

ISLAM: ITS MEANING AND MESSAGE

ABDUL-LATEEF K.A.

ABSTRACT

Islam is one of the major world living religions. It is a religion as well as a way of life regulating the lives of its adherents by way of telling them what is mandatory (Wajib), lawful (Halal), unlawful (Haram), desirable (Mubah), and detestable (Makruh), approved (Mandub)etc. A believer (Muslim) who is equally a subject (Mukallaf) of Islamic law (Shariah) is expected to grasp the correct understanding (Fiqh) of all the above and strictly abide by them hoping for reward from his Lord (Rabb). Since Islam is widely diffused across the world, claiming about ¼ of the world population, the need therefore arise that we should know our neighbours so as to engender mutual understanding , mutual understanding that is aimed at mutual reciprocative tolerance; as tolerance facilitates unity and peaceful co-existence.

INTRODUCTION

Islam is a derivative of an Arabic verbal noun which means to surrender, to concur, to submit etc. It is equally a derivative of one of the attributes of Allah - '**As- Salam**' meaning; the Lord of Peace. Thus, Islam is defined as a religion of peace and total submission to the will of Allah. It is an ideology and a comprehensive way of life that covers the whole gamut of human life in all its ramifications as it does not divide life into water tight compartments of spiritual and temporal or in other words, religious and secular. Hence, an adherent of Islam is called Muslim; that is, one who surrenders himself whole heartedly as well as whatever he has to the will of Allah, without leaving anything behind with himself to be given to Caesar as Caesar and whatever he had, according to Islamic teachings belong to Allah to whom he had eventually returned.

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE OF GOD, MAN & LIFE

Islamic concept of God is referred to as **At-Tawheed** or Islamic monotheism. Islam teaches that God is the first without beginning, and of course the last without end; as everything or rather anything that has beginning will definitely has an end. Islam is of the opinion that, the existence of Allah as well as His Unity are neither controvertible nor compromisable.

Since there cannot be a design without a designer, the Heaven and the earth with their perfect harmony could neither have evolved by themselves nor by a 'Big Bang' as we are made to understand. The truth about the universe uphold by Islam is that, Allah is its architect creator and

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cherisher, He created them as a manifestation of His power and majesty and they, no doubt, constitute a significant pointer to His existence, essence and unity. Although man was the last to be created, yet every other thing are made subservient to him so as to make it easy for him the service of his Lord.

And since no one petition God to be created nor even have a fore knowledge of His creation, it goes therefore that Allah should send Him Guidance (*Al-Hidayyah*) over his mission on earth as it would not augur well for him to be left alone to go (grope) in darkness, hence the scriptures sent for his guidance as '*Manual of life*'.

Islamic belief system establishes that there is no two Gods whether in the Heaven or on the Earth³.

Say, Allah is but one

He is the One upon whom all depends

He begets not nor is He begotten

And there is no compare for Him⁴

Based upon the above quotation from the *Gur'an*, Islam teaches that man should devote is worship to Allah alone. It has to be stated that worship (*Ibadah*) in Islam is not confined to prayer (*Salat*), charity (*Zakat*), fasting (*Siyam*), pilgrimage (*Hajj*) etc alone but rather include everything a believer could do to please his Lord and creator ⁵. ***Say, verily my prayer, my sacrifice, my living and my dying are all for Allah, the Lord of the worlds. This what I am commanded and I am foremost of those who surrender themselves to the will of Allah.*** (.Qur'an 6:162-3)

Muslim scholars have classified Islamic Monotheism (*Tawheed*) into about five categories they are: ⁶

Tawheed -ul-Huluhiyyah

Tawheed - ar - Rububiyyah

Tawheed -ul - Asma wa Sifat

Tawheed - ul- Ibadah

Tawheed - ul - Ittibah

Tawheed - ul - Af'al

Meanwhile, before we proceed to explain the identified categories of *tawheed*, it is pertinent to note that *Iman* refers to faith or belief and that the opposite of *Iman* is *Kufr* (unbelief). Equally the opposite of *tawheed* is *Shrik* which means polytheism. Polytheism or rather '*Shrik*' is the greatest and the only unpardonable sin that a man may commit⁷.

By *Tawheed -ul - Huluhiyah* (Unity of Allah's existence and essence) Islam establishes that nothing predates Allah. He created everything, both the material and immaterial ones, seen or unseen etc. He did not only create them but continue to be nurturing them. Thus, all power belongs to God as nothing happens without His knowledge and permission. Islam further establishes that Allah is unique in this regard as nobody other than Him could create the Heaven and the earth as well as what they contain both.

