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What is Islam

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"My Lord! I ask You for beneficial knowledge, and I seek refuge with You from non-beneficial knowledge."

What is Islam?

By Maulana Dr Fazlur Rahman Ansari

A. RELIGION OF UNITY

1. Unity of God

Islam teaches the purest form of Monotheism and regards Polytheism as the deadliest sin. A Muslim addresses GOD by His Personal Name: ALLAH - the word "god" and its equivalents in other languages being unstable in the matter of connotation. Allah, according to Islam, is the one GOD, Who is Indivisible in Person and Who has no partner: wife, son, or daughter. He is the Matchless and "naught is as His likeness." "He begetteth not, nor was he begotten." He is the First, the Last, the Eternal, the Infinite, the Almighty, the Omniscient, the Omnipresent. He is the Creator, the Nourisher, the Cherisher of all things. He is the All-Just, the Avenger of the wrongs done to the weak and the oppressed, the Compassionate, the Merciful, and Loving, the Guide, the Friend, the Magnificent, the Glorious, the Beautiful, and the True. In short He is the Possessor of all Excellence.

Speaking of the conception of God in Islam, Gibbon, the famous western historian, says: "The Creed of Muhammad is free from the suspicion of ambiguity and the Quran is a glorious testimony to the unity of God. The Prophet of Mecca rejected the worship of idols and men, of stars and planets, on the rational principle that whatever is corruptible must decay and perish, that whatever is born must die, that whatever rises must set. In the Author of the universe his rational enthusiasm confessed and adored an infinite and Eternal Being, without form or place, without issue or similitude, present to our secret thoughts, existing by the necessity of His own nature, and deriving from Himself all moral and intellectual perfections. These sublime truths are defined with metaphysical precision by the interpreters of Quran. A philosophic theist might subscribe to the popular creed of the Muhammadans."

2. Unity of the Universe

From the Unity of the Creator, according to Islam, proceeds the Unity of Universe, i.e., Unity of Creation and Unity of Purpose. In other words, the Cosmos is a Moral Order.

3. Unity of Mankind

Islam regards the whole of mankind as an "organic unity" - a single family, and emphatically says that the distinctions on the mundane plane, the distinctions namely of race, color, language or territory cannot form the ground for claims of superiority of one group over the other. The only distinction that has "value" is that which arises at the moral and spiritual plains - namely, the distinction of "taqwa," or, "piety and righteousness."

Professor H.A.R. Gibb, the famous English critic of Islam says, ".....Islam.....possesses a magnificent tradition of inter-racial understanding and cooperation. No other society has such a record of success in uniting, in an equality of status, of opportunity and of endeavor so many and so various races of mankind...If ever the opposition of the great societies of the East is

to be replaced by cooperation, the mediation of Islam is an indispensable condition." (Whither Islam? P. 379).

4. Unity of Religion

According to Islam, the human intellect, though a great and powerful asset, has its natural limits, and, therefore, neither the normative nor the empirical sciences are capable of leading humanity to a sure knowledge of ultimate truths and the code of life based upon them. The only source of sure knowledge open to humanity is, consequently, Divine Guidance, and that course has been actually open ever since the beginnings of human life on earth. Allah raised His "Prophets" and "Messengers" and revealed His Guidance to them for transmission to humanity. Coming from the same Source, all revealed religions have, therefore, been one, i.e. **ISLAM**.

Allah's Prophets and Messengers continued to come to every country and community to work in their respective limited fields. Time after time, the revealed Guidance was either lost or corrupted through human interpolation, and new Prophets with fresh Dispensations were sent, and humanity continued to advance from infancy to maturity was reached - when humanity was practically to become one family - instead of sectional Guidance, a perfect, final and abiding Revelation, addressed to entire mankind and for all time, was granted in the seventh century of the Christian era. That Revelation, which recapitulates all former Revelations and thus sets a seal on the Unity of Religion, is **ISLAM**; The Scripture which enshrines it is the **HOLY QURAN**; and the Prophet who brought it is the Leader of Humanity, **MUHAMMAD** (Allah bless him!).

Thus all the Prophets of God, from Adam down to Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them all), are the Prophets of a Muslim, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him!) being the Last and Final one, and all the Divine Scriptures are the Scriptures of a Muslim, though he follows only the Holy Quran because it alone exists in its original purity and it alone contains the religion of Islam which has been followed by all rightly-guided people since the day the first human being came into existence.

