The Meaning of Islam

"ISLAM" is derived from the Arabic root salaama peace, purity, submission and obedience. In the religious sense, Islam means submission to the will of God and obedience to His law.

Everything and every phenomenon in the world, other than man and jinn is administered totally by God-made laws, they are obedient to God and submissive to His laws, i.e. they are in the state of Islam. Man possesses the quality of intelligence and choice, thus he is invited to submit to the good will of God and obey His law, i.e. become a Muslim. Submission to the good will of God, together with obedience to His beneficial law, i.e. becoming a Muslim, is the best safeguard for man's peace and harmony.

Islam dates back to the age of Adam and its message has been conveyed to man by God's Prophets and Messengers including Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Islam's message has been restored and enforced in the last stage of the religious evolution by God's last Prophet and Messenger Muhammad.

The word ALLAH in the Arabic language means God, or more accurately The One and Only Eternal God, Creator of the Universe, Lord of all lords, King of all kings, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. The word Allah to mean God is also used by Arabic speaking Jews and Christians.

Articles of Faith

1. Allah, the One and Only God

A Muslim believes in ONE GOD, Supreme and Eternal, Infinite and Mighty, Merciful and Compassionate, Creator and Provider. God has neither father nor mother, neither sons nor was He fathered. None equal to Him. He is God of all mankind, not of a special tribe or race.

God is High and Supreme but He is very near to the pious thoughtful believers; He answers their prayers and helps them. He loves the people who love Him and forgives their sins. He gives them peace, happiness, knowledge and success. God is the Loving and the Provider, the Generous, and the Benevolent, the Rich and the Independent, the Forgiving and the Clement, the Patient and the Appreciative, the Unique and the Protector, the Judge and the Peace. God's attributes are mentioned in the Quran.

God creates in man the mind to understand, the soul and conscience to be good and righteous, the feelings and sentiments to be kind and humane. If we try to count His favours upon us, we cannot, because they are countless. In return for all the great favours and mercy, God does not need anything from us, because He is Needless and Independent. God asks us to know Him, to love Him and to enforce His law for our benefit and our own good.
2. Messengers and Prophets of God

A Muslim believes in all the Messengers and Prophets of God without any discrimination. All messengers were mortals, human beings, endowed with Divine revelations and appointed by God to teach mankind. The Holy Quran mentions the names of 25 messengers and prophets and states that there are others. These include Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Their message is the same and it is Islam and it came from One and the Same Source; God, and it is to submit to His will and to obey His law; i.e., to become a Muslim.

3. Revelations and the Quran

A Muslim believes in all scriptures and revelations of God, as they were complete and in their original versions. Allah, the Creator, has not left man without guidance for the conduct of his life. Revelations were given to guide the people to the right path of Allah and sent down to selected people, the prophets and messengers, to convey it to their fellow men.

The message of all the prophet and messengers is the same. They all asked the people of their time to obey and worship Allah and none other. Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad who were revealed their own book of Allah, were sent at different times to bring back straying human beings from deviation to the right course.

The Quran is the sacred book of the Muslims. It is the last book of guidance from Allah, sent down to Muhammad, peace be upon him, through the angel Jibrael (Gabriel). Every word of it is the word of Allah. It was revealed over a period of 23 years in the Arabic language. It contains 114 Surahs (chapters) and over 6000 verses.

The Quran deals with man and his ultimate goal in life. Its teachings cover all areas of this life and the life after death. It contains principles, doctrines and directions for every sphere of human life. The theme of the Quran broadly consists of three fundamental ideas: Oneness of Allah, Prophethood and life after death. The success of human beings on this earth and in the life hereafter depends on obedience to the Quranic teaching.

The Quran is unrivalled in its recording and preservation. The astonishing fact about this book of Allah is that it has remained unchanged even to a dot over the past fourteen hundred years. No scholar has questioned the fact that the Quran today is the same as it was revealed. Muslims till today memorize the Quran word by word as a whole or in part. Today, the Quran is the only authentic and complete book of Allah. Allah is protecting it from being lost, corrupted or concealed.

