



Islamic Faith and Practices

Definition of Islam

Islam literally means “submission to God”, or “peace.” Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) defined true Muslims as

“Those who harm no one with their words and actions, and who are the most trustworthy representatives of universal peace.”

Goals of Islam are establishing peace in both individual and social levels, and salvation in this world and in the Hereafter. There are about 1.6 billion Muslims in the world. Islam is a universal religion; Muslims can be from any nation. In Islam one ethnic group or nation is not superior to another one. Racism is forbidden in Islam.

Islamic Beliefs

The beliefs and practices of all branches of Islam are almost the same. There are six articles of faith in Islam:

1. Belief in God (Allah)

We believe that there is no deity other than Allah. The word “Allah” in Arabic literally means “God”. God in Islam is All-Powerful and He is the Creator of the universe, His creation encompasses the past, current and future.

Islam is strictly monotheistic. Allah does not resemble anything in the universe. Allah cannot be seen by human eye, but He is known through His attributes and names, some of which are Oneness, Creator, Sustainer, All-Gracious, All-Forgiving. According to Islam, there are 99 names of God known to the people.

God is beyond all duality, association, gender and all qualities that distinguish beings from each other in this world. God is beyond any imagination and he is beyond anything in the universe in resemblance. God is beyond time as well.

2. Believing in Angels

We believe in the invisible realm of existence and the beings inhabiting it. Angels are servants of God who build relations between metaphysical world and material world. Angels convey God’s commands, direct the acts of creation, and represent their worship in their own realms.

3. Believing in Prophets

Muslims believe that Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) is a messenger of God. Muslims also believe in the prophets came before Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) and respect all the messengers of Allah, with no exceptions. There are 25 prophets who are mentioned in the Quran including Moses, Jesus, David, Abraham, Adam, Jacob, Joseph, Noah, Aaron and Muhammad peace be upon all of them. According to a prophetic tradition, there were about total of 124,000 prophets come to the world at various times and to various people since the time of Adam.

There is no tribe or nation or race to which God has not sent His prophets.

4. Belief in Holy Scriptures

Muslims believe that God revealed scriptures to His messengers as a means of guidance for them. Muslims believe that the Quran is the final book of Allah revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). Muslims also believe in the originally revealed scriptures given to other prophets, such as Torah of Moses, the Gospel of Jesus, the Psalms of David, and the Tablets of Abraham (peace be upon them).

5. Belief in the Life of Hereafter

In Islam, the death is not an end, but the start of a new eternal life, the life of Hereafter. The spirit is eternal; the death separates spirit from body. After death, spirits live in the intermediate world (Alem-i Berzah) until the Day of Destruction. In Hereafter, spirits will be re-united with new bodies. This is called resurrection. On the Day of Judgment, everybody will be questioned by God according to what they have done in this world. Depending on the result of this judgment, people will enter paradise or hell. Allah will judge not on the basis of His justice, but on the basis of His mercy. Paradise and Hell are eternal places. There will not be any way of going back to this world again.

6. Believing in the Divine Destiny

We believe in the balanced combination of the divine destiny and free will. We believe that God knows our past and future actions, this is called divine destiny (God is beyond time). However, we as humans don’t know divine destiny. While divine destiny is an eternal knowledge, the free will is respected as well. We are free to choose what we want to do in this life. There is no concept of Savior in Islam. We cannot say that we are saved or doomed. All our life is between hope and fear.

Freedom of Believing

Islam has come to re-establish and reaffirm the original monotheistic faiths of previous prophets such as Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus (peace be upon them). Qur’an expresses freedom of believing as follows:

“There is no compulsion in religion. The right way stands there clearly distinguished from the false. Hence he who rejects the false deities and believes in God has indeed taken hold of the firm, unbreakable handle; and God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.” (Qur’an 2:256)

Qur’an classifies all people into four main categories:

- 1) Muslims.
- 2) People of the Book, i.e. Christians and Jews. So according to Islam, they are not disbelievers.
- 3) Disbelievers or Infidels. (They don’t believe the existence of God).
- 4) Hypocrites. (They say that they believed in God, but really they don’t).

