

Islam

at a glance

WAMY Series on Islam No. 1

ISLAM AND MUSLIMS

The Arabic word "Islam" means peace, submission, and obedience. The religion of Islam consists of 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 the total reorganization of one's life according to the guidance revealed by God-the Qur'an-and sayings of the Prophet. A Muslim also works to create a human society on the same basis. "Muhammadanism" is a misnomer for Islam and offends its very spirit, for it implies that Muslims have deified and worship Muhammad, as the Christians did with Jesus Christ. This practice is condemned in the Qur'an and is totally foreign to the Islamic belief structure.

The word "Allah" is the proper name of God in Arabic. It is a unique term and has no plural or feminine forms.

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. In Qur'an (3:3), we read:

Say, 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.

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

MAN: THE FREE AGENT

Man is the highest creation of God. He has the most potential of any part of God's creation and is left relatively free in his will, actions, and choice. God has revealed the right path, and the life of Prophet Muhammad provides a perfect example. Man's success and salvation lie in following both. Islam teaches the sanctity of the person and confers equal rights upon all regardless of race, gender, color, or other external differences. The law of God, as 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 .

THE QUR'AN AND HADITH

The Qur'an is the last revealed word of God and the basic source of Islamic teachings and laws. It deals with the foundations of creeds, morality, the history of humanity, worship, knowledge, wisdom, the relationship of God to man and man to God, and all aspects of interpersonal relationships. Its comprehensive teachings are meant to be used to construct sound systems of social justice, economics, politics, legislation, jurisprudence, law, and international relations, and represent important sections of the Qur'an.

Muhammad (PBUH) could not read or write. This did not represent an obstacle, for the Qur'an was committed to memory and writing by his followers during his lifetime and under his supervision. 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. The hadith, a term which covers the literature dealing with the Prophet's teachings, sayings, and actions, was reported and collected with great care by his devoted companions. Its main function is to explain and elaborate the Qur'anic verses.

CONCEPT OF WORSHIP

Islam does not teach or accept mere ritualism, but rather emphasizes intention and action. To worship God is to know and to love Him, to obey 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 Qur'an 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. There are no separate "sacred" and "secular" realms, for all are united within the nature of the individual.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Muhammad (blessing and peace be upon him) was born to a noble family in the year 570 AC in Makkah, a trading center located in the Arabian peninsula. He received the first revelation when he was forty years old. As soon as he started calling his people to Islam, he and his followers were persecuted and forced to undergo severe hardship. After a while, God commanded him to migrate to the nearby city of Madinah. Over the next twenty-three years he completed his mission of prophet hood. He died at the age of 63. He led a perfect life, as he was the physical embodiment of all that the Qur'an teaches, and thus set an example for all human beings.

ISLAM'S RATIONAL APPEAL

Islam, with its clear and direct expression of truth, has a great appeal to anyone seeking knowledge. It has a solution for all problems that arise during the course of one's life. It is a guide toward a better and complete life.

ISLAM - THE SOLUTION for MODERN PROBLEMS

The Brotherhood of Man: A major problem facing mankind today is racism. The developed world can send a man to the moon but cannot stop man from hating and fighting his fellow man. Ever since the days of the Prophet Muhammad fourteen centuries ago, Islam has given a vivid example of how racism can be ended: the annual pilgrimage to Makkah reveals the Islamic miracle of the real brotherhood of all races and nations.

The Family: 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 unselfishness, generosity, and love in the framework of a well-organized family system.

UN FRAGMENTED VIEW OF LIFE

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, as well as 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.

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 humanity until the Day of Judgment. The prophet hood of Muhammad obliges Muslims to follow his exemplary life as a model.

2. **Prayers:** Daily prayers are offered five times a day as a duty toward Allah. They strengthen and enliven one's belief in Allah and

inspire individuals to develop a higher morality They purify the heart and help one to resist giving into temptation.

3. Fasting the Month of Ramadan: During Ramadan, Muslims abstain from food, drink, and all sexual activity from dawn to sunset. In addition, they must strive to abstain from evil intentions and desires. This communal fast seeks to instill within the individual feelings of love, sincerity, devotion, patience, unselfishness, and will-power as well as to develop a sound social conscience.

4. Zakat: An annual payment of 2.5% of ones net savings that has been in ones possession for one year. This is a religious duty and purifies ones money It must be given to those who are poor and in need.

5. Pilgrimage to Makkah: This must be performed once during one's lifetime, provided that one can afford it financially and withstand it physically.

Besides these pillars, every action 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, for this makes an individual aware of the meaningfulness of the universe and of his or her place in it. This belief frees one from all fears and superstitions by making him conscious of the presence of Allah and of mans obligations toward 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 human beings as one family under the universal omnipotence of Aliah, who has created and nourishes all parts of His creation. Islam rejects the idea of a chosen people by stating clearly that one must have faith in God and do good works in good action in order to gain entrance to heaven. Thus, a direct relationship between God and each individual is established, a fact that also makes an intercessor unnecessary.