore, holds that every nation was sent a Warner and a Guide, (Al-Qur'an, 35:24), and that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the seal of this prophetic office. As the eminent classical scholar Imam Ibn Kathir states in his celebrated exegesis Tafsir Ibn Kathir: The prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH) is the perfection of a divine plan that spans all of human history. This understanding elevates Islam from a parochial, seventh-century Arab phenomenon to a universal spiritual inheritance of all humanity.

## Tawhid - The Indivisible Oneness of God: The Bedrock of Islamic Faith

The single most fundamental and defining feature of Islam is the doctrine of Tawhid - the absolute, uncompromising Oneness of Allah. Tawhid is not merely a theological proposition; it is the axis upon which the entire edifice of Islamic belief, worship, ethics, and law revolves. It categorically rejects all forms of polytheism, pantheism, anthropomorphism, and the ascription of partners to God. The most concentrated and sublime expression of Tawhid is found in Surah Al-Ikhlâs: "Say, He is Allah, [who is] One. Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born, nor is there to Him any equivalent" (Al-Qur'an, 112:1-4).

The medieval Islamic scholar Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah, in his monumental work Majmu' al-fatawa, elaborates that Tawhid encompasses three inseparable dimensions: Tawhid al-Rububiyyah (the Oneness of Lordship), Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah (the Oneness of Worship), and Tawhid al-Asma wa al-Sifat (the Oneness of Names and Attributes). Together, these dimensions ensure that the Muslim's entire life is oriented exclusively towards the Divine, making Tawhid not merely a creed to be recited but a lived reality that shapes every moral choice, social interaction, and political commitment. The testimony of faith - 'La ilaha illallah' - is thus the most radical and transformative statement in human history, for it liberates the individual from all servitude to created beings and channels allegiance solely to the Creator.

## The Five Pillars of Islam - Architecture of Devotion and Discipline

Islam provides its adherents with a practical, structured framework of worship and discipline through the Five Pillars. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "Islam is built on five [pillars]: testifying that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, performing the prayers, paying the Zakat, making

the pilgrimage to the house, and fasting in Ramadan" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 8; Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 16). These five pillars constitute the structural skeleton of Islamic practice, binding the individual to God's to the community simultaneously.

The 'Shahada' (Declaration of Faith) is the gateway into Islam and the verbal affirmation of Tawhid. 'Salah' (Prayer), observed five times daily, establishes a rhythmic, continuous communication between the servant and God, anchoring the Muslim's consciousness in divine remembrance throughout the day. 'Zakat' (Obligatory Almsgiving) represents Islam's institutionalised mechanism for social redistribution, ensuring that wealth circulates within the community and that the destitute are not forgotten. 'Sawm' (Fasting in Ramadan) cultivates spiritual discipline, empathy for the poor, and collective solidarity. 'Hajj' (Pilgrimage to Makkah) is the grand, annual demonstration of universal Muslim brotherhood, erasing all distinctions of race, class & nationality as millions stand equally before their Creator. Taken together, these pillars illustrate Islam's genius in harmonising personal piety with collective responsibility.

## The Holy Quran and the Prophetic Sunnah - Eternal Foundations of Guidance

Islam rests upon two primary and authoritative sources of guidance: the Holy Quran and the Prophetic Sunnah. The Quran is the verbatim, uncreated Word of Allah, revealed in the Arabic language, preserved with miraculous precision across fourteen centuries, and constituting the ultimate criterion of truth.

Allah Himself undertook its preservation: "Indeed, it is We who sent down the Quran and indeed, We will be its guardian" (Al-Quran, 15:9). This divine guarantee of preservation distinguishes the Quran from all other scriptures in the history of religion — no other book can claim an unbroken, authenticated manuscript tradition from the moment of its revelation to the present day.

The Sunnah, the recorded words, actions and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) serves as the living commentary and practical implementation of the Quran. Imam Malik Ibn Anas, the founder of the Maliki school of jurisprudence, famously declared: The Sunnah is like Noah's Ark — whoever boards it is saved, and whoever remains behind is drowned, underscoring the indispensability of prophetic guidance. Together, the Quran

and the Sunnah constitute the Shari'ah, - the divine legal and ethical framework which, as the contemporary scholar Dr. Tariq Ramadan observes in Western Muslims and the Future of Islam, is not a rigid code of punishments but a dynamic, principled system of ethics designed to protect the five universal objectives of Islamic law (Maqasid al-Shari'ah): life, intellect, lineage, property & religion.

## Islam as Deen - A Complete and Holistic way of life.

One of the most critical and frequently misunderstood features of Islam is its self-characterisation not merely as a religion - a private, spiritual affair confined to a place of worship, but as a 'Deen', a complete and sovereign system of life encompassing politics, economics, family, law, art, and international relations. The Quranic verse cited in the introduction [5:3] declares this religion perfect, leaving no domain of life ungoverned by divine principle. The renowned Pakistani Islamic scholar Dr. Israr Ahmed, in his lectures on Quranic themes, emphasises that the distinction between 'Deen' and 'Mazhab' (institutional religion) is fundamental: Deen governs the totality of individual and collective existence, while Mazhab is a

privatised, colonially imposed reduction of faith to ritual.