Tawheed - ar - Rububiyyah simply refers to the concept of Allah being the creator and cherisher of the Heaven and the Earth⁸. This revolves around the fact that Allah did not only create them, but continue to be nurturing them. Thus, a believer must affirm that Allah alone creates, kills, enriches, enthrones, dethrones, and changes situation and circumstances. Allah is unique and cannot be compared to any of His creatures as none of them (His creatures) could do any of the aforementioned issues.

Tawheed-ul-Asma was- sifat has to do with the names and attributes of Allah. Allah is the Sovereign (*Al-Mulk*), the Sublime (*Al-Qudus*), the Lord of Peace (*As-Salaam*) the Beneficent (*Ar-rahman*), the Merciful (*Ar-Raheem*) etc. Though, to a lesser degree, man may seem to exhibit some of these attributes, they are not in any case comparable to that of Allah as human beings, indeed all creatures; are limited to time and space. In other words, some of those attributes of Allah may manifest themselves in some of the creatures in an extremely finite innocuous way, whereas they are extremely infinite with regards to Allah. For example, man sees, however, is sightening is limited just like himself.

Tawheed - al - Ibadah, signifies the position of Islam with regards to worship. Islam teaches that God alone should be worshipped. He has neither beginning nor end. He created man for the purpose of serving Him and created every other thing for the service of man. It is degrading for man to descend so low as to be worshipping things that are ordinarily made subservient to him; for Allah had made him His vicegerent (*khalifah*) on earth. To worship any other thing other than Allah is *Shrik* and one who does that is called *a Mushrik*.

Tawheed - al - Ittibah has to do with law, leadership and followership. Islam is of the position that since Allah is the creator of man as well as every other thing, laws governing the smooth running of his life could be best formulated by Him and only Him. It further asserts that since the mind of God is revealed through His apostles who are to be emulated, followed and obeyed by their followers; as obedience to the apostle of God

signifies obedience to Allah and vice versa⁹. The position of Islam is that, obedience is due to our leaders as long as they command what is good and forbid what is evil. However, if they command us to commit sin against God and crime against humanity they should not be obeyed. To put it in a subtle language, obedience is not due to a creature of Allah who commands disobedience to Allah ¹⁰.

We have given to you a law (a way of life)

So follow it and do not follow the fancies of those who know not.

Q45:18

Sayyid Qutb posit that, ***‘they are equipped with nothing but fancies and ignorance when they undertake the task which is no concern of theirs and does not properly belongs to them, their claim to one of the properties of Divinity is a great sin and a great evil’***¹¹.

Finally, ***Tawheed - al - Af'al*** refers to God's work. Islam establishes that nobody other than Allah could perform any of His (Allah's) duties. Duties of creation, sending down rain in torrents alternation of day and night could not be done except by Allah, thus, to attribute the power to do any of them to a creature is but a shrik¹².

In order for man to grasp the correct picture of his mission on the surface of the earth Allah had continued to be sending down guidance to him. This guidance (***Al-Hidayyah***) becomes necessary as a result of the fact that man is ignorant of his coming to the surface of the earth just as earlier observed, and since God created him for certain purpose, the need therefore arise that he should be made to have a correct understanding of the purpose for which he had been created ¹⁴. No wonder therefore, that Allah had been sending inspiration (Guidance) through His angels to His chosen ones among men (i.e the Prophets or Messengers). Islam teaches that there is no single nation to which a prophet had not been sent and that before a nation would be destroyed, a warner would have been sent to them ¹⁵.

The scriptures sent by God to mankind via these Messengers could therefore be likened to the manual (Users Guide) bought along with items in the market particularly electronics and related goods. Thus, failure to read, digest, comprehend and apply its contents will rob the buyer of the valuable service or utility of such items. In the same vain, it behoves man to equally read, digest, comprehend and imbibe the content of the scriptures sent by God for his proper guidance. For just as he (man) stands in need of food and water for his physical development and growth, he equally stands in need of ***‘al-Hidayyah’*** (The Divine Guidance of Allah) for his spiritual development and growth as well. No wonder, this is referred to as ***‘Spiritual Diet’***. This is borne out of the fact that man is composed of matter and spirit and so the two components should be nurtured together. However, if one or both is or are neglected, it is going to be pernicious for man as society or even life

becomes unworthy of living. This is why neither materialism nor unbridled asceticism is acceptable to Islam. Islam maintains a golden mean course between these two extremes.¹⁶