5. Unity of the Sexes

Differentiation of functions have misled certain cultures of the world to regard a woman as a being who belongs, so to say, to a different and inferior species: and to meet out to her inhuman treatment accordingly. Islam emphatically repudiates that notion and teaches that both man and woman have sprung from the same essence and the same source and consequently possess the same human status. Their functions and interests, instead of being antagonistic, are meant to be complementary. The natural relation between the sexes, in all its aspects, is therefore, that of love and harmony, without which no true human progress can be possible.

6. Unity of Classes

Islam aims at the creation of a classless society by eliminating all possible social conflicts (through revolving the different interests). In the sphere of

economics, Islam lays down the principle that wealth should not be allowed to circulate among the wealthy only, and envisages, through its laws and institutions, a "Cooperative Commonwealth of Talent." In the political sphere, Islam stands for the Cooperative Commonwealth of the Pursuers of Righteousness.

Taken as a whole, the Islamic state is a "welfare state" where sovereignty belongs to Allah alone and no human being has a right to govern other human beings except in the name of Allah and according to His Will, and where nobody, not even the Head of the State, is above the law, Absolute Justice is the watchword and the Establishment of Righteousness is the goal. The merits of Islam's social ethics have elicited praise even from the otherwise hostile critics. For instance: H.G. Wells says: "Islam created a society more free from widespread cruelty and social oppression than any society that had ever been in the world before" (Outline of History, p. 325).

H.A.R. Gibb says: "Within the Western world Islam still maintains the balance between exaggerated opposites. Opposed equally to the anarchy of European nationalism and the regimentation of Russian communism, it has not yet succumbed to that obsession with the economic side of life which is characteristic of present-day Europe and present-day Russia alike." (Whither Islam? p. 378). Prof. Louis Massignon says: "Islam has the merit of standing for a very equalitarian conception.... it occupies an intermediate position between the doctrines of bourgeois capitalism and Bolshevik communism" (Whither Islam? p. 378).

7. Unity of Human Activity

Islam conceives of the human personality as a "unity" and consequently regards the distinction of "secular" and "religious" as unscientific, irrational and absurd. The life of a Muslim, both in its individual and social manifestations, is a life for God and God alone. "Islam," says Dudley Wright, scholar of Comparative Religion, "is no mere creed; it is a life to be lived. In the Quran may be found directions for what are sometimes termed the minor details of daily life, but which are not minor when it is considered that life has to be lived for God. The Muslim lives for God alone. The aim of the Muslims is to become Godbound, and to endeavor to advance the knowledge of God in all his undertakings. From the cradle to the grave the true Muslim lives for God and God alone."

A. **RELIGION OF "SUBMISSION TO THE DIVINE WILL"**

The word "Islam" means "submission" and, as a religious term, it connotes "submission to the Divine Will and Commands." As such, ISLAM is co-extensive with NATURE. For, everything in Nature submits to the Divine Will without demur. The only exception is man. He has to choose "Islam" through his free will and thus to attain his destiny by falling in line with the rest of God's Creation.

Goethe, the renowned poet-philosopher of Germany, says:

"Naerrisch, dass jeder in seinem Falle

Seine besondere Meinung priest!

Wenn Islam Gott ergeben heisst,

Im Islam leben und sterben wir alle"

Viz:

"It is lack of understanding that everyone praises own special opinion; (for) Islam means submission to God and in Islam we all live and die."

B. RELIGION OF NATURE

The above statement brings out, and the Holy Quran emphasizes in clear terms, that to be a Muslim is to live and grow in accordance with true human nature and in harmony with the Nature around. Islam, thus, means conformity to the Natural Law.

C. RELIGION OF DISCIPLINE

The concepts of Submission to the Divine Will and Conformity to the Natural Law, when actively realized in human life, give rise to the healthiest form of DISCIPLINE and Islam is the religion of Discipline par excellence.

In the famous book; "First and Last Things," H. G. Wells says:

"The aggression, discipline and submission of Muhammadanism makes, I think,.....fine and honorable religion for men. Its spirit, if not its formula, is abundantly present in our modern world... I have no doubt that in devotion to a virile...Deity and to the service of His Empire of stern Law and Order, efficiently upheld, men have found and will find salvation."

