

Islam At A Glance

ISLAM AND MUSLIMS The Arabic word Islam means peace, submission and obedience. The religion of Islam is the complete acceptance of the teachings and guidance of God as revealed to His Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). A Muslim is one who believes in God and strives for total reorganization of his life according to His revealed guidance and the sayings of the Prophet. He also works for building human society on the same basis. "Muhammadanism is a misnomer for Islam and offends its very spirit. The word 'Allah' is the proper name of God in Arabic. It is a unique term because it has no plural or feminine gender.

CONTINUITY OF MESSAGE Islam is not a new religion. It is, in essence, the same message and guidance which Allah revealed to all Prophets:

"Say, we believe in Allah and that which has been revealed to us, and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ismael and Issac 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". (Qura'n 3:83).

The message which was revealed to Prophet Muhammed (PBUH), the last Prophet in Islam in its comprehensive, complete and final form.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM 1. The declaration of faith : To bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, and that Muhammad is His messenger to all human beings till the Day of Judgement. The Prophethood of Muhammad obliges the Muslims to follow his exemplary life as a model.

2. Prayers : Daily prayers are offered five times a day as a duty towards Allah. They strengthen and enliven the belief in Allah and inspire man to a higher morality. They purify the heart and prevent temptation towards wrong-doings and evils.

3. Fasting the month of Ramadhan : The Muslims during the month of Ramadhan not only abstain from food drink and sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset, but also from evil intentions and desires. It teaches love, sincerity and devotion. It develops a sound social conscience, patience, unselfishness and will-power.

4. Zakat: To pay annually 2.5% of one's net savings as a purifying sum to be spent on the poor and needy. Zakaat implies that everything man possesses belongs to God and therefore anyone in need has a share in it.

5. Pilgrimage to Makkah: It is to be performed once in a lifetime, if one can afford it financially and physically. Hajj implies Man's temporary suspension of all worldly activities and his realisation of himself as a naked soul in front of God alone.

Besides these pillars every action which is done with the awareness that it fulfills the will of Allah is also considered an act of worship. Islam enjoins faith in the Oneness and

Sovereignty of Allah, which makes man aware of the meaningfulness of the Universe and of his place in it. This belief frees him from all fears and superstitions by making him conscious of the presence of the Almighty Allah and of man's obligations towards Him. This faith must be expressed and tested in action. Faith alone is not enough. Belief in one God requires that we look upon all humanity as one family under the universal Omnipotence of God -the Creator, and Nourisher of all. Islam rejects the idea of a chosen people, making faith in God and good action the only way to heaven. Thus, a direct relationship is established with God, without any intercessor.

MAN : THE FREE AGENT Man is the highest creation of God. He is equipped with the highest of potentialities. He is left relatively free in his will, action and choice. God has shown him the right path, and the life of Prophet Muhammad provides a perfect example. Man's success and salvation lies in following both. Islam teaches the sanctity of the human personality and confers equal rights upon all without any distinction of race, sex or colour.

The law of God, enunciated in the Qura'n and exemplified in the life of the prophet, is supreme in all cases. It applies equally to the highest and the lowest, the prince and the peasant, the ruler and the ruled.

LIFE AFTER DEATH The world according to Islam is a place of trial and man is being judged in it. Man is accountable to Allah for all that he does herein. Life on earth will, one day, come to an end; and after that a new world will be resurrected. It will be in this life after death that man will be rewarded or admonished for his deeds and misdeeds.

QURA'N AND HADITH The Qura'n is the last revealed word of God and the basic source of Islamic teachings and laws. The Qura'n deals with the bases of creeds, morality, history of humanity, worship, knowledge, wisdom, God-man relationship, and human relationship in all aspects. Comprehensive teachings on which, can be built sound systems of social justice, economics, politics, legislation, jurisprudence, law and international relations, are important contents of the Holy Qura'n.

Muhammad (PBUH) himself was an unlettered man who could not read or write. Yet, the Holy Qura'n was committed to memory and writing by his followers, under his supervision, during his lifetime. The original and complete text of the Qura'n is available to everybody in Arabic, the language in which it was revealed. Translations of the meaning into many languages are widely used.

Hadith, the teachings, sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad, meticulously reported and collected by his devoted companions, explain and elaborate the Qura'nic verses.