4. The Angels

There are purely spiritual and splendid beings created by Allah. They require no food or drink or sleep. They have no physical desires nor material needs. Angels spend their time in the service of Allah. Each is charged with a certain duty. Angels cannot be seen by the naked eyes. Knowledge and the truth are not entirely confined to sensory knowledge or sensory perception alone.
5. The Day of Judgement

A Muslim believes in the Day of the Judgement. This world as we know it will come to an end, and the dead will rise to stand for their final and fair trial. On that day, all men and women from Adam to the last person will be resurrected from the state of death for judgement. Everything we do, say, make, intend and think are accounted for and kept in accurate records. They are brought up on the Day of Judgement.

One who believes in life after death is not expected to behave against the Will of Allah. He will always bear in mind that Allah is watching all his actions and the angels are recording them.

People with good records will be generously rewarded and warmly welcomed to Allah's Heaven. People with bad records will be fairly punished and cast into Hell. The real nature of Heaven and Hell are known to Allah only, but they are described by Allah in man's familiar terms in the Quran.

If some good deeds are seen not to get full appreciation and credit in this life, they will receive full compensation and be widely acknowledged on the Day of Judgement. If some people who commit sins, neglect Allah and indulge in immoral activities, seem superficially successful and prosperous in this life, absolute justice will be done to them on the Day of Judgement. The time of the Day of Judgement is only known to Allah and Allah alone.

6. Qadaa and Qadar

A Muslim believes in Qadaa and Qadar which relate to the ultimate power of Allah. Qadaa and Qadar means the Timeless Knowledge of Allah and His power to plan and execute His plans. Allah is not indifferent to this world nor is He neutral to it. It implies that everything on this earth originates from the one and only Creator who is also the Sustainer and the Sole Source of guidance.

Allah is Wise, Just, and Loving, and whatever He does must have a good motive, although we may fail sometimes to understand it fully. We should have strong faith in Allah and accept whatever He does because our knowledge is limited and our thinking is based on individual consideration, whereas His knowledge is limitless and He plans on a universal basis. Man should think, plan and make sound choices, but if things do not happen the way he wants, he should not lose faith and surrender himself to mental strains or shattering worries.

The purpose of life

A Muslim believes that the purpose of life is to worship Allah. Worshipping Allah does not mean we spend our entire lives in constant seclusion and absolute meditation. To worship Allah is to live life according to His commands, not to run away from it. To worship Allah is to know Him, to love Him, to obey His commands, to enforce His laws in every aspect of life, to serve His cause by doing right and shunning evil and to be just to Him, to ourselves and to our fellow human beings.
Status of Human Beings

A Muslim believes that human beings enjoy an especially high ranking status in the hierarchy of all known creatures. Man and woman occupy this distinguished position because they alone are gifted with rational faculties and spiritual aspirations as well as powers of action. Man and woman are not a condemned race from birth to death, but dignified beings potentially capable of good and noble achievements.

A Muslim also believes that every person is born Muslim. Every person is endowed by Allah with the spiritual potential and intellectual inclination that can make him a good Muslim. Every person's birth takes place according to the will of Allah in realization of His plans and in submission to His commands. Every person is born FREE FROM SIN. When the person reaches the age of maturity and if he is sane, he becomes accountable for all his deeds and intentions. Man is free from sin until he commits sin. There is no inherited sin, and no original sin. Adam committed the first sin, but he prayed to Allah for pardon and Allah granted Adam pardon.

Salvation

A Muslim believes that man must work out his salvation through the guidance of Allah. No one can act on behalf of another or intercede between him and Allah. In order to obtain salvation, a person must combine faith and action, belief and practice. Faith without doing good deeds is as insufficient as doing good deeds without faith.