The German Orientalist Friedrich Delitzsch admits that the Muslim shows "owing to his religious surrender to the Will of God an exemplary patience under misfortune and he bears up under disastrous accidents with an admirable strength of mind." (Die welt des Islam, p. 28).

D. RELIGION OF TRUTH

The concept of "Truth" forms the keynote of Islamic ideology and pervades the entire universal order presented by Islam. Not only is "truthfulness" a fundamental value in the elaborate Islamic Moral Code - a value which forms the foundation - stone of Muslim character, but God Himself has been mentioned in the Holy Quran as "The Truth," or "the True," the Holy Prophet Muhammed (God bless him!) as the "Bearer of Truth," the Quran itself as "the Truth," and the abode of the righteousness after death as the "Seat of Truth."

E. RELIGION OF TEMPERANCE

Islam is the religion of Purity and Temperance par excellence. It stresses purity not only of the mind and the heart, which certain other religions also stress, but also of the body, its fundamental principle being the harmonious development of human personality. Consequently; it strictly prohibits the use of all drinks and foods which might be unhealthy and injurious to the body, or the mind or both. Thus its prohibitive injunctions cover not only all the intoxicants, e.g. , wine, opium, etc., but also those foods which are harmful to healthy human growth. Ultimately, Islamic Temperance covers all evil thoughts, feelings and deeds.

F. RELIGION OF BEAUTY

Unlike certain religions, Islam is not the religion of contempt for the world, of the negation of any fundamental value. It is positively and definitely a religion of fulfillment - fulfillment of all the faculties and positive capabilities with which God has endowed man. Aesthetic culture, therefore, forms part of Islamic life - of course, governed and controlled by Islam's moral and spiritual principles. In Islam the concept of "Beauty" permeates the entire human activity - nay, the whole cosmic order. "Allah," says the Holy Prophet Muhammed (peace be with him!), "is Beautiful and loves what is beautiful." Beauty in thought, word and deed, and beauty in all creative activity is the Islamic ideal.

Islam permits the creation of Art, within the limitations of its spiritual and moral framework. But its motto is not "Art for the sake of Art" but "Art for the sake of Life," whereby alone a true blending of spiritual, moral and physical beauty - the rational and harmonious goal of human life - is achievable.

G. RELIGION OF REASON

Islam regards Reason as man's distinctive privilege and God's noble gift, and the Holy Quran has repeatedly exhorted mankind to employ Reason in the matters of social and natural phenomena and in understanding its Message and practicing its Guidance, thus giving to "personal judgment," its due place in the life of a Muslim. "Intellectual Culture" in general, forms one of the noblest pursuits of human life in Islam and the acquisition and cultivation of knowledge has been made obligatory upon every Muslim man and woman.

H. RELIGION OF THE NEGATION OF SUPERSTITION

Islam is a positively rational religion and stands opposed to the mystery cults and religions of mysterious dogmas whose acceptance is generally claimed on the basis of blind faith. Speaking of the negation of superstition and the affirmation of Reason in Islam, Godfrey Higgins says: "No relic, no image, no picture, no mother of God disgrace his (Muhammad's) religion. No such doctrines as the efficacy of faith without works, or that of a death-bed repentance, plenary indulgences, absolution or auricular confession, operate first to corrupt, then to deliver up his followers into the power of a priesthood, which would of course be always more corrupt and more degraded than themselves. No indeed! The adoration of one God, without mother, or mystery, or pretended miracle, and the acknowledgement that he, a man, was sent to preach the duty of offering adoration to the Creator alone, constituted the simple doctrinal part of the religion of the Unitarian of Arabia." (Apology for Muhammad).

About the Author:

Dr. Muhammad Fazlur Rahman (*Rahmatullahe Alaih*) was a well know Islamic theologian, a scholar of Muslim and Modern Philosophy, Comparative Religion, Psychology, and Social Sciences. As a missionary, he traveled round the earth for the spiritual and moral uplift of different Muslim communities. He was the founder of World Federation of Islamic Missions in Karachi, Pakistan. He was a Qadriyya shaykh, and to his credit he has a large number of publications on Islam.

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