

Islam is not named after a personality, as is Christianity ✝ after Jesus Christ or Buddhism ☸ after Buddha, where mortals are deified as man-gods and worshipped as, alongside or in place of the Creator. Neither is Islam a racial religion like Hinduism ☸ or Judaism ✡ (named after the Hindu and Judaic tribes respectively), where salvation is an ethnic birthright. Nor does Islam take its name after a political ideology like Marxism or Capitalism; both of which exploit the poor and vulnerable, rape the Earth of her resources and destroy her environment. 'Islam' actually means 'Submission to the will of Allah (the One True God)'. Anyone who embraces Islam, submitting their will to that of Allah, is a Muslim. 'Islam' also implies 'peace', 'security' and 'salvation' — all of which are natural consequences of submitting to God.

This day, I (Allah) have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and am pleased with Islam as your religion and way of life. (Quran, 5:3)

Islam teaches that Allah sent a succession of prophets to every nation to teach them about Him and His Will. However, later generations became heedless and strayed from the Truth, even changing the revelation with them for worldly gain. So Allah sent His last and greatest prophet, Muhammad, as a universal messenger, along with a universal revelation, the Quran. Muslims hail the Quran as God's Final Literal Word to humanity; immutable, incorruptible and confirming the essential truth of all previously revealed scripture.

O People of the Book (Jews and Christians)! Now has come to you Our (Final) Messenger (Muhammad) explaining to you much of what you used to hide from the Scripture and pass over. Indeed, there has come to you from Allah a light and a Clear Book (this Quran). (Quran 5:15)

Hence, while other religions were developed and named by men, Islam is the re-expression of the same religion espoused by all prophets sent throughout the ages to guide humanity. As Allah says in the miraculous Quran, forever preserved since He revealed it to His Messenger over 1400 years ago:

Allah has ordained for you the same religion which He ordained for Noah; and that which We have inspired to you (O Muhammad), and that which We ordained for Abraham, Moses and Jesus. (Quran 42:13)

As the highest created intelligence, humans are responsible for their actions and will inevitably be held to account for them.

Every soul shall taste death. And you will be given your dues on the Day of Judgment. (Quran 3:185)

Our natural urges are not in themselves evil, but need to be expressed within limits so as not harm ourselves or others...

If any do transgress the limits ordained by Allah, such persons wrong themselves as well as others. (Quran 2:229)

The measure of true faith is obedience to God and is proportional to the balance of one's deeds: it increases with righteousness and piety, and decreases, or is even nullified, through sin.

Verily, Allah enjoins justice, goodness and helping (one's) relatives; and He forbids obscenities, wickedness and all kinds of oppression and extremism. Thus does He admonish you, that you may take heed. (Quran 16:90)

The greatest oppression and, if not repented for, the only unforgivable sin, is to worship, directly or indirectly, any person, place or thing besides Allah. This is because every soul was created with the purpose and inclination to worship its Creator alone, in awe and loving gratitude, and towards good in general.

You (who disbelieve) worship besides Him nothing but names which you and your ancestors have forged (and) for which Allah has sent down no authority. Verily, the command is for none but Allah — He has commanded that you worship none but Him. That is the upright religion, but most people know not. (Quran 12:40)

So to embrace Islam is to simply revert back to that innocent and natural state of submission to the Creator, Allah. And to affirm that He is One, distinct from and transcendent above His Creation, having neither peer nor partner, neither rival nor relative, is to acknowledge His mastery over the universe and His unique rights over its inhabitants.

Let there be no compulsion in the religion. The right path is distinctly clear from the wrong. So whosoever rejects false worship and believes in Allah: then such have grasped a firm handhold that never breaks. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (Quran 2:256)

Life's test then is to recognise the Truth of the Creator, to lovingly accept His noble purpose for us, and to act upon that; striving as best we can to worship Him alone and serve Him sincerely.

And they were not commanded except that they should worship Allah (alone), being sincere to the upright religion (of Islam). (Quran 98:5)

Thus, in Islam, salvation is universally attainable and not confined to any people, place or time. Eternal happiness is not obstructed by notions of reincarnation, blind leaps of faith, or the mediation of priests or so-called holy men. Those who deny their Lord, work evil and are unrepentant, will enter Hell: a place of real pain and suffering meant to dissuade man from wrong-doing.

And (on the Day of Judgement) it will be said to the wrong-doers: 'Taste (you now, the consequences of) what you used to earn!' (Quran 39:24)

And for the righteous, Paradise: a place of unimaginable physical beauty and perfection, full of every conceivable (and inconceivable) delight to satisfy all our wholesome desires.

Beautiful for men is the love of things they covet: women, children, hoards of gold and silver, branded beautiful horses, cattle and well-tilled land. Such is the pleasure of the present life; but with Allah is the excellent return (to Paradise). (Quran 3:14)

Part of the Muslims' Islamic duty is to work for the betterment of the society within which they live. Muslims are expected to positively affect their surroundings by exhibiting good manners and conducting themselves honourably. Indeed, fairness, compassion, gentleness, leniency, truthfulness, moderation, forbearance, humility and neighbourly concern are all cornerstones of the true Islamic character. From the many traditions of the Prophet illustrating this are his sayings:

'Forgive the one who wrongs you; join the one who cuts you off; do good to the one who does evil to you; and speak the truth, even if it be against yourself.'

'None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.'

'Allah does not judge you by your physiques and appearances, but rather He looks into your hearts and observes your deeds.'

