

The word "Islam" literally stems from the root "s-l-m" and the words "silm" and "salamah" which mean peace, and which indicate the "submission" or "surrender" of oneself to God Almighty, being obedient to His commands, embarking on a safe and secure path that leads to salvation, promising a sense of trust to everyone and everything, while also denoting the fact that the person surrendering will not inflict any harm on others, be it physical or verbal.

The basis of Islam is "iman" and "iz'an", that is, faith, and conscious obedience. The fruits of Islam are "ihسان" (blessings) and "ihklas" (sincerity), that is acting or living as if seeing God, and doing everything only for the sake of God Almighty. The concept of Islam can be briefly summarized as the unconditional and doubtless belief of the "Tawhid", the Unity of God, and His divine Existence, and the submission of the self to Him. Also included in this, are the performance of every act and the responsibility of acting as if one sees Him, and is observed by Him, and doing everything only for His sake. A person who acts according to these or to similar descriptions is called a "Muslim" (not an Islamist). Such a person is accepted as a candidate to eternal prosperity.

Based on the messages of God Almighty, and the teachings and practices of His prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace and blessings, Islam is a Divine religion. A person who believes and practices Islam is called a "Mu'min" and a "Muslim" (one who has faith, and who has submitted). Scholars have described Islam as "the sum of all divine laws that urge people to do good deeds with their freewill and consciousness." Hence, if such a dynamic system can be practiced in life, then its fruits will become obvious in this world and in the hereafter. On the contrary, when this system is expelled from life, then it is not easy to find anything positive to say about religion.

From the perspective of language, there is a fine distinction between "iman" and "Islam", that is, faith and submission. However, it is strongly believed that Islam without faith (iman), and faith (iman) without Islam (submission and/or actions) are incomprehensible. Faith is the interior, and Islam is the physical expression of this faith that constitutes the exterior. Their union makes the Divine Religion, which establishes all aspects of faith and practice in this life (iman and Islam). A person who practices and who accordingly represents this religion can only be called a Muslim. From this perspective, those who consider religion to be no more than a system of beliefs, and those who only practice it culturally without understanding the deeper meanings, are mistaken. It is obvious that both groups have been and will be left bereft of the fruits of this religion, fruits promised by the Lord, in this and in the next world.

Surprisingly, however, to consider the practice of Islam as being part of the faith would be another mistake. Although those who believe that the practice of the faith is compulsory, but still fail to fulfill their duties are sinners, they are still Mu'min (one who has faith). Such thought does not conflict with the Sunni understanding of Islam, because not worrying about committing sins is very different from saying "To punish or not to punish is God's decision". According to the Qur'an, faith is an essential part of the religion, lying in its very core, while Islam is the only way to make faith a part of human nature. Practice without faith is hypocrisy, faith without practice is sin (transgression). As hypocrisy is no more than hidden blasphemy, it will not be forgiven, but it is possible for sins to be forgiven through repentance. In this respect, even if someone does not practice Islam, we should have a good opinion of them and not see those people as non-believers, unless they undermine or express that they do not care about Islam. Yet, it is not possible to think in the same way for those who are faithless, and oppress and despise other believers for being Muslims. An additional point that needs to be addressed here is the importance of being steadfast in one's religion, carrying out all the aspects of faith and its practice, this is what God seeks in believers.

To be a truthful Muslim, one should avoid all kinds of hypocrisy and acts of blasphemy; one should surrender to God with utmost sincerity, and practice Islam with a consciousness of being in His presence and being watched by Him. It is disrespectful to think of religion only as a matter of conscience and mysticism. Those who seemingly accept Islam - God is always aware of the truth of the situation - yet proclaim that the practice of religion is a form of extremism, are deceiving themselves with empty illusions and they are posing as devout Muslims. Subjective and immoral interpretations of Islam turn it into a man-made religion, not a divine religion. In fact, Islam was sent down to save people from their own selves, the self that follows only human desires, and to enlighten people with the knowledge of God. In other words, Islam is collection of divine rules and revelations that raises human beings above the level of the animals, and which prepares them for the journey to the comforting climate of the heart and the spirit. The spirit of this system is Iman (faith), its body is Islam (submission), its perception Ihsan (consciousness of His presence), and the name of this unique order is Din, Islam (submission).

