

ISLAM *at a* GLANCE

MUSLIMS' BELIEF IN A NUTSHELL

say: We believe in Allah and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isacc and Jacob and the tribes that which was given to Moses and Jesus and to the Prophets from their Lord; we make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we submit.'

(Holy Qur'an 3.83)

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‘ISLAM’ AND ‘MUSLIM’

Islam is an Arabic word which means peace, purity, acceptance and commitment. The religion of Islam is the complete acceptance of the teachings and the guidance of God, (i.e surrender to the Will of Allah).

A muslim is one who accepts freely and willingly the supreme power of Allah and strives for total reorganisation of this life according to the revealed teachings of God. He also works towards the establishment of a just social order which would totally reflect the guidance of God.

CONTINUITY OF MESSAGE:

Islam is not a new religion. It is in essence the same message and guidance which Allah revealed to all His Prophets. ‘Say: We believe in Allah and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Jacob and the tribes and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and to the Prophets from their Lord; we make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we submit.’ (Qur’an 3:83)

The message which was revealed to Muhammad, the last Prophet, is Islam in its comprehensive, complete and final form.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

Every action which is done with the awareness that it fulfils the will of Allah is considered an act of worship in Islam. Nevertheless, the specific acts of worship, termed the pillars of Islam, provide the framework of spiritual life.

They are the following:

1. The declaration of faith: ‘I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger; the prophethood of Muhammad obliges the muslims to follow his exemplary life in every way.
2. Prayers are prescribed 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 control the temptation towards wrong doing and evil. It should be stressed that while Allah does not need our prayers we cannot survive without His blessings and guidance. ‘O you who believe! Seek help with patient perseverance and prayer, for Allah is with those who patiently persevere. (Qur’an 2:153)
3. Fasting is observed once each year during the month of Ramadaan. This means abstention from food, drink and intimate marital relationship from dawn to sunset, and also from evil intentions and desires. It teaches love, sincerity and devotion. It develops a sound social conscience, patience, unselfishness and will power. When we fast by choice, Allah remembers our sacrifice.
4. Zakaat - payment annually of 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 Allah and therefore anyone in need has a share in it.

5. Pilgrimage (Hajj) to Makkah - once in a lifetime provided one has the means to do so. Hajj implies Man's temporary suspension of all worldly activities and his realisation of himself as a naked soul in front of Allah alone.

ONENESS OF GOD:

Islam enjoins faith in the oneness and Sovereignty of God, Which makes man aware of the meaningfulness of the Universe and his place in it. This belief frees him from all fears and superstitions by making him conscious of the presence of Almighty Allah and of man's obligations towards Him. Belief in one God requires that we look upon all humanity as one family irrespective of colour, class, race or territory, under the Omnipotence of Allah the creator and good action the only way to Heaven. Thus a direct relationship is established with Allah, open to all alike, without any intercessor.

MAN, THE FREE AGENT:

Man is the highest creation of Allah and chooses his own way. Created with the highest potentialities, man is left relatively free in his will, action and choice. Allah has shown him the right path and the life of Prophet Muhammad provides a perfect example. Man's success and salvation lies in following them. Islam teaches the sanity of the human personality and confers equal rights upon all without any distinction of race or sex.

The law of Allah, enunciated in the Qur'an 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 punished for his deeds and misdeeds. Allah will judge man on the day of existence which leads to further blessings, or to Hell, a stage of suffering and punishment.

QUR'AN AND HADITH

The Qur'an is the last revealed Word of Allah and as such affirms and completes the total process of revelation which has come from the Divine Guidance for the human race. The Qur'an is the basic source of Islamic teachings and laws and deals with the bases of creed, morality, history of humanity, worship, knowledge, wisdom, the God-man relation, and human relationships, in all aspects. Comprehensive teachings on which sound systems of social justice, economics, politics, legislation, jurisprudence, law and international relations can be built, are important contents of the Holy Qur'an.