The comprehensiveness of Islam as Deen is evident in the fact that the Quran addresses not only prayers and fasting but also the laws of contract, inheritance, governance, warfare, diplomacy, environment, and personal conduct. The Prophet (PBUH) taught that even the removal of a harmful object from the road is an act of faith, and that a smile towards one's brother is charity (Sahih Muslim). This holistic ethical vision, which the German orientalist Annemarie Schimmel in *And Muhammad is His Messenger* describes as Islam's 'integration of the sacred and the mundane,' is among the religion's most enduring and distinguished features.

## Social Justice, Human Dignity and Universal Brotherhood.

Islam introduced, fourteen centuries before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a revolutionary doctrine of human equality grounded not in secular ideology but in divine command. The Quran declares: "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-Quran, 49:13). This verse dismantles every hierarchy of race, tribe, caste, and gender and replaces it with a single criterion of human worth: moral excellence (taqwa).

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), in his historic Farewell Sermon (Khutbat al-Wada) delivered in 632 CE before over 100,000 companions, proclaimed: "All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; a white person has no superiority over a black person, nor does a black person have any superiority over a white person, except by piety and good action." (Reported in Musnad Ahmad.) This declaration, delivered at the apex of the Prophet's mission, was nothing short of a universal charter of human rights, centuries ahead of its time. The institution of Zakat, the prohibition of usury (riba), and the rights of slaves, women, and minorities enshrined in Islamic law further substantiate Islam's commitment to a just social order.

## Wasatiyyah - The Principle of the Middle Path and Balance.

Among the most philosophically mature and practically significant features of Islam is the principle of Wasatiyyah - the middle path, moderation and balance. Allah declares in the Quran: "And thus We have made you a median [i.e.; just] community that you will be witness over the people and the messenger will be a witness over you" (Al-Quran, 2:143). The word 'Wasat' in Arabic connotes not moral centre of gravity.

The contemporary Egyptian Islamic scholar Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, in his seminal work 'Islamic Awakening between Rejection and Extremism', identifies Wasatiyyah as Islam's answer to the twin dangers of fanaticism and dissolution. Islam neither endorses the extreme asceticism of monasticism nor the unbridled materialism of secularism. It neither devalues the world in favour of the hereafter, nor sacrifices the hereafter for worldly gain. The Prophet is reported to have said: "Make things easy and do not make them difficult, and give glad tidings and do not repel people." (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 69). This principle of ease, mercy, and balance renders Islam

not only spiritually profound but eminently liveable - a complete, sustainable way of life for all human beings regardless of culture, geography or era.

## The Primacy of Knowledge and the Rational Tradition in Islam.

Perhaps the most arresting indication of Islam's civilisational ambition is the fact that the very first word of divine revelation was a command to read. The Quran states: "Read in the name of your Lord who created - Created man from a clinging substance. Read, and your Lord is the most Generous - who taught by the pen - Taught man that which he knew not" (Al-Quran, 96:1-5).

This inaugural revelation places knowledge, literacy and intellectual inquiry at the very heart of the Islamic mission. The Prophet further declared: "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim." (Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 224), without distinction of gender, social class or geographic location.

This Quranic injunction catalysed one of the greatest intellectual revolutions in human history. Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, in his encyclopedic masterpiece 'Ihya Ulum al-Din' (The Revival of the Religious Sciences),

articulates a framework in which religious and rational knowledge are not in conflict but are complementary dimensions of a unified Islamic epistemology. The great North African polymath Ibn Khaldun, in his *Muqaddimah*, demonstrates how the Islamic civilization's synthesis of revelation and reason produced remarkable advances in mathematics, astronomy, medicine, philosophy and jurisprudence. The Islamic golden age, centered in Baghdad, Cordoba, and Cairo from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries, was not a historical accident but the direct fruit of Islam's elevation of knowledge as a religious duty and civilisation imperative.

### Conclusion - Islam: The Complete and Enduring Charter of Human life.

Islam, in sum, is far more than a system of rituals or a collection of moral injunctions. It is a comprehensive, divinely revealed way of life, a complete Deen, that addresses the totality of human existence from the innermost dimensions of the soul to the outermost structure of civilisation. Its salient features, as elaborated above, paint a portrait of a religion of extraordinary depth, balance,

and universality : the absolute monotheism of Tawhid, the practical discipline of the Five Pillars, the eternal guidance of the Quran and Sunnah, the holistic governance of the concept of Deen, the radical egalitarianism of its social vision, the philosophical maturity of Wasatiyyah, and the civilisational vitality of its commitment to knowledge.

These features do not operate in isolation but as an integrated, organic whole. As the eminent South Asian scholar and poet Allama Muhammad Iqbal wrote in 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' : Islam is not the possession of any one people or era - it is the final, universal message of God to all of humanity, designed to be as relevant to the twenty-first century as it was to the seventh. The Quran's own testimony is its most fitting conclusion : " And we have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds " (Al-Quran, 21 : 107). It is in this spirit of universal mercy, justice and wisdom that Islam states its claim as not merely a religion of 1.9 billion people, but as the definitive and eternal answer to humanity's deepest spiritual, moral and civilisational needs.

α ————— α