

A Brief Introduction to Islam (part 1 of 2)

Description: A brief introduction to the meaning of Islam, the notion of God in Islam, and His basic message to humanity through the Prophets.

By Daniel Masters, AbdurRahman Squires, and I. Kaka

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Islam and Muslims

The word "Islam" is an Arabic word which means "submission to the will of God". This word comes from the same root as the Arabic word "salam", which means "peace". As such, the religion of Islam teaches that in order to achieve true peace of mind and surety of heart, one must submit to God and live according to His Divinely revealed Law. The most important truth that God revealed to mankind is that there is nothing divine or worthy of being worshipped except for Almighty God, thus all human beings should submit to Him.

The word "Muslim" means one who submits to the will of God, regardless of their race, nationality or ethnic background. Being a Muslim entails wilful submission and active obedience to God, and living in accordance with His message. Some people mistakenly believe that Islam is just a religion for Arabs, but nothing could be further from the truth. Not only are there converts to Islam in every corner of the world, especially in England and America, but by taking a look at the Muslim World from Bosnia to Nigeria, and from Indonesia to Morocco, one can clearly see that Muslims come from many various races, ethnic groups and nationalities. It is also interesting to note that in actuality, more than 80% of all Muslims are not Arabs - there are more Muslims in Indonesia than in the whole Arab World! So, though even though it is true that most Arabs are Muslims, the large majority of Muslims are not Arabs. However, anyone who submits completely to God and worships Him alone is a Muslim.

Continuity of the Message

Islam is not a new religion because "submission to the will of God", i.e. Islam, has always been the only acceptable religion in the sight of God. For this reason, Islam is the true "natural religion", and it is the same eternal message revealed through the ages to all of God's prophets and messengers. Muslims believe that all of God's prophets, which include Abraham, Noah, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, brought the same message of Pure Monotheism. For this reason, the Prophet Muhammad was not the founder of a new religion, as many people mistakenly think, but he was 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, who was one of the earliest and greatest prophets.

Sufficient is 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 worshipped Him without 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.

The Oneness of God

The foundation of the Islamic faith is belief in the Oneness of Almighty God - the God of Abraham, Noah, Moses and Jesus. Islam teaches that a pure belief in One God is intuitive in human beings and thus fulfils the natural inclination of the soul. As such, Islam's concept of God is straightforward, unambiguous and easy to understand. Islam teaches that the hearts, minds and souls of human beings are fitting receptacles for clear divine revelation, and that God's revelations to man are not clouded by self-contradictory mysteries or irrational ideas. As such, Islam teaches that even though God cannot be fully comprehended and grasped by our finite human minds, He also does not expect us to accept absurd or demonstrably false beliefs about Him.

According to the teachings of Islam, Almighty God is absolutely One and His Oneness should never be compromised by associating partners with Him - neither in worship nor in belief. Due to this, Muslims are required to maintain a direct relationship with God, and therefore all intermediaries are absolutely forbidden. From the Islamic standpoint, believing in the Oneness of God means to realize that all prayer and worship should be exclusively for God, and that He alone deserves such titles as "Lord" and "Saviour". Some religions, even though they believe in "One God", do not make all of their worship and prayers for Him alone. Also, they also give the title of "Lord" to beings that are not All-Knowing, All-Powerful and Un-Changing - even according to their own scriptures. Suffice it to say that according to Islam, it is not enough that people believe that "God is One", but they must actualize this belief by proper conduct.

In short, in the Islamic concept of God, which is completely based on Divine Revelation, there is no ambiguity in divinity - God is God and man is man. Since God is the only Creator and continual Sustainer of the Universe, He is transcendent above His creation - the Creator and the creature never mix. Islam teaches that God has a unique nature and that He is free from gender, human weaknesses and beyond anything which human beings can imagine. The Quran teaches that the signs and proofs of God's wisdom, power and existence are evident in the world around us. As such, God calls on man to ponder over the creation in order to build a better understanding of his Creator. Muslims believe that God is Loving, Compassionate and Merciful, and that He is concerned with the daily affairs of human beings. In this, Islam strikes a unique balance between false religious and philosophical extremes. Some religions and philosophies portray God as just an impersonal "Higher Power" who is uninterested, or unaware, of the life of each individual human. Other religions tend to give God human qualities and teach that He is present in His creation, by being incarnate in someone, something - or even everything. In Islam,

however, Almighty God has clarified the truth by letting mankind know that He is "Compassionate", "Merciful", "Loving" and the "Answerer of Prayers". But He has also emphasized strongly that "there is nothing like unto Him", and that He is high above time, space and His creation. Finally, it should be mentioned that the God that Muslims worship is the same God that Jews and Christians worship - because there is only one God. It is unfortunate that some people mistakenly believe that Muslims worship a different God than Jews and Christians, and that "Allah" is just the "god of the Arabs". This myth, which has been propagated by the enemies of Islam, is completely false since the word "Allah" is simply the Arabic name for Almighty God. It is the same word for God which is used by Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians. However, it should be clarified that even though Muslims worship the same God as Jews and Christian, their concept of Him differs somewhat from the beliefs of other religions - mainly because it is based completely on Divine Revelation from God. For example, Muslims reject the Christian belief that God is a Trinity, not only because the Quran rejects it, but also because if this was God's true nature, He would have clearly revealed it to Abraham, Noah, Jesus and all of the other prophets.

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