Muhammad himself was an unlettered man who could not read or write. The Holy Qur'an was revealed to him piece-meal over a period of 23 years and committed to memory and writing by his followers under his supervision during his lifetime. The original and complete text of the Qur'an 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 the Prophet Muhammad, meticulously reported and collected by his devoted companions, explain and elaborate the Qur'anic verses.

CONCEPT OF WORSHIP:

Islam does not teach or accept mere ritualism. It emphasises intention and action. To worship Allah is to know Him and love Him, to act upon His laws in every aspect of life, to enjoin goodness and forbid evil and oppression, to practice charity and justice and to serve him by serving mankind. Islam seeks to implant in man's heart the strongest conviction that his every thought and action are known by Allah, who sees him at all times and in all places.

The Qur'an presents this concept in the following sublime manner:-

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

ISLAMIC WAY OF LIFE:

Islam provides definite guidelines for all people to follow in all walks of life. The guidance it gives is comprehensive and includes the social, economic, political, moral and spiritual aspects of life. The Qur'an reminds man of the purpose of life on earth, and his duties and obligations towards himself, his kith and kin, his community, his fellow human beings and his Creator. Man is given fundamental guidelines about a purposeful life and then he is left with the challenge of human existence before him so that he might put these high ideals into practice. In Islam man is a wholesome, intergrated unit and not a collection of fragmented, competitive parts. The sacred and secular are not seperate parts of man; they are united in the nature of human being.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was born in the year 570 A.C. in Makkah in Arabia. He came from a noble Arab 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 to migrate to Madina, another city in Arabia. During a short span of 23 years, he completed his prophethood and died at the age of 63. He was put to rest in the city of Madina. He left no wealth of property. He led a perfect life and set an example for all human beings. His biography illustrates in practical terms, the meaning and implications of the Qur'anic teachings.

ISLAM'S RATIONAL APPEAL:

Islam is a simple, rational and practical religion. The unity of God, the Prophethood of Muhammad and the concept of life after death are the basic articles of faith. There is no hierarchy of priests and there no complicated rites and rituals. Everybody may approach the Qur'an directly and translate its dictates into practice.

Islam stands for the middle path and the goal of producing a moral man in the service of a just society.

‘Our Lord! Give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter (Qur’an 2:201)
Islam guides towards a better and complete life glorifying in all its praise Allah, the Almighty Creator.

STATUS OF WOMEN

No discrimination is made on the basis of sex. Islam recognises that the sphere of potential capabilities and hence responsibilities of men and women are equally important in themselves but not exactly the same. The roles of men and women are complementary to each other.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE:

Marriage is a very important and sacred bond of relationship between man and woman and a step towards a better, purer and happier life. Islam gives both man and woman full right to divorce. Nevertheless divorce is discouraged and is allowed as the last resort. Islam allows limited polygamy only as a remedy subject to certain conditions.

JIHAD:

Jihad consists in exerting oneself to the utmost in order to personally follow the teachings of Islam. A Muslim, therefore expends all the powers of body and soul, his wealth, possessions and even life in the fight against the evil forces of the world in order that injustice, oppression and contumacy are annihilated and Allah’s just order is established. Therefore to struggle in the path of Allah with the pen; speech or the sword is Jihad.

‘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’. (Qur’an 4:75)

Islam has come to liberate man from the worship of man and to establish the worship of Allah.

Islam - The Solution for 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 the Hajj, the Islamic miracle of the real brotherhood of all races and nations can be seen in action.

THE FAMILY

The family which is the basic unit of civilisation 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 conflict. 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 within himself? Has he liberated himself from the yoke of worldly tyrants indulging in the exploitation of man by man? If such a achievement has not been made despite all the developments in science and technology, then Islam has still a great and glorious part to play.

For more detailed understanding of the fundamental teachings of Islam, please read!

“Towards Understanding Islam”

by Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi

A brief, but most positive book on Islam.

Available free on request from the Dawah Centre.