

Introduction to Islam

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What is Islam?

Islam is a religion which guides its followers in every aspect of their lives. It is a way of life.

Islam is the modern or latest version of the message sent by God through Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Islam was sent to mankind through Prophet Muhammad. Islam is "modern" in the sense that it has come to complement the teachings which were introduced through Moses and Jesus.

Islam is a religion which seeks to give a meaningful purpose to our life on this earth. It seeks to guide us in fulfilling that purpose by creating harmony between ourselves, our Creator and fellow human beings.

What you will read below are some of the basic features of Islam.

The One & Only God

Islam is a monotheistic religion. It teaches that there is only one God who is the origin and creator of the universe. This is the foundation of Islam, and is reflected in the famous sentence which says that, "There is no god but Allah." (Allah is the Arabic name of God.)

The belief in God relates us to our origin and guides us throughout our life. The belief in one God shows that man should not worship any material thing or person in this universe.

By teaching that there is only One God for all humans, Islam promotes the sense of brotherhood and equality in human society--all are equally related to God in the same way. The Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, says:

*He (God) is One, God is Eternal;
He has neither begotten,
nor has He been begotten;
and there is no one equal to Him.
(Holy Quran, Chapter 112)*

The Purpose of Life

Our life on this earth has a specific purpose; it is not the result of nature's accident, nor is it a punishment for eating the fruit of the forbidden tree. We are here according to God's plan: the wordly life is a test; it is a chance to prove ourselves as deserving of the eternal blissful life in the hereafter. God did not create us just for few years of this life. To be created just for this world's life would amount to a joke played by the Creator with the human species. Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, said; *"You have not been created to perish; on the contrary, you have been created for eternal life."*

According to Islam, the final destination of mankind is the life hereafter. At the end of time, all human beings will be resurrected and will be held accountable for their wordly life. The life in hereafter will be an eternal life. However, whether it will be blissful or full of sorrow depends on how we spend our present life.

It was to help mankind in achieving this objective that God sent various prophets and messengers to guide them. Muhammad is the last prophet, and Islam is the final and complete version of God's message.

Status of Human Beings in Islam

Prime Creation: Human being is the prime creation of God. He says, *"We have indeed honored the children of Adam; spread them in the land and the sea, provided them with good things; and preferred them in esteem over many things that We have created."* (Holy Quran, Chapter 17, Verse 70)

Born Sinless: Islam teaches that every human being is born sinless; no child carries the burden of his or her ancestors' sins. God says, *"No carrier shall carry the burden of others."* (Holy Quran, Chapter 35, Verse 18). Each human being is born with a pure conscience which can absorb and accept the true message of God. It is only the social and familial influences which take a person away from God's message.

Accountability: Islam also emphasizes on the issue of responsibility and accountability of human beings--each person is responsible for his or her own actions. Although Islam teaches that God has predetermined the span of our life and the time of our death, it does not mean that even our actions are predetermined by Him. We surely are free in our actions and are, therefore, accountable for them. God only provides guidance for us to know what is good and what is bad. He says, *"We created man of a water-drop...Surely We guided him to the right way--now whether he (follows it and) be grateful or (goes astray and) be ungrateful is up to him."* (Holy Quran, Chapter 76, Verse 3).

Race: Islam very categorically rejects racial discrimination. It promotes the feeling of brotherhood and equality among its followers. God clearly says, *"O Mankind! We have created you from one male and one female, and then We made you into different races and tribes so that you may know (and easily recognize) each other."* Therefore, no one can claim any superiority over others based on racial or tribal differences. A person is to be judged by his character, not by his color or race. God continues, *"Surely the most honorable of you in God's sight is the person who is most upright in character among you."* (Holy Quran, Chapter 49, Verse 13).

Gender: Even gender does not count as a criterion of superiority. In Islam, women are as human as men. They are not evaluated on basis of their gender, but on basis of their faith and character. Fourteen hundred years ago, the Qur'an recorded God's clear statements on this issue. Out of the four verses, I will just quote one: *"Whoever, be it a male or a female, does good deeds and he or she is a believer, then they will enter the Paradise."* (Holy Quran, Chapter 4, Verse 124). So there is no difference in the degree or level of woman's humanity or honor in Islam.

The only difference there exists is concerning the role which Islam has envisioned for man and woman. This has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority. In Islam, man and woman are equal in rights; but equality is not synonymous to similarity. Islam believes that man and woman are equal but dissimilar. Islam looks at their different roles in society not as superior or inferior but as complementary to each other.