'Give glad tidings and do not cause others to flee. Facilitate people and do not make things difficult for them.'

'Show mercy to those on earth, (and) the One in Heaven will show mercy to you.'

'Truly, Allah is kind and gentle, (and) loves kindness and gentleness (from others).'

'Whoever eats his fill while his neighbour goes hungry is not a true believer.'

'Whoever does not thank the people, does not thank Allah.'

And do not turn your face away from people with pride, nor walk upon the earth with insolence in your stride. Truly, Allah dislikes every arrogant boaster. (Quran 31:18)

The basic building block of any society is the family unit. Here again, Islam lays down comprehensive morals enjoining, amongst other virtuous deeds, parental responsibility and a child's reciprocal dutifulness to its parents. The Quran says:

And treat your parents with kindness. If one or both of them attain old age in your care, never say to them a word (suggesting) disgust, nor reproach them, but address them with reverent speech. And humble yourself out of mercy before them, and pray: 'My Lord! Be merciful to them for having cared for me in my childhood.' (17:23-4)

With such texts, Islam has laid down a solid ethical basis to guide a Muslim's daily interactions with the material world.

As for a Muslim's spiritual life, it is built upon Five Pillars:

1) The Witnessing of Faith (*shahada*) :: To bear witness that 'None is worthy of worship but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger,' freely and sincerely, affirms a person's faith in Islam. That faith is then evidenced with one's limbs by serving and worshipping Allah in the way of His Messenger.

Allah gives witness that none is worthy of worship but He, as do the angels and those with knowledge. (Quran 3:18)

2) Prayer (*salah*) :: Muslims perform five daily ritual prayers. The prayer ensures that throughout the rhythm of the day — at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, dusk and nightfall — a direct link is maintained between the believer and God. The prayer takes only a few minutes to perform and engages the mind, body and soul of the worshippers as they stand, bow, kneel and prostrate before their Lord whilst glorifying and praising Him and asking His pardon, forgiveness and guidance. As Islam has no religious hierarchy or priesthood, any worthy Muslim nominated by his congregation can lead them in prayer.

O you who believe! Seek help in patience and prayer.
(Quran 2:153)

3) Alms-giving (*zakah*) :: Islam teaches that everything belongs to Allah and wealth is held in trust by humans. *Zakah* means 'purity' and one's capital savings are purified by setting aside around one fortieth for those in need. This charitable redistribution of wealth effectively eradicated poverty in early Islamic society and, given the opportunity, could do so again.

And such of you as believe and spend (in Allah's Way), theirs will be a great reward. (Quran 57:7)

4) Fasting (*sawm*) :: Each year, during the Islamic lunar month of Ramadan, Muslims abstain from food, drink and sexual relations from dawn till dusk. Fasting teaches self-restraint and God-consciousness. It also helps Muslims improve their health and empathise with those less fortunate.

O you who believe! Fasting has been prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become pious. (Quran 2:183)

5) Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) :: Pilgrimage to the *K'aba* in Mecca is an obligation for those who are physically and financially able. Clad in simple garments that strip away all social distinctions, millions gather in Mecca to perform *Hajj* rites that go back to Prophet Abraham. The pilgrims return home with their spirits high, their lives refocused, their faith rejuvenated and strengthened, and their past sins forgiven.

And *Hajj* to the House (*K'aba*) is a duty that mankind owes to Allah — those who are able. (Quran 3:97)

Worship in Islam is, in fact, any deed, word or feeling that is loved by God. The worshipper draws ever closer to Allah by pursuing divine knowledge and applying it; following the inspired example or *Sunna* of the Prophet throughout.

Say (O Muhammad): 'If you love Allah then follow me, Allah will (then) love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.' (Quran 3:31)

Obsessing over the highs and lows of this life causes people to fluctuate between moments of ecstasy and despair, turning them to false gods, drugs and alcohol, and even suicide for release. But the believing Muslim is the one who remains firm, patient, grateful and hopeful in times of both joy and sadness; conscious all the while of God's presence, and of the transient nature of this present life.

This present life is like the water We send down from the clouds so that the luxuriant herbage sustaining man and beast may grow; until when the Earth adorns it garments and is beautified, and its people believe they are its masters. Down then comes Our scourge upon it by night or in broad day, laying it waste as though it had not flourished the day before. Thus We make plain Our Signs to a thoughtful people. (Quran 10:24-5)

This then has been a glimpse into Islam, the true Religion of God. Not just a religion, but a truly complete way of life in which the relation of the individual to society and the material to spiritual are balanced in perfect harmony. Islam is simple, rational and practical. For truth seekers of every background, it offers certainty and security of faith — it does not need to change to stay relevant or to suit popular culture and nor does it subject itself the designs of man. Thus, only through the divine guidance of Islam, the Quran and the *Sunna*, can humanity be saved now... and till the end of time.

Righteousness is not that you turn your faces to the east and the west. But righteous is the one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the Angels, the Scripture and the Prophets; who gives his wealth, in spite of love for it, to kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the wayfarer, to those who ask and to set slaves free. And (righteous are) those who pray, pay alms, honour their agreements, and are patient in (times of) poverty, ailment and during conflict. Such are the people of truth. And such ones, they are those who fear God. (Quran 2:177)

Islam is the world's fastest growing religion. It is also the most misunderstood. One in five people across the globe today profess Islam, representing every branch of humanity and every walk of life. What is the attraction? What do Muslims believe? Behind the headlines and beyond the hype,

what's Islam really all about?