It becomes necessary therefore, that in taking care of the sum total of his affairs he should follow the prescriptions of Allah (his Lord) as contained in the scripture sent to him.¹⁷ This follows from the fact that although man is endowed with intellect, which of course gives him an edge or a degree above every other creature of God yet his knowledge and indeed himself is limited to time and space. Hence, the need for him to depend on; and follow God's injunctions (His creator and cherisher) who is in His essence Omniscient. The Islamic position in this regard, is that man is Allah's vicegerent on earth as he is the acme of His handiwork¹⁸ and so certain trust, nay, certain duties and responsibilities fall on him, for every opportunity a man has, there is always attendant responsibilities. And so just like a plenipotentiary is rewarded for his laudable achievement or recalled by his country for trial over his misdeed and or ineptitude conducts, in the same vain is man going to be recalled for reward and or punishment as the case may be. This accounts for why he is going to be resurrected after death.

Khilafah refers to the position of honour given to man by Allah among the comity of His creatures. **Khilafah** literarily means representation, vicegerence or viceroyship. Man, according to this principle is a representative of Allah on earth where he is to live for a short while and exercise his right of vicegerency. By this, man is subordinate to God and thus expected to carry out His will. However, God does not make man to be a robot as he has given freedom of will to do or not to do the will of Allah. It is therefore clear, that man has been given the power to make or mar his life. He will make his life as he would live a comfortable non-apitiful life and secure eternal bliss if he lives his life according to the dictates of God as contained in the scriptures sent by Him. He mars his life if turns out to be disobedient and ungrateful to Him and follows the footsteps of Satan so that by and large life becomes unworthy of living and eternal damnation becomes his lot. These are the principle of Islamic worldview to which every devout Muslim must subscribe and reflect in his life; as Islam considers life to be all about service, service to Allah and humanity via Him.¹⁹ Islam teaches that, man should, in a bid to proffer solutions to his multifaceted problems avoid unnecessary compartmentalization of life into spiritual and secular. All the problems should be taken into consideration as a compact whole without giving undue preference to any one above the others as such unnecessary water tight compartment are bound to have their accompanying woes. Thus, his psychological, sociological, political, moral and or religious problems must be simultaneously taken into consideration, for just as human beings need food and water for their physical development and growth they as well stand in need of al -Hidayyah (Divine Guidance of Allah) for their Spiritual development and growth. Man is never an ordinary economic animal so that his needs are only food, shelter and cloth. But he

needs all these basic necessities of life and cannot neglect them. He possesses the physical body, yet all his problem could not be solved through physical sciences. Man is equally psychological as he has emotions, desires, likes and dislike yet psychology alone could not provide solution to his multi-dimensional problems. Man is social as he lives together with others and cannot afford to do otherwise, yet it will be misleading to think that solution can be proffered to his avalanche of problems via sociology alone. Infact, the resultant effects would be pernicious than the problems it is aimed at solving, for this is indeed a case of wrong diagnosis and wrong medication. Dr Alexis Carrel puts it in a rather subtle way: **'Economists would realize that humanbeings think, feel and suffer, that they should be given other things than work, food and leisure; that they have spiritual as well as physiological needs. And also that the causes of economic and financial crises may be moral and intellectual. We should no longer be obliged to accept the barbarous condition of life in great cities, the tyranny of factory and office, the sacrifice of moral dignity to economic interest, of mind to money, as benefactions conferred upon us by modern civilization. We should reject mechanical inventions that hinder human development. Economics would no longer appear as the ultimate reason for everything. It is obvious that the liberation of man from the materialistic creed would transform most of the aspect of existence. Therefore. Modern society will oppose with all its might this progress in our conception.'** (in R.H.Tawney, *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, London, George Unwin Ltd,1937 p225)

Islam is based on five pillars (Qawaid - ul - Islam) through which a devotee expresses his commitment to Islam. They are Iman (faith or belief), Salat (Prayer), Zakat (Charity or Islamic tax), Siyam or Sawm (Fasting) and Hajj (Pilgrimage to the Holy land of Makkah and its precinct). By faith, a Muslim is to establish strongly in his heart that Allah is the only true God beside whom there is non and that He is the only one who deserves to be worshipped. Infact, he utters **Kalimatul-Shahadah** (the word of testimony) every now and then to affirm his faith in Allah and the Messengership of Muhammad (SAW). He equally believes strongly that there are angels (**Malaikah**) who are special creatures of Allah made out of light. They are honourable servants of Allah who never disobey Him in matter of His commandment but carry out His injunctions with exact precision²⁰. They do not sleep, eat, drink nor have freedom of will.

