

The Religion of Islam

The first thing that one should know and clearly understand about Islam is what the word "Islam" itself means. The religion of Islam is not named after a person as in the case of Christianity which was named after Jesus Christ, Buddhism after Gotama Buddha, Confucianism after Confucius, and Marxism after Karl Marx. Nor was it named after a tribe like Judaism after the tribe of Judah and Hinduism after the Hindus. Islam is the true religion of "Allah" and as such, its name represents the central principle of Allah's "God's" religion; the total submission to the will of Allah "God".

The Arabic word "Islam" means the submission or surrender of one's will to the only true god worthy of worship "Allah" and anyone who does so is termed a "Muslim". The word also implies "peace" which is the natural consequence of total submission to the will of Allah. Hence, it was not a new religion brought by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in Arabia in the seventh century, but only the true religion of Allah re-expressed in its final form. Islam is the religion which was given to Adam, the first man and the first prophet of Allah, and it was the religion of all the prophets sent by Allah to mankind. The name of God's religion Islam was not decided upon by later generations of man. It was chosen by Allah Himself and clearly mentioned in His final revelation to man. In the final book of divine revelation, the Qur'an, Allah states the following: "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion" . (Qur'an 5:3) "If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah (God) never will It be accepted of Him"

(Qur'an 3:85)

"Abraham was not a Jew nor Christian; but an upright Muslim." (Qur'an 3:67)

THE MESSAGE OF ISLAM

Since the total submission of one's will to Allah represents the essence of worship, the basic message of Allah's divine religion, Islam is the worship of Allah alone and the avoidance of worship directed to any person, place or thing other than Allah. Since everything other than Allah, the Creator of all things is Allah's creation; it may be said that Islam, in essence calls man away from the worship of creation and invites him to worship only its Creator. He is the only one deserving man's worship as it is only by His will that prayers are answered. "You alone do we worship and from you alone do we seek help"

. (Qur'an 1:5) Elsewhere, in the final book of revelation, the Qur'an, Allah also said:

"And your Lord says:"Call on Me and I will answer your (prayer)".

(Qur'an 40:60) It is worth noting that the basic message of Islam is that Allah and His creation are distinctly different entities. Neither is Allah His creation or a part of it, nor is His creation Him or a part of Him. This might seem obvious, but, man's worship of creation instead of the Creator is to a large degree based on ignorance of this concept. It is the belief that the essence of Allah is everywhere in His creation or that His divine being is or was present in some aspects of His creation, which has provided justification for the worship of creation though such worship maybe called the worship of Allah through his creation. However, the message of Islam as brought by the prophets of Allah is to worship only Allah and to avoid the worship of his creation either directly or indirectly. In the Qur'an Allah clearly states:

"For We assuredly sent amongst every people a prophet,(with the command) worship me and avoid false gods"

(Qur'an 16:36)

THE UNIVERSALITY OF ISLAM

Within the central principle of Islam and in its definition, (the surrender of one's will to God) lies the roots of Islam's universality. Whenever man comes to the realization that Allah is one and distinct from His creation, and submits himself to Allah, he becomes a Muslim in body and spirit and is eligible for paradise. Thus, anyone at anytime in the most remote region of the world can become a Muslim, a follower of God's religion, Islam, by merely rejecting the worship of creation and by turning to Allah (God) alone. It should be noted however, that the recognition of and submission to Allah requires that one chooses between right and wrong and such a choice implies accountability. Man will be held responsible for his choices, and, as such, he should try his utmost to do good and avoid evil. The ultimate good being the worship of Allah alone and the ultimate evil being the worship of His creation along with or instead of Allah. This fact is expressed in the final revelation as follows:"Verily those who believe, those who follow the Jewish (Scriptures), the Christians and the Sabians any who believe In Allah and the last day, and work righteousness *hall have their reward with their Lord; They will not be overcome by fear nor grief (Qur'an 2:62). If only they had stood by

the law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that was sent to them from their Lord, they would have enjoyed happiness from every side. There is from among them a party on the right course; but many of them follow a course that is evil"

. (Qur'an 5:66)

RECOGNITION OF ALLAH

The question which arises here is, "How can all people be expected to believe in Allah given

their varying- backgrounds, societies and cultures? For people to be responsible for worshipping Allah they all have to have access to knowledge of Allah. The final revelation teaches that all mankind have the recognition of Allah imprinted on their souls, a part of their very nature with which they are created. In the Qur'an 172-173; Allah explained that when He created Adam, He caused all of Adam's descendants to come into existence and took a pledge from them saying, Am I not your Lord? To which they all replied, " Yes, we testify to It: 'Allah then explained why He had all of mankind bear witness that He is their creator and only true God worthy of worship. He said, "That was In case you (mankind) should say on the day of Resurrection, "Verily we were unaware of all this." That is to say, we had no idea that You Allah, were our God. No one told us that we were only supposed to worship You alone. Allah went on to explain that it was also In case you should say, "Certainly It was our ancestors who made partners (With Allah) and we are only their descendants; will You then destroy us for what those liars did?" Thus, every child is born with a natural belief in Allah and an inborn inclination to worship Him alone called in Arabic the "Fitrah". Prophets were sent, as was earlier mentioned, to every nation and tribe to support man's natural belief in Allah and man's inborn inclination to worship Him as well as to reinforce the divine truth in the daily signs revealed by Allah. Although, in most cases, much of the prophets' teachings became distorted, portions remained which point out right and wrong. Consequently, every soul will be held to account for its belief in Allah and its acceptance of the religion of Islam; the total submission to the will of Allah. We pray to Allah, the exalted, to keep us on the right path to which He has guided us, and to bestow on us a blessing from Him, He is indeed the Most Merciful. Praise and gratitude be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, and peace and blessings be on prophet Muhammad, his Family, his companions, and those who rightly follow them.

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