

Islam and Muslims

In Arabic, “Islam” means “submission” but it is derived from the Arabic root word “*S-L-M*” which means peace. A Muslim, therefore, is one anyone or anything that peacefully and wilfully submits itself to the will of God. Even the elements of nature (the wind, the trees, rocks, the sun, etc.) can properly be said to be Muslims, since they all submit themselves to the divine will of God. The religion of Islam consists of the acknowledgement of the existence of God’s unity and the acceptance of His teachings and guidance as revealed to His final Prophet, Muhammad (Peace be upon him and his progeny). A Muslim is thus one who believes in God and strives to please Him by following His guidance. “Muhammadanism” is a misnomer for Islam and offends its very spirit, since it implies that Muslims have deified and worshipped Muhammad, as the Christians have done with Jesus Christ. This practice is condemned in the Qur’an and is totally foreign to the Islamic belief structure.

Who is Allah?

The word “Allah” (pronounced Al-Laah) is the proper name of God in Arabic. It is a unique word in that it has no plural or feminine forms. Recognizing the monotheistic nature of Allah lies at the core of Islam. In the Qur’an, Allah describes Himself to humanity as follows:

Allah is He besides whom there is no god, the Ever-Living, the Self-subsisting by whom all subsist; Slumber does not overtake Him nor sleep; Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His; Who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they cannot comprehend anything out of His knowledge except what He pleases, His knowledge extends over the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of them both tires Him not, and He is the Most High, the Great. (2:255)

Continuity of Message

Islam is not a new religion, but a re-presentation of the same message and guidance that Allah revealed to all of His prophets. Muslims accept belief in ALL the divine Prophets and Messengers. Rejection of one is tantamount to rejection of them all. It is said in the Qur’an:

The Qur’an and the Ahlul Bayt

Since Allah is perfect, it follows that His guidance must also be perfect. The Qur’an is the revealed word of Allah and the basic source of Islamic teachings and laws. It is a complete and comprehensive book that deals with the foundations of belief, morality, the history of humanity; worship, knowledge, wisdom, the attainment of spiritual perfection, and the relationship between Allah and His creation. The Qur’an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel over 1400 years ago. In length, it is roughly the same size as the New Testament. Throughout the ages, its comprehensive teachings have been used to construct sound systems of social justice, economics, politics, legislation, jurisprudence, law, international relations, and scientific inquiry. Unlike scriptures from other religious traditions, the Qur’an does not contain a single error or inconsistency, whether scientific or otherwise.

The words, order, and language of the Qur’an have never been altered, even in the slightest manner. The Qur’an that we have today is exactly the same one that was revealed over 1400 years ago. No other book that claims to be a divine revelation can make this claim, and no one has ever been able to refute this claim to complete authenticity.

Say [O Muhammad]: We believe in Allah and that which has been revealed to us, and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and to other Prophets, from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we submit. (3:3)

A simple survey of the lives of the great Prophets reveals that their message was essentially the same. They called human beings towards belief in God and towards spiritual perfection. Muhammad, the last of Allah’s Messengers, was sent to proclaim Allah’s final and complete message to all of humanity. This was necessary because the messages delivered by previous prophets and messengers had been distorted. They had been mixed with speculation, superstition, myth, conjecture, and man-made philosophies. Islam is therefore not a new religion. It is the same message that was preached by all the great prophets, beginning with the Prophet Adam. The religion of Islam is this divine religion in its purest and most unadulterated form, and is designed to provide humanity with the uncorrupted message of Allah.

The term “Ahlul Bayt” refers to the Family of the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur’an relates the following:

... Verily Allah intends to keep off from you every kind of uncleanness, O People of the House (Ahlul Bayt), and purify you with a perfect purification. (33:33)

When asked about this verse, the Prophet Muhammad replied that it referred only to himself, his daughter Fatima, her husband ‘Ali b. Abi Talib, and her two sons Hasan and Husayn. According to Qur’an, the Ahlul Bayt were made pure and spotless. They led perfect lives, and were the physical embodiment of all that the Qur’an teaches. They were perfect models of humility, self-sacrifice, piety, obedience, and devotion to Allah, and thus set an example for all human beings.

Taken together, the Qur’an and the Ahlul Bayt represent the legacy left by the Prophet Muhammad. In fact, according to various statements made by the Prophet Muhammad (such as the famous Tradition of *Thaqalayn*), by adhering to the Qur’an and the Ahlul Bayt, humanity has all the tools it needs to attain spiritual perfection.

Man: The Free Agent

Humans have been blessed above all of Allah’s other creatures by being given a free will. Through free will, humankind has the potential to become the most sublime of Allah’s creatures. Allah has revealed the right path, and it is up to each individual whether to accept it – and attain eternal happiness, or reject it – and become guilty of falsifying the purpose of his or her existence. Life on this earth has a specific purpose. We are not the result of nature’s accident, nor are we here as punishment for eating the fruit of a forbidden tree. This world is a testing ground; it is a chance to prove ourselves as worthy of an eternity of bliss in the hereafter. As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) said: “You have not been created to perish; on the contrary, you have been created for eternal life.” Heaven has been prepared for us; all we have to do is earn it. The Qur’an eloquently emphasizes this point through the following words:

... Truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error; therefore, whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah, he indeed has laid hold on the firmest handle, which shall not break off, and Allah is Hearing, Knowing. (2:256)

The Concept of Worship

Islam does not teach or accept mere ritualism, but rather emphasizes intention and action. To worship Allah is to know and to love Him. Thus, anything done with the intention of pleasing the Creator is considered an act of worship. This includes, but is not limited to: Obeying His laws, enjoining good and forbidding evil and oppression, practising charity and truthfulness, and working towards the betterment of the human condition. The Qur'an elucidates these concepts in the following beautiful manner:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the east or the west; But it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance out of love for Him, for your kind, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the people proximate to Allah. (2:177)

Islam's Rational Appeal

Islam, with its clear and direct expression of truth, has a great appeal to anyone seeking knowledge. Its guidance is comprehensive and includes the social, economic, political, moral, and spiritual aspects of life. The Qur'an reminds humankind of the purpose of one's life, one's duties and obligations toward oneself, one's family, community, fellow human beings, and Creator. Humanity is given fundamental guidelines about a purposeful life and then confronted with the challenges of human existence so that these high ideals can be put into practice. The tragedy of secular societies is that they fail to connect the different aspects of life. The secular and the religious, as well as the scientific and the spiritual, seem to be in conflict. In Islam, a person's life is regarded as a holistic and integrated unity and not a collection of fragmented and competitive parts. There are no separate "sacred" and "secular" realms, for all are united within the nature of the individual.

The family, which is the basic unit of civilization, is disintegrating in all western countries. Islam's family system brings the rights of the husband, wife, children, and relatives into a fine equilibrium. It nourishes human nature through unselfishness, generosity, and love in the framework of a well-organized family and social system.

Criteria for Truth

How do you know if your belief system is true? Take a moment to consider the following:

- Are the teachings of your belief system rationally tenable?
- Is your belief system universally applicable?
- Does your belief system enhance your progress towards spiritual perfection?
- Who is the creator of your belief system? Is he a creation or is he the Creator?
- Has your belief system been corrupted by superstitions, myths, or man-made philosophies?
- Does your belief system concur with the discoveries of modern science?
- Could a human being have invented your belief system?

If a belief system fails any of these qualifications, then it cannot be divine. If this is the case, then you can either live your life knowing that your belief system is imperfect, or you can open the door to inner peace and enlightenment. The choice is yours.

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Islam

At a Glance



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