Islam addresses those who are intellectually capable, urging them to do what is good for both this and the next life through their own freewill, promising eternal contentment to those who heed this call. The position of believers is not one of being oppressed by responsibilities and obligations. All blessings, prosperity and enduring joy are bound together with the free will of humanity by God's Knowledge, Will and Choce. In the same way religion and the responsibilities entailed are a favor and a tribute given to human will by the Divine Will. From this aspect, Islam is totally different than other religious systems; the manners of Islam are divine, and the expression of this is servitude. Those to whom Islam is being addressed are intellectually capable, and they possess freewill, as already stated; they try to practice the religion of God, and also try to be representatives of it. It is also possible to think of religion as a gift from God to those who are capable; those who are mentally incapable and who are not free in their actions cannot be held responsible for religious obligations, and they are not privileged

as others are as they cannot be encouraged to do good.

As this religion has been sent by the All-Knowing God, He Who best knows His creation, it always shows the way to the truth, to good deeds, and it encourages hearts with promises of paradise. On the other hand, it also urges people to be cautious and warns them of terrible consequences if they go astray. In this context, the commandments of the religion are everlasting, constant, and relevant to the date, because these edicts are eternal. Despite the fact that all systems are subject to becoming irrelevant and out-of-time, the commandments of Islam are always new, and attractive. Yet, there are some biased people who do not perceive this truth. This is not surprising, as all man-made decrees are subjective, and they all differ from country to country, and fall out of step with time, due to continuous amendment that is made on an ad hoc basis; such systems provide only a temporary relief to the problems of humanity, due to the limited perception of humanity of itself.

On the contrary, Islam has been revealed with messages that deal with all kinds of matters and that provide satisfaction for the eternal and never-ending needs of humanity. It has never asked or suggested anything that goes against human nature, and has never neglected any of our needs or desires. For those who are mindful and righteous, there are no issues that have been neglected, no doubts or desires that go unanswered, and there are no conflicts between the commandments of the religion and their practical meaning, nor are there any gaps or issues that have not been taken in hand. On the whole, Islam, with its eternal messages and glad tidings about how to please and see the Lord in the hereafter, has been uniquely and divinely planned to suit human nature, its capabilities, goals, and tendencies.

Living an Islamic life, one benefits from the lawful bounties of this world, spending all one's years full of the joy of walking the corridors that lead to paradise and the eternal blessings of He Who Bestows. In addition to all of this, if a person can live his/her life totally concentrating on pleasing God, which is the essence of religion, then this person can be considered as being of the rank of the angels. The decrees made by humanity are limited, and are usually race and ethnicity oriented; these can never be an answer to the limitless and never-ending needs and desires of humanity. God is the Creator and the All-Knowing, and this religion is His decree given to mankind for this world. All other man-made systems are of limited vision and are short-sighted in their awareness, and their spirituality is always hazy.

Islam, the true religion, is a unique order that never misleads and a divine source that opens new earthly and heavenly prospects for human beings. This divine system is called "religion" from the perspective of belief, "shariah" from the perspective of actions, and "community" from the perspective of social functions. Primarily, all actions and activities occur according to the

belief system, and social life is shaped according to this behavior, these actions and activities. For this reason, believers, who have solid faith and who make their faith a part of their character, continuously practicing it, are sources of truth, justice and fairness; such a person is trustworthy, a representative of high morality, a seeker of knowledge and wisdom, and is loyal to the sacred call of religion. Such a faithful believer would also actively participate in working toward the perfection of human society.