CONCEPT OF WORSHIP Islam does not teach or accept mere ritualism. It emphasizes intention and action. To worship God is to know Him and love Him, to act upon His law in every aspect of life, to enjoin goodness and forbid wrong-doing and oppression, to practice charity and justice and to serve Him by serving mankind. The Qura'n presents this concept in the following sublime manner;

"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces to the East or the West, but righteous is he who believes in God and the Last Day and the Angels and the Books and the Prophets; and gives his wealth for love of Him to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask; and to set slaves free; and observes proper worship and pays the Zakat. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress, such are those who are sincere. Such are the God fearing." (Qur'an 2: 177).

The ISLAMIC WAY OF LIFE Islam provides specific guidelines for all people to follow in their daily lives. Its guidance is comprehensive and includes the social, economic, political, moral, and spiritual aspects of life. The Qur'an reminds man of the purpose of his life, of his duties and obligations toward himself, his family and relatives, his community, his fellow human beings, and his Creator. Man is given fundamental guidelines about a purposeful life and then confronted with the challenges of human existence so that he may put these high ideals into practice. In Islam, a person's life is regarded as a holistic and integrated unity and not a collection of fragmented and competitive parts. The "sacred" and "secular" are not separate parts of man; they are united in the nature of human being.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Muhammad (blessing and peace be upon him) was born in the year 570 A.C. in the city of Makkah in Arabia. He came of a noble family; he received the first revelation at the age of forty. As soon as he started preaching Islam, he and his followers were persecuted and had to face severe hardships. He was, therefore, commanded by God to migrate to Madina, another city in Arabia. During a short span of 23 years, he completed his mission of prophethood and died at the age of 63. He was put to rest in the city of Madina. He left no wealth or property. He led a perfect life and set an example for all human-beings. His biography illustrates in real life, the meaning and implications of the Qura'nic teachings.

ISLAM'S RATIONAL APPEAL Islam in its clear and direct way of expressing truth has a tremendous amount of appeal for any seeker of knowledge. It is a solution for all the problems of life. It is a guide towards a better and complete life glorifying, in all its phases, God, the Almighty Creator and the Merciful Nourisher.

MUSLIM POPULATION About 1 in 5 people in the world are Muslim, the majority of whom are not Arab.

JIHAD This seems to be one of the most misunderstood concepts in the media. To Muslims everything in their life can be seen as a Jihad. It essentially means struggle. The majority of the time this is essentially a personal struggle of oneself to the utmost in order to personally become a better person. It could be making the effort to stop smoking, swallowing your anger when provoked, giving time to your child after work though you are tired, to organize events for the betterment of society though you are shy. The small part of this Jihad may also require the person to have the courage to physically defend the rights of others. A Muslim, therefore expends all the powers of body and soul,

his wealth, possessions in the effort to improve oneself and remove oppression from the world and bring justice. The more widely known concept of Jihad is expressed in the Qur'an as,

"What has happened to you? Why don't you fight in the way of Allah in support of men, women and children whom finding helpless, they have repressed; and who pray, 'O Allah! Liberate us from this habitation which is ruled by tyrants.'" (Holy Qur'an 4:75)

ISLAM - THE SOLUTION OF MODERN PROBLEMS

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN: A major problem which modern man faces is that of racism. The materially advanced nations can send man to the moon but they cannot stop man from hating and fighting his fellow man. Islam, over the last 1400 years, has shown in practice how racism can be ended. Every year, during Hajj, the Islamic miracle of real brotherhood of all races and nations can be seen in action.

THE FAMILY The family which is the basic unit of civilization is disintegrating in all western countries. Islam's family system brings into a fine equilibrium the rights of man, wife, children and relatives. Islam nourishes human unselfishness, generosity and love in a well-organised family system.

Human beings live according to their view of life. The tragedy of secular societies is that they fail to connect the different aspects of life. The secular and the religious, the scientific and the spiritual seem to be in conflicts. Islam puts an end to this conflict and brings harmony to man's vision of life.

CONCLUSION: What is the state of the world today? Has man freed himself from all superstitions, imbecilities and absurd beliefs? Has he discovered the man from within himself? Has he liberated himself from the yoke of worldly tyrants indulging in the exploitation of man by man? If such a millennium has not been achieved despite all developments in science and technology, then Islam has still a great and glorious part to play