In Qur’an, God warns Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) that the belief of someone is not at his hands:

“You (Prop. Muhammad (p.b.u.h.)) cannot guide to truth whomever you like but God guides whomever He wills. He

knows best who are guided (and amenable to guidance).”
(Qur'an 28:56)

Islamic Scholar Fethullah Gulen says:

“For us, being human is more important than being Muslim, Christian, Jew, Hindu or Buddhist.”

II. Islamic Practices

Common practices in Islam are as follows (These are also called “Five Pillars” of Islam):

1. Declaration of Faith:

One become Muslim by believing and stating

“There is no deity but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger and servant”.

2. Prescribed Prayers:

Performed five times a day individually or as part of congregation. Large congregational prayers are offered once per week (Friday noon time). Prescribed prayers are the central practice that shapes the daily life of a Muslim and maintains the constant remembrance of God.

3. Fasting

Fasting is obligatory during the Month of Ramadan. In each day, the fasting start before sunrise and ends with sunset. During fasting Muslims abstain from drinking or eating, bad behaviors and sayings. They must maintain spiritual discipline and self-control.

4. Giving Alms

It is obligatory for every men and women in Islam who have certain amount of wealth. The 2.5% of the total wealth has to be given to the needy, poor or orphans in the community.

5. Pilgrimage

It is obligatory for every men and women who have certain amount of wealth. It is a sacred journey to Mecca and other holy places around it. It is the largest human assembly on earth. During the pilgrimage, believers shed their normal dress and put on plain clothing, until all resemble each other in piety and humility.

Clergy People in Islam

There are generally two types of clergy people in Islam:

Islamic scholars: They study Islamic sciences such as theology, Qur'an commentaries, Islamic Law and Hadith studies. They are analogous to researchers and university professors.

Imams: Leaders of prescribed prayers. Whoever have sufficient knowledge about leading the prayer is eligible to be an imam. They are usually appointed by Governments to each mosque. Islamic scholars are usually Imams at the same time.

Sharia (Islamic Law)

Sharia, or Islamic law and commandments, influences the legal code in most Islamic countries, but the extent of its impact varies widely. Some governments partly adopted Islamic Law in their constitution. Literally, Sharia means "path" or "path to water". In its religious sense, it means God's law of the body of commands that, if followed, will provide the path to salvation.

Islamic law is derived from four sources:

1. **Qur'an:** The literal and metaphorical word of God
2. **Hadith:** The actions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad
3. **Ijma:** The consensus of Islamic scholars
4. **Qiyas:** The reasoning based on analogies between current problems and solved problems. For example, a ban on narcotics based on the Qur'anic injunction against wine-drinking.

Islamic law defines and/or shapes almost every part of life:

1. **For individual:** Praying, fasting, pilgrimage, giving alms.
2. **For family:** Marriage. Rights and duties of husband and wife. Taking care of elders in family.
3. **For society:** Trade rules. Taking care of orphans. Ceremony for a death.
4. **For Government:** Rights and duties of individuals and Government. Islamic penal code.

Nowadays, there is NO Islamic country implementing Islamic law completely. Islamic law can only be enforced by the state. Therefore, it is not possible to apply it unless most of the people desire to be governed by Islamic law.

III. The Holy Book Qur'an

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is literal and symbolic (comprehensive) word of God. It was revealed by God to Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) through Archangel Gabriel in Arabic language in the 7th century for a period of 23 years. The Qur'an we have now is exactly the same Quran in terms of its content, which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century. The Qur'an cannot be interpreted just by reading its direct translation from Arabic language. Qur'an interpretations should take into account why a certain verse is revealed, and what were the circumstances and socio-political conditions. Qur'an interpretations must be compatible with the overall message of the Qur'an.