Faithful Muslims, who are conscious of their religion, whose practices are in line with the divine commandments, whose hearts are always connected to their Lord, and whose actions reflect this relation with the Divine, will never be deceived, nor will such people be in a position of servitude to any other human being. Such Muslims are always aware of their relationship with this exalted community, and thus are self-confident; they reflect this assurance, and are distinctive in their behavior. They love, show sympathy, and deep respect for all the created things because of the Creator. They prevent themselves from performing base and simplistic actions that are not compatible with the honor of being human; they are above the others in their faith, wisdom, and actions. While doing all of the above, believers are never proud or arrogant, they never push or force others to accept their philosophy or way of life. Aware of the fact that Islam never causes repugnance, they accept everyone as they are, and instead of trying to push their ideas on others, they are adorned with true faith, trying to represent their religion flawlessly, and being one of those who are admired by those around. Yet, they are not seeking the admiration of others; they do everything for the sake of their Exalted God, thinking only of His approval in their everyday speech, behavior, and thought; such people are never "ostentatious", considering this as little better than a virus infecting and killing the heart and spirituality.

As a matter of fact, Islam did not come to oppress the minds or the will of humanity, but rather it was sent to prevent such oppression and tyranny on the part of human beings, hence urging people to use their minds and their intellects alongside their freewill to make new choices. This was exactly how things were at the time when Islam was being fully practiced; its majestic spiritual charm never needed any mind games or tricks, nor was hidden or explicit cruelty accepted. Deeds were the language that Islam used to reach the heart, words were used to explain the details. Words were used as a tool to address the conscience, words that encourage good and prohibit evil were the means; physical enforcement was not used. Islam does not approve of enforced faith (this is against the nature of the religion), nor does it accept any practice or deed which is not oriented around the pleasing of God. According to Islam, enforced faith is hypocrisy, and such deeds are no more than showing off. The Qur'an strictly forbids oppression in faith, as can clearly be seen in this verse "There is no compulsion in religion. True guidance is distinct from error (Al-Bakara 256)." Islam exists to prevent all kinds of hypocrisy and disbelief, and to hinder those who want to show-off. All of these facts in no way contradict the persistent behavior of a believer in the expression and establishment of the Truth.

As long as there is an opportunity, Islam will address the minds and souls of humanity, saving them from hypocrisy and leading them to the truth by the perfect example of the prophet Muhammad (pbuh), lighting the true faith and belief in their hearts, and equipping them with an awareness of God's presence everywhere and eternally. This kind of behavior is nothing more than the result of the acceptance of the message of Muhammad (pbuh).

The message proclaimed by the last prophet (the Messenger) Muhammad (pbuh) is the final and complete divine message, and it is the most reliable, trustworthy path leading to God Almighty. If this religion cannot express itself very clearly nowadays, the fault lies in that it is not only being perceived incorrectly, but it is also not being depicted in the best possible manner by those who follow Islam. Nevertheless, we do not think that this situation will stay forever as it is. When the time is right, Islam will re-express itself in every stage of life and it will entrance mankind with its joyful colors and patterns once again.

When this community of Islam notices that once again they are renowned and their name has been given to them by God (according to a verse in the Qur'an, "God is the one who gave the name Muslim to you and to those before you") they will be impressed, saying "How Exalted, how Beneficial our Lord is" and turn their faces towards Him; they will submit to His wisdom.

Islam is an invitation that expresses the religions that came before it. As materialist and naturalist philosophies have become too energetic, the containment of this divine message has also meant that all other religions are defeated by those dangerous and terrifying ideologies. Islam is the protector of the true faith. Since every other prophet in the past proclaimed the same messages, Islam is a point of support, and acts as evidence for the other heavenly religions. Thus, to revive Islam means revitalizing the other heavenly religions, correcting those points that are erroneous, maybe even partially revising some points that are in need of repair and providing new ideas for the believers of other religions. I personally believe that all of the above are possible and the fact that all heavenly religions come from the same source is a great advantage in this direction.

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