

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 Allah as revealed to His prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

A Muslim is one who believes in Allah 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 Allah 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 the Prophets.

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.

—Quran 3:83

The message which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is Islam in its comprehensive, complete and final form.

The Five Pillars of Islam

There are 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 (peace be upon him) 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 in 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 percent of one's net saving on which a year has passed as a religious duty and purifying sum to be spent on poorer sections of the community.

5. **Pilgrimage to Makkah:** It is to be performed once in a lifetime, if one can afford it financially and physically.

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 Allah requires that we look upon all humanity as one family under the universal Omnipotence of Allah—the Creator and Nourisher of all. Islam rejects the idea of a chosen people, making faith in Allah and good action the only way to heaven. Thus, a direct relationship is established with Allah, without any intercessor.

Man: The Free Agent

Man is the highest creation of Allah. He is equipped with the highest of potentialities. He 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 both. Islam teaches the sanctity of the human personality and confers equal rights upon all without any distinction of race, sex or color.

The law of Allah, enunciated in the Quran 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.

Quran and *Hadith*

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

Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself was an unlettered man who could not read or write. Yet, the Holy Quran was committed to memory and writing by his followers, under his supervision, during his lifetime. The original and complete text of the Quran 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 Quranic verses.

Concept of Worship

Islam does not teach or accept mere ritualism. It emphasizes intention and action. To worship Allah 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 practise charity and justice and to serve Him by serving mankind. The Quran 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 Allah and the Last Day and the Angels and the Book 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 Allah-fearing.

—Quran 2:177

Islamic Way of Life

Islam provides definite guidelines for all peoples 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 Quran reminds man of the purpose of his life on earth, of 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's life is a wholesome, integrated unit and not a collection of fragmented, competitive parts. The sacred and secular are not separate parts of man; they are united in the nature of being human.

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 Allah to migrate to Madinah, 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 led a perfect life and set an example for all human beings as his life was the embodiment of the Quranic 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, Allah, the Almighty Creator and the Merciful Nourisher.

Muslim Population at a Glance¹

<i>Continent</i>	<i>Population (millions)</i>
Africa	224.20
Asia	575.30
Europe	20.00
North and South America & Australia	4.00
<i>Total</i>	823.40

Number of countries with over 50% Muslim population is 58.

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 fellowmen. 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-organized family system.

Unfragmented 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, 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.



¹ 1975 estimates. (Current population is estimated to be over one billion.)