There are many interpretations of the Qur'an written in different centuries and places. Some of them are written by only one scholar, some are results of a collaborative effort. Qur'an interpretations commonly express more than one way to understand a single verse or subject.

There are biased interpretations of Qur'an inclined to some minor denominations or sects; however, they are not well respected by the majority of Muslims.

IV. Moral Values in Islam

Moral values in Islam are based on two principles:

Responsibility: In Islam, everybody is responsible for his/her actions in this life.

Spiritual Perfection: Striving to attain spiritual perfection through adopting good moral values such as piety, love, humility, compassion, and generosity. Purifying heart and soul from egoism, carnal desires and evil inclinations.

Respecting Human Rights

- All people are equal, and no one shall enjoy a privilege or suffer a disadvantage due to his or her race, color, sex, origin, or language.

- Human life is sacred and cannot be violated. Every effort must be made to protect it.
- All people are born free. Slavery and forced labor are abhorrent.
- Both rulers and the ruled are subject to the law, and equal before the law.
- Every person is free to prefer a belief and practice it. No one can be forced to believe or not to believe in a certain belief.
- No one can insult or ridicule the religious beliefs of others. All Muslims are required to respect the religious feelings of others.

Examples

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) stated: "I have been sent only for the purpose of perfecting good morals."

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) summarized the moral behavior of a Muslim:

"God has given me nine commands:

- To remain conscious of God, whether in private or in public;
- To speak justly, whether angry or pleased;
- To show moderation both when poor and when rich,
- To reunite friendship with those who have broken off with me;
- To give to him who refuses me;
- that my silence should be occupied with thought;
- that my looking should be an warning;
- that I should command what is right."

Humbleness:

"God elevates the humble and degrades the arrogant." (Hindi)

"Anyone who has in his or her heart the weight of a mustard seed of pride shall not enter Paradise."

"Modesty and faith are twins. A person who gives up one of them has to lose the other one, too."

Generosity:

"No one truly believes until he likes his neighbor or his brother in Islam as whatever he likes for himself."

"The generous are near to God, Paradise, and people, but distant from the Fire. The miserly are distant from God, Paradise, and people, but near to the Fire."

Trustworthiness:

"It is obligatory for you to tell the truth, for truth leads to virtue and virtue leads to Paradise"

"A hypocrite is known by three characteristics: When he speaks, he lies; when he promises, he denies; when he is entrusted, he cheats." (Bukhari, Muslim)

Love:

"You shall not enter Paradise as long as you do not affirm belief; and you will not believe as long as you do not love one another."

"When a man loves his brother, he should tell him that he loves him."

"Whoever loves to meet God, God (too) loves to meet him and whoever hates to meet God, God (too) hates to meet him."

Parent and Relatives:

"Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him alone, and treat parents with the best of kindness. Should one of them, or both, attain old age in your lifetime, do not say 'Ugh!' to them, nor push them away, and always address them in gracious words. Lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy, and say 'My Lord, have mercy on them even as they cared for me in childhood.' " (17:23-24)

Neighbors

"He is not a believer who fills his stomach when his neighbor is hungry. He does not believe whose neighbors are not safe from his damaging behavior."

"The finest person in the sight of God is the one who is best to his friends and his neighbors."

Orphans, Widows, and Needy

"Have you seen the one who denies religion? It is he who turns away the orphan and does not urge others to feed the poor ..." (107:1-3)

"The person who strives for the widows and the poor is like the one who strives in the way of God."

"I and the person who brings up an orphan will be like this in heavens." He put his index and middle finger together.

Forbidden Behaviors in Islam

Qur'an prohibits slandering, insulting, suspicion, spying and backbiting in society:

"O you who believe! Let not some people among you slander another people, it may be that the latter are better than the former. Do not defame one another, nor insult one another with nicknames. Whoever (does that and then) does not turn to God in repentance, those are indeed wrongdoers." (49:11)

Islam strictly prohibits gossiping, adultery and obscenity, fortune-telling, magic, gambling, lottery, drinking.

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