

What is Islam? Elaborate the Salient Features of Islam.

Introduction

Islam is the final and universal religion revealed by Allah for the complete guidance of Mankind. Islam, means attaining true peace through sincere obedience to the will of Allah. It is not confined to worship alone; rather it provides a comprehensive framework for individual character-building and collective social order. Islam offers guidance in moral conduct, family life, social justice, governance, economics, human rights, environmental responsibility, and international peace. Therefore, the salient features of Islam reflect its universality, balance, mercy, and practicality as a complete code of life for humanity.

Meaning and Essence of Islam

1. Contextual and Literal Meaning of Islam

The word Islam comes from the Arabic root "S-L-M", meaning peace, purity, and submission. Thus, Islam literally means achieving peace through submission to Allah.

2) According to Sharia

In Sharia, Islam is a complete code of life consisting of beliefs, worship, moral principles, and laws regulating personal and collective matters. It provides guidance in family affairs, justice, economics, politics, and social welfare.

Allah says in the Holy Quran:

"Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam." (Qur'an 3:19)

3) Islam According to Sunnah

According to Sunnah, Islam is defined through its practical pillars. The Prophet Muhammad ^{pbu} explained Islam in ~~as~~:

"Islam is to testify that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammed is the Messenger of Allah, establish prayer, pay zakat, fast in Ramadan, and perform Hajj..." (Sahih Muslim)

4) Islam in the View of Contemporary Scholars

Renowned scholar Syed Abul A'la Maududi defines Islam as:

"Islam is a complete way of life which covers every aspect of human existence - individual, social, economic, and political."

Salient Features of Islam

1) Islam: A Complete Code of Life

The foremost feature of Islam is that it provides guidance in every sphere of life. Islam does not separate religion from worldly affairs but integrates spiritual and material aspects harmoniously. It does not restrict itself to worship alone but provides guidance in personal conduct, family life, social dealings, governance, economy, justice and global affairs. Allah says in the Holy Quran:

"We have sent down to you the Book as clarification for all things." (Quran 16:89)

2) Spiritual and Moral Purification

Islam reforms individuals through prayer, fasting, and remembrance of Allah. This spiritual connection brings inner peace and stability. Islam develops noble character by teaching truthfulness, patience, humility and compassion.

Allah says in the Holy Quran:

"Indeed, prayer prevents immorality and wrongdoing." (Quran 29:45)

In the light of Sunnah:

"The best among you are those who have the best character."

(Sahih Bukhari)

4) Universal Brotherhood and Equality

Islam establishes a universal brotherhood that transcends race, color, nationality, and class. It rejects all forms of discrimination and declares that superiority is based only on piety and righteousness. The principle created an unprecedented egalitarian society. Allah says in the Holy Quran:

"Indeed, the believers are brothers." (Quran 49:10)

Prophet ^ﷺ in his Farewell Sermon:

"No Arab has superiority over a non-Arab,
and no white over a black except by
righteousness." (Musned Ahmed)

5) A Balanced and Just Social System

Islam provides a balanced social system based on mutual rights and responsibilities. It strengthens family life, honors parents, protects women, ensures the welfare of children, and commends kindness toward neighbours, orphans, and the needy. Islam does not promote selfish individualism; rather, it builds a compassionate society where collective welfare is prioritized.

Allah says in the Quran:

"And live with them in kindness"

(Quran 4:19)

6) Shura - Based Political System of Islam

Islam presents a political system founded upon justice, consultation, accountability, and public welfare. Leadership in Islam is not an instrument of the oppression but a sacred trust for serving the people. Islam strongly condemns tyranny and promotes Shura as a governing principle. Hazrat Umar (RA) emphasized the importance of responsible leadership by stating:

"There is no Islam without community, no community without leadership."

7) Interest - Free Financial System of Islam

Islam offers a unique and balanced economic framework based on fairness, lawful trade, zakat, and social welfare. It strictly prohibits riba (interest) which leads to exploitation and concentration of wealth in a few hands. Islam also makes zakat obligatory to ensure redistribution of wealth and elimination of poverty. Hence, the Islamic Economic system promotes social justice, compassion, and economic stability.

Allah says in the Holy Quran:

"Allah has permitted trade and forbidden interest." (Quran 2:275)

8) Absolute Justice and Rule of Law

Justice is the backbone of Islam and one of its most emphasized teachings. Islam commands

believers to uphold justice even if it goes against their own interests, family, or community. The Prophet^ﷺ demonstrated equality before law by declaring:

"If Fatimah, daughter of Muhammed, stole, I would cut off her hand." (Sahih Muslim)

9) Comprehensive Charter of Human Rights

Islam is the greatest promoter of human dignity and fundamental rights. It guarantees the right to life, honor, equality, justice, and freedom. Islam granted these rights centuries before modern human rights declarations. Islam strongly protects human life:

"Whoever kills a soul... it is as if he has killed all mankind." (Qur'an 5:32)

10) Good Governance and Accountability in Islam

A highly significant salient feature of Islam is its emphasis on good governance, accountability, and responsibility in public affairs. Islam views authority not as a privilege but a sacred trust that must be exercised with justice, transparency, and service to the people. The Quran commands rulers and institutions to deliver trusts faithfully. The rightly guided caliphs set remarkable examples of accountability. Hazrat Umar (R.A) once said:

"If a mule stumbles on the road of Iraq, I fear Allah will ask me why I did not level the path for it."

Conclusion

Islam is a complete and universal way of life that provides guidance in every sphere of human existence. Its salient features — moral purification, brotherhood, social justice, consultation based governance, interest-free economy, absolute justice, human rights and mercy for all creation make it a timeless system for individual reform and collective prosperity.

Allah says in the Holy Quran:

"Today I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favour upon you."

(Quran 5:3)
