An Introduction To Islam

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Article

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by Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi
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What is Islam?

Islam is a religion which guides its followers in every aspect of their lives. It is a **way of life**.

Islam is the modern or latest version of the message sent by God through Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Islam was sent to mankind through Prophet Muhammad. Islam is "modern" in the sense that it has come to complement the teachings which were introduced through Moses and Jesus.

Islam is a religion which seeks to give a meaningful purpose to our life on this earth. It seeks to guide us in fulfilling that purpose by creating harmony between ourselves, our Creator and fellow human beings.

What you will read below are some of the basic features of Islam.

The One & Only God

Islam is a monotheistic religion. It teaches that there is only one God who is the origin and creator of the universe. This is the foundation of Islam, and is reflected in the famous sentence which says that, "There is no god but Allah." (Allah is the Arabic name of God.)

The belief in God relates us to our origin and guides us throughout our life. The belief in one God shows that man should not worship any material thing or person in this universe.

By teaching that there is only One God for all humans, Islam promotes the sense of brotherhood and equality in human society––all are equally related to God in the same way. The Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, says:

He (God) is One, God is Eternal;(112:1)
He has neither begotten,(112:2)
nor has He been begotten; (112:3)
and there is no one equal to Him.(112:4)

The Purpose of Life

Our life on this earth has a specific purpose; it is not the result of nature's accident, nor is it a punishment for eating the fruit of the forbidden tree. We are here according to God's plan: the worldly life is a test; it is a chance **to prove ourselves as deserving of the eternal blissful life in the hereafter**. God did not create us just for few years of this life. To be created just for this world's life would amount to a joke played by the Creator with the human species. Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, said," You have not been created to perish; on the contrary, you have been created for eternal life."

According to Islam, the final destination of mankind is the life hereafter. At the end of time, all human beings will be resurrected and will be held accountable for their worldly life. The life in hereafter will be an eternal life. However, whether it will be blissful or full of sorrow depends on how we spend our present life.

It was to help mankind in achieving this objective that God sent various prophets and messengers to guide them. Muhammad is the last prophet, and Islam is the final and complete version of God's message.

Status of Human Beings in Islam

Prime Creation

Human being is the prime creation of God. He says,

"We have indeed honored the children of Adam; spread them in the land and the sea, provided them with good things; and preferred them in esteem over many things that We have created." (*Qur'an, 17:70*)

Born Sinless

Islam teaches that every human being is born sinless; no child carries the burden of his or her ancestors' sins. God says,

"No carrier shall carry the burden of others." (*Qur'an, 35:18*).

Each human being is born with a pure conscience which can absorb and accept the true message of God. It is only the social and familial influences which take a person away from God's message.

Accountability

Islam also emphasizes on the issue of responsibility and accountability of human beings––each person is responsible for his or her own actions. Although Islam teaches that God has predetermined the span

of our life and the time of our death, it does not mean that even our actions are predetermined by Him. We surely are free in our actions and are, therefore, accountable for them. God only provides guidance for us to know what is good and what is bad. He says,

"We created man of a water-drop...Surely We guided him to the right way – now whether he (follows it and) be grateful or (goes astray and) be ungrateful is up to him." (*Qur'an, 76: 3*).

Race

Islam very categorically rejects racial discrimination. It promotes the feeling of brotherhood and equality among its followers. God clearly says,

"*O Mankind! We have created you from one male and one female, and then We made you into different races and tribes so that you may know (and easily recognize) each other."* (*Qur'an, 49:13*).

Therefore, no one can claim any superiority over others based on racial or tribal differences. A person is to be judged by his character, not by his color or race. God continues,

"Surely the most honorable of you in God's sight is the person who is most upright in character among you." (*Qur'an, 49:13*).

Gender

Even gender does not count as a criterion of superiority. In Islam, women are as human as men. They are not evaluated on basis of their gender, but on basis of their faith and character. Fourteen hundred years ago, the Qur'an recorded God's clear statements on this issue. Out of the four verses, I will just quote one:

"Whoever, be it a male or a female, does good deeds and he or she is a believer, then they will enter the Paradise." (*Qur'an, 4:124*).

So there is no difference in the degree or level of woman's humanity or honor in Islam.

The only difference there exists is concerning the role which Islam has envisioned for man and woman. This has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority. In Islam, man and woman are equal in rights; but equality is not synonymous to similarity. Islam believes that man and woman are equal but dissimilar. Islam looks at their different roles in society not as superior or inferior but as complementary to each other.

Islam, The Religion of Peace

Islam is a religion of peace. This is evident even from the name "Islam" itself. ("Islam" is an Arabic word.) The word "Islam" and the Arabic word for peace, "salam" both come from the same root, "salima".

Muslims are taught to greet each other by saying "*salamun alaykum—peace be upon you.*" The daily prayers also end with the same sentence. In Islam, one of the names by which God is known is "Salam" which means peace.

However, one must realize that **peace** can never be achieved in vacuum. It **is intertwined with justice**. One can have peace only on basis of justice. "Justice" means putting everything in its rightful place. If one starts putting things in the wrong places, then he disrupts the social harmony and disturbs peace.

Islam seeks to promote peace on two levels:

1. Peace within One's Self

A person can achieve inner peace by creating harmony and balance between his main emotions (desire and anger) and his spiritual self. In other words, between his emotions and his conscience.

Human's spiritual power or conscience is not a static phenomenon: it has the ability of growth as well as decadence. God swears by the soul of human being and says,

"He inspired to it to understand what is good and what is evil. Prosperous in the person who purifies it, and failed is he who seduces it." (Qur'an, 91:10).

2. Peace With Others

Islam very strongly emphasizes on the rights which people have over each other. It seeks to preserve peace in society by training and urging its followers to fulfill the rights of each other. In Islam, salvation is not possible by just fulfilling the rights of God; one has to fulfill the rights of other human beings also.

Unfortunately, because of the Middle Eastern events of the last three decades, Islam has been branded by the media as a religion of violence. In recent years, the word "Islamic" has become one of the adjectives of "terrorism."

In this backdrop, firstly, one must realize that the events in the Middle East can be fairly and fully understood only in the light of the post-WWI history of that region, in particular the promises given by the British to the Arabs. Secondly, no fair-minded person would allow himself to blame the religion of Islam for the wrong-doings of those who call themselves as Muslims. It is just like saying that the Catholic Church promotes violence and terrorism because of the Irish Republican Army's activities!

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