Also, a Muslim believes that Allah does not hold any person responsible until he has shown him the Right Way. If people do not know and have no way of knowing about Islam, they will not be responsible for failing to be Muslim. Every Muslim must preach Islam in words and action.

Acceptance of Faith

A Muslim believes that faith is not complete when it is followed blindly or accepted unquestioningly. Man must build his faith on well-grounded convictions beyond any reasonable doubt and above uncertainty. Islam ensures freedom to believe and forbids compulsion in religion (one of the oldest synagogues and one of the oldest churches in the world are in Muslim countries).

A Muslim believes that the Quran is the word of Allah revealed to prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel. The Quran was revealed from Allah on various occasions to answer questions, solve problems, settle disputes and to be man's best guide to the truth. The Quran was revealed in Arabic and it is still in its original and complete Arabic version today. It is memorized by millions.

A Muslim also believes in a clear distinction between the Quran and the Traditions (called Hadiths) of the Prophet Muhammad. Whereas, the Quran is the word of Allah, the Traditions of Prophet Muhammad (hadiths - i.e. his teachings, sayings, and actions) are the practical interpretations of the Quran. Both the Quran and the Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad are the primary sources of knowledge in Islam.
Pillars of Islam and Application of Faith

Islam is built on five pillars (Hadith Sahih Bukhari Vol 1, Book 2, No 7), the first of which is a state of faith, the other four are major exercises of faith of which some are daily, some weekly, some monthly, some annually and some are required as a minimum once in a lifetime. These exercises of faith are to serve man's spiritual purposes, satisfy his human needs and to mark his whole life with a Divine touch. The five pillars of Islam are:

WITNESSING (SHAHADA) THAT ALLAH IS ONE AND MUHAMMAD IS HIS MESSENGER

This statement of faith must be declared publicly. It should be a genuine belief which includes all the above articles of faith. The witnessing of the Oneness of Allah is the rejection of any form of deity other than Allah, and the witnessing that Muhammad is His Messenger is the acceptance of him being chosen by Allah to convey His message of Islam to all humanity and to deliver it from the darkness of ignorance into the light of belief in, and knowledge of, the Creator. The statement of Shahada in arabic is:

Ashhadu Alla Ilaha Illa Allah Wa Ashhadu Anna Muhammad Rasulu Allah

An English translation would be:

I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is His Messenger

PRAYER (SALAH)

Praying to the Creator on a daily basis is the best way to cultivate in a man a sound personality and to actualize his aspiration. Allah does not need man's prayer because He is free of all needs. Prayer is for our immeasurable benefit, and the blessings are beyond imagination.

In prayer, every muscle of the body joins the soul and the mind in the worship and glory of Allah. Prayer is an act of worship. It is a matchless and unprecedented formula of intellectual meditation and spiritual devotion, of moral elevation and physical exercise, all combined.

Offering of prayers is obligatory upon every Muslim male and female who is sane, mature and in the case of women free from menstruation and confinement due to child birth. Requirements of prayer: performing of ablution (Wudu), purity of the whole body, clothes and ground used for prayer, dressing properly and having the intention and facing the Qiblah (the direction of the Ka'bah at Mecca).

Obligatory prayers: Five daily prayers, the Friday's noon congregation prayer and the funeral prayer. Times of obligatory prayers:

1. **Early morning**: After dawn and before sunrise.
2. **Noon**: After the sun begins to decline from its zenith until it is about midway on its course to set.
3. **Mid-afternoon**: After the expiration of the noon prayer time until sunset.
4. **Sunset**: Immediately after sunset until the red glow in the western horizon disappears.
5. **Evening**: After the expiration of the sunset prayer until dawn.
Highly recommended prayer: Those accompanying the obligatory prayer and the two great festival prayers.

Optional prayer: Voluntary prayer during the day and night.

