

What is Islam?

﴿ ما الإسلام؟ ﴾

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Among the blessings and favors that God has bestowed upon humanity is that He endowed them with an innate ability to recognize and acknowledge His existence. He placed this awareness deep in their hearts as a natural disposition that has not changed since human beings were first created. Furthermore, He reinforced this natural disposition with the signs that he placed in Creation that testify to His existence. However, since it is not possible for human beings to have a detailed knowledge of God except through revelation from Himself, God sent His Messengers to teach the people about their Creator Who they must worship. These Messengers also brought with them the details of how to worship Allah, because such details cannot be known except by way of revelation. These two fundamentals were the most important things that the Messengers of all the divine revelations brought with them from God. On this basis, all the divine revelations have had the same lofty objectives, which are:

1. To affirm the Oneness of Allah - the praised and glorified Creator – in His essence and His attributes.

2. To affirm that Allah alone should be worshipped and that no other being should be worshipped along with Him or instead of Him.

3. To safeguard human welfare and oppose corruption and evil. Thus, everything that safeguards faith, life, reason, wealth and lineage are part of this human welfare that religion protects. On the other hand, anything that endangers these five universal needs is a form of corruption that religion opposes and prohibits.

4. To invite the people to the highest level of virtue, moral values, and noble customs.

The ultimate goal of every Divine Message has always been the same: to guide the people to Allah, to make them aware of Him, and to have them worship Him alone. Each Divine Message came to strengthen this meaning, and the following words were repeated on the tongues of all the Messengers: "Worship Allah, you have no god other than Him." This message was conveyed to humanity by prophets and messengers which God sent to every nation. All of these messengers came with this same message, the message of Islam.

All the Divine Messages came to bring the life of the people into willing submission to Allah. For this reason, they all share the name of Islam, which means submission in Arabic. Islam, in this sense, was the religion of all the Prophets, but why does one see different variations of the religion of God if they all emanated from the same source? The answer is twofold.

The first reason is that as a result of the passage of time, and due to the fact that previous religions were not under the Divine protection of God, they underwent much change and variation. As a result, we see that the fundamental truths which were brought by all

messengers now differ from one religion to another, the most apparent being the strict tenet of the belief and worship of God and God alone.

The second reason for this variation is that God, in His infinite Wisdom and eternal Will, decreed that all the divine missions prior to the final message of Islam brought by Muhammad, may the Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him, be limited to a specific time frame. As a result, their laws and methodologies dealt with the specific conditions of the people whom they had been sent to address.

Humanity has passed through numerous periods of guidance, misguidance, integrity, and deviation, from the most primitive age to the heights of civilization. Divine guidance accompanied humanity through all of this, always providing the appropriate solutions and remedies.

This was the essence of the disparity that existed between the different religions. This disagreement never went beyond the particulars of the Divine Law. Each manifestation of the Law addressed the particular problems of the people it was meant for. However, the areas of agreement were significant and many, such as fundamentals of faith; the basic principles and objectives of the Divine Law, such as protecting faith, life, reason, wealth, and lineage and establishing justice in the land; and certain fundamental prohibitions, some of the most important of these being idolatry, fornication, murder, theft, and giving false witness. Moreover, they also agreed upon moral virtues like honesty, justice, charity, kindness, chastity, righteousness, and mercy. These principles as well as others are permanent and lasting; they are the essence of all the Divine Messages and bind them all together.

But where does the message of Muhammad fit in with the previous messages revealed by God? A brief history of the prophets might clear this point.

The first human, Adam, followed Islam, in that he directed worship to God alone and none else and abided by His commandments. But through the passage of time and the dispersal of humanity throughout the earth, people strayed from this message and began directing worship to others instead of or along with God. Some took to worshipping the pious who passed away amongst them, while others took to worshipping spirits and forces of nature. It was then that God started to send messengers to humanity steering them back to the worship of God Alone, which accorded to their true nature, and warning them of the grave consequences of directing any type of worship to others besides Him.

The first of these messengers was Noah, who was sent to preach this message of Islam to his people, after they had started to direct worship to their pious forefathers along with God. Noah called his people to leave the worship of their idols, and ordered them to return to the worship of God Alone. Some of them followed the teachings of Noah, while the majority disbelieved in him. Those who followed Noah were followers of Islam, or Muslims, while those that did not, remained in their disbelief and were seized with a punishment for doing so.

After Noah, God sent messengers to every nation who had strayed from the Truth, to steer them back to it. This Truth was the same throughout time: to reject all objects of worship and to direct all worship without exception to God and none else, the Creator and Lord of all, and to abide by His commandments. But as we mentioned before, because each nation differed in regards to their way of life, language, and culture, specific messengers were sent to specific nations for a specific time period.

God sent messengers to all nations, and to the Kingdom of Babylon He sent Abraham – one of the earliest and greatest prophets – who called his people to reject the worship of the idols to which they were devoted. He called them to Islam, but they rejected him and even tried to kill him. God put Abraham through many tests, and he proved true to all of them. For his many sacrifices, God proclaimed that he would raise amongst his progeny a great nation and choose prophets from amongst them. Whenever people from his progeny started to stray away from the Truth, which was to worship none but God alone and to obey His commandments, God sent them another messenger steering them back to it.

Consequently, we see that many prophets were sent amongst the progeny of Abraham, such as his two sons Isaac and Ishmael, along with Jacob (Israel), Joseph, David, Solomon, Moses, and of course, Jesus, to mention a few, may the Peace and Blessings of God be upon them all. Each prophet was sent to the Children of Israel (the Jews) when they went astray from the true religion of God, and it became obligatory upon them to follow the messenger which was sent to them and obey their commandments. All of the messengers came with the same message, to reject worship of all other beings except God Alone and to obey His commandments. Some disbelieved in the prophets, while others believed. Those that believed were followers of Islam, or Muslims.

From amongst the messengers was Muhammad, from the progeny of Ishmael, the son of Abraham, may the Peace and Blessings of God be upon him, who was sent as a messenger in succession to Jesus. Muhammad (pbuh) preached the same message of Islam as the previous prophets and messengers – to direct all worship to God Alone and none else and to obey His commandments – in which the followers of the previous prophets went astray.

So as we see, the Prophet Muhammad was not the founder of a new religion, as many people mistakenly think, but he was sent as the Final Prophet of Islam. By revealing His final message to Muhammad, which is an eternal and universal message for all of mankind, God finally fulfilled the covenant that He made with Abraham.

Just as it was incumbent upon the those who were alive to follow the message of the last of the succession of Prophets which was sent to them, it becomes incumbent upon all of humanity to follow the message of Muhammad (pbuh). God promised that this message would remain unchanged and fit for all times and places. Suffice it to say that the way of Islam is the same as the way of the prophet Abraham, because both the Bible and the Quran

portray Abraham as a towering example of someone who submitted himself completely to God and directed worship to Him alone and none else, and without any intermediaries. Once this is realized, it should be clear that Islam has the most continuous and universal message of any religion, because all prophets and messengers were "Muslims", i.e. those who submitted to God's will, and they preached "Islam", i.e. submission to the will of Almighty God by worshipping Him Alone and obeying His commandments.

So we see that those who call themselves Muslims today do not follow a new religion; rather they follow the religion and message of all prophets and messengers which were sent to humanity by God's command, also known as Islam. The word "Islam" is an Arabic word which literally means "submission to God", and Muslims are those who willfully submit to and actively obey God, living in accordance with His message.