A believer should equally believe in all the scriptures as well as all the Messengers of God without making any distinction in between them. It should be stated here that prophets are to be emulated and obeyed rather than being worshipped.²¹

A Muslim should also believe in predestination. By this, we mean that whatever happens to a man, whether good or bad after striving to his utmost capacity to avert them has been pre-determined by Allah and must come to

pass. Thus, his date and place of birth, date, place and circumstances of death, height, colour, race, sex, intelligence etc had been determined by Allah long before he was born. This equally means, that nothing happens without His knowledge and permission. Of equal fundamental importance to Islam, is the belief in Resurrection, Life after Death and the Reward and Punishment that follows it. All these are called 'Article of faith (Ar Kanul-Iman).

Salat or prayer are to be said regularly at the appointed time and place²² and of course too in congregation as Islam places high premium on unity, brotherhood and togetherness. In every aspect of Islam it exhibits unity, brotherhood, equality and spirit of community. It slams door to racism, class formation, tribalism and apartheid as all human beings are considered to be equal before Allah, the only point of distinction being **Taqwallah**- the fear of God or rather God consciousness²³.

Zakat is paid for the purification of the believers' wealth and for the up keep of law and order in the society. The proceed of **Zakat** are equally used for the upkeep of the indigent members of the **Ummah** (community) as well as the provision of social amenities Q9:60, 9:103, 9:34.5.

Siyam (Fasting) is to be observed for a period of 29 or 30 days of the month of Ramadan the 9th month of the Islamic calendar Q2:83-7 **Siyam** means abstinences from eating, drinking and sexual intercourse as well as every other things that may vitiate fasting such as lustful gaze at opposite sex, fighting, backbiting, slander, lying, vain talks etc from the early dawn till early dusk.

Hajj (Pilgrimage) is the fifth and the last pillars of Islam. It is to be observed or carried out by every Muslim at least once in his life- time, if he has the good health, wealth and he is certain of safety on his way to the Holy land. By this, he becomes a guest of Allah, (*Al hajj*) so that if he performs all the rites properly, with sincere motives he is promised *al-Jannah* (Paradise) by Allah.

Islam place a great importance on the rights of Allah, His apostle and those of our fellow human beings as one offends Allah by denying any of His creatures his or its rights. Significantly, out of all the sin or rather crimes that man may commit, the only one that directly affects Allah is '**Shrik**'(act of associating partner with Allah), the rest one thousand and one affects fellow creatures.

CONCLUSION

Islam is a religion and a way of life. It regulates all the facets of believers' life in all its ramifications. Thus, Islam should not be seen in the western understanding of religion as such tendency as considering religion to be just the opium of the people may not be true with Islam. Such idea or

of religion may generate a lots of confusion when it comes to a belief system like that of Islam. The attempt here is only to expose the basic tenets of a religion and a way of life that attracts one of the largest following amongst its peers. This is done with a view to bring about mutual understanding which, at the long run, is expected to bring about the much needed tolerance, mutual co-operation, unity and peaceful co-existence.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. Abul A'ala, Mawdudi, *Human Rights in Islam*, Leceister, The Islamic Foundation 1980p9.
3. Ali, Abdullah Yusuf, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* Maryland, Amana Publications 1420 AH/1999CE Chapter 2:163, 42:11
4. Qur'an Chapter 112:1-4
5. Qur'an Chapter 51:56
6. Philips, Abu Ameenah Bilal, *The Fundamental of Tawheed (Islamic Monotheism)*, Riyadh, Tawheed Publications 1990/1410 pp 1.5.
7. Qur'an 4:48, 116
8. Qur'an Chapter 1:2 see Abu A'ala Mawdudi commentary on the verse.
9. Q3:132; 4:65, 69.
10. Qur'an Chapter 4:59
11. Qulb Sayyid *This Religion (Of Islam)* Leceister, The Islamic Foundation 1980 p27
12. Qur'an Chapter 67:30
13. Qur'an Chapter 2:38
14. Qur'an Chapter 2:28
15. Qur'an Chapter 16:36:89, 10:47
16. Qur'an Chapter 102:1-8
17. Qur'an Chapter 5:45, 46& 5:50
18. Qur'an Chapter 95
19. Qur'an Chapter 51: 56
20. Qur'an Chapter 66: 6
21. Qur'an Chapter 2:285
22. The appointed place for as - Salat (the Muslim prayer) is the Mosque (Al - Masjid). See Qur'an 11:14, 17:78:79
23. Qur'an 49:13.