Prayer should be offered in its due time, unless there is a reasonable excuse. Delayed obligatory prayers must be made up. In addition to the prescribed prayer, a Muslim expresses gratitude to God and appreciation of His favours and asks for His mercy all the time. Especially at times of, for example, childbirth, marriage, going to or rising from bed, leaving and returning to his home, starting a journey or entering a city, riding or driving, before or after eating or drinking, harvesting, visiting graveyards and at time of distress and sickness.

OBLIGATORY CHARITY (ZAKAH)

Obligatory charity giving is an act of worship and spiritual investment. The literal meaning of Zakah is purity and it refers to the annual amount in kind or coin which a Muslim with means must distribute among the rightful beneficiaries. Zakah does not only purifies the property of the contributor but also purifies his heart from selfishness and greed. It also purifies the heart of the recipient from envy and jealousy, from hatred and uneasiness and it fosters instead good-will and warm wishes for the contributors.

Zakah has a deep humanitarian and social-political value; for example, it frees society from class welfare, from ill feelings and distrust and from corruption. Although Islam does not hinder private enterprise or condemn private possession, it does not tolerate selfish and greedy capitalism. Islam adopts a moderate but positive and effective course between individual and society, between the citizen and the state, between capitalism and socialism, between materialism and spiritualism.

Zakah is paid on the net balance after paying personal expenses, family expenses, due credits, taxes, etc. Every Muslim male or female who at the end of the year is in possession of the equivalent of 85 grams of gold (approx. $1400 in 1990) or more in cash or articles of trade, must give Zakah at the minimum rate of 2.5%. Taxes paid to government do not substitute for this religious duty. The contributor should not seek pride or fame but if disclosing his name and his contribution is likely to encourage others, it is acceptable to do so.

The recipients of Zakah are: the poor, the needy, the new Muslim converts, the Muslim prisoners of war (to liberate them), Muslims in debt, employees appointed to collect Zakah, Muslims in service of research or study or propagation of Islam, and wayfarers who are foreigners in need of help.

Note the obligatory nature of Zakah; it is required. Muslims can also go above and beyond what they pay as Zakah, in which case the offering is a strictly voluntary charity (sadaqa).

FASTING (SAWM)

Fasting is abstaining completely from eating, drinking, intimate sexual contacts and smoking from the break of dawn till sunset. It is a matchless Islamic institution which teaches man the principle of sincere love to God. Fasting teaches man a creative sense of hope, devotion, patience, unselfishness, moderation, willpower, wise saving, sound budgeting, mature adaptability, healthy survival, discipline, spirit of social belonging, unity and brotherhood.

Obligatory fasting is done once a year for the period of the month of Ramadan; the ninth month of
the Islamic year. Recommended fasting includes every Monday and Thursday of every week, three
days in the middle of each Islamic month, six days after Ramadan following the Feast Day and a
few days of the two months before Ramadan. Fasting of Ramadan is a worship act which is
obligatory on every adult Muslim, male or female if he/she is mentally and physically fit and not
on a journey. Exceptions: women during their period of menstruation and while nursing their
child, and also in case of travel and sickness for both men and women.

THE PILGRIMAGE (HAJJ)

It is a pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once in a lifetime and it is obligatory upon every Muslim male
and female who is mentally, physically and financially fit. It is the largest annual convention of
faith on earth (in 1989: 2.5 million). Peace is the dominant theme. Peace with Allah, with one's
soul, with one another, with all living creatures. To disturb the peace of anyone or any creature in
any shape or form is strictly prohibited.

Muslims from all walks of life, from every corner of the globe assemble in Mecca in response to
the call of Allah. There is no royalty, but there is loyalty of all to Allah, the Creator. It is to
commemorate the Divine rituals observed by the Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael, who were
the first pilgrims to the house of Allah on earth: the Ka'bah. It is also to remember the great
assembly of the Day of Judgement when people will stand equal before Allah.

Muslims go to Mecca to glorify Allah, not to worship a man. The visit to the tomb of Prophet
Muhammad at Madena is highly recommended but not essential in making the Hajj valid and
complete.

Sources:
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