

Preamble

The Meaning of Islam

Islam is the Way of life God intended for humanity whose teachings and fundamentals were revealed to Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him. Prophet Muhammad received a divine mandate to convey these teachings to all people. The Quran was part of this revelation, and the prophet delivered it exactly as he received it. The prophet provided an interpretation of the verses of the Quran, based on divine revelations, and acted according to its injunctions. The Qur'an was transmitted to us through generation after generation who memorized it in its entirety such that there is no doubt that the Quran that we have today is exactly the same one that was revealed to the prophet and read to his companions.

The Quran is Divine

Those who have studied the style and meaning of the Quran, and have also studied the life of the prophet and his environment, have concluded with certitude that the Quran could not have been authored by Muhammad, nor by any other human being. Thus, it is clear that the Quran has been revealed by God, and as such, is the source of the creed of Islam and the basis of its laws and injunctions.

In the Quran, God challenges people to bring about a similar book – a challenge that has not been answered till this day.

Several verses in the Quran deliver this challenge. For example: «And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it and call on your helpers aside from Allah if you are truthful. But if you do not and you shall never do, then fear the fire for which men and stones are the fuel; it is prepared for those who reject the Truth».[2:23-24]. “Say: "If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Quran, they could not bring forth the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support"». [17:88].

Human Interpretation of Islam is not Divine:

After the death of the prophet, Muslim scholars endeavored to interpret certain verses of the Quran which do not have a single unequivocal meaning. The scholars' efforts were based on their understanding of the Quarnic verses, their appreciation of the essence of the religion, and on the sayings and deeds of the prophet. However, different interpretations developed based on the independent reasoning of each of the scholars. The result was a wealth of opinions and interpretations, and ultimately, the development of different schools of thought with respect to juristic methodology and rulings. However, these interpretations were looked upon as mere human efforts based on the ijtiḥad of the scholars. None of the scholars considered his interpretation to be the only valid one that everyone must follow. Rather, they considered their efforts to be a means of providing different alternatives to be considered.

The verses of the Quran which deal with the basic creed such as the belief in God and the Day of Judgment; the fundamentals of Islamic Law (Shariah) such as mandatory prayers, and the pure dues (Zakat); the duty of protection of life, wealth and

honor; are clear and unambiguous. These verses provide a unique and unequivocal meaning. Differences in scholarly opinion referred to above, relate principally to the secondary issues of the creed and Islamic jurisprudence.

Tolerance of Islam:

That such differences in opinion were allowed and tolerated, shows that Islam respects the principles of freedom of rationale thought and expression. Such freedoms paved the way to the development of different Islamic schools of thoughts, and protected their ability to flourish and attract followers. In this way, Islam caters to legitimate versatile cultural aspects of human life.

Islam is a Creed and a Law:

God revealed the Qurān to Muhammad to be used as the fundamental source of Islamic creed and law- the two primary components of Islam.

a- The Creed:

The creed is the theoretical basis of the religion. To become a Muslim, one has to believe without a shadow of a doubt in its truth. The Islamic creed has been stated in a number of clear, unambiguous, and unequivocal verses. All Muslims, irrespective of their school of thought, agree upon it. It constituted the basis for the call to Islam, as well as the basis for all other divinely revealed messages communicated by previous messengers.

b- The Law (Shariah):

The Law (Shariah) is the system which encompasses the fundamental set of Islamic laws. It also includes the basis on

which such laws are derived. It organizes the relationship between man and God, man and his fellow Muslims, man and his fellow human beings, man and the universe, and man and life in general.

The Creed and the Law in Quran:

The Quran uses the term faith (Iman) to refer to the creed, while it uses the term «righteous deeds» to refer to the law. The following few verses illustrate this: «Surely, those who have faith and did righteous deeds, shall have for enjoyment, the gardens of paradise. Wherein they shall dwell (for ever), no change from that will they wish». [18:107-108]. «Whoever does righteous deeds, man or woman, and has faith, surely to him will We give a new life. A life that is good and pure and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their action». [16:97]. «By the Time. Surely, man is in loss. Except such as have faith and do righteous deeds, and recommend each other to the truth and recommend each other to patience». [103:1-3].

This shows that Islam is not merely a creed that organizes the relationship between man and his God, but is also a set of laws which guides man to act righteously in all aspects of life.

The Relationship between Creed and the Law in Islam:

The Islamic creed is the foundation upon which Islamic law is built. The laws of Islam cannot exist without the creed because it is the creed that legitimize the law. That is, the creed provides the basis for Muslims to respect the law and to apply it without external compulsion.

Thus, Islam provides a cohesive bond between the creed and the law. The Islamic creed provides the moral incentive for Muslims to abide by the law. The law transforms a Muslim's belief in the creed into actions and deeds. Salvation can only be attained by maintaining the bond between the two. Those who either believe in the creed but do not abide by the law or apply the law but reject the creed are not considered Muslims before God.

Equality in Islam:

Islam is meant to be a universal message to all mankind regardless of color, gender, wealth or social stature. The closeness of a person to God is measured by the strength of his belief and his steadfastness in applying the Law. This is illustrated in the following verses: «O mankind, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Surely, the most honored of you before God is the most righteous of you». [49:13]. «Not your desires, nor those of the People of the book can prevail; whoever does evil, will be requited accordingly. Nor will he find, besides God, any protector or helper. And whoever does righteous deeds, be they male or female and have faith, they will enter Heaven and not the least injustice will be done to them». [4:123-124].

Gender Equality in Religious Responsibility:

Males and females are equally and independently responsible for their religious duties. Islam is a personal responsibility, each person, man or woman, is held responsible for acquiring the faith and performing righteous deeds. Each person, man or woman, will be recompensed according to his (her) individual deeds.

This has been affirmed by several Quranic verses. For example: «God sets forth, as an example of the *kafireen*, the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were, respectively, under two of Our righteous servants, but they betrayed their husbands by rejecting their doctrine and they profited nothing before God on their account, but were told: "Enter the fire along with those who enter". And God sets forth, as an example to those who believe, the wife of Pharaoh. Behold, she said: "O my :Lord, build for me, in closeness to You, a mansion in Paradise, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from those that do wrong"». [66:10-11]

Young men and women are also held independently responsible for their religious duties, once they reach puberty. «O mankind! Do your duty to your Lord, and protect yourselves from [the account on] a Day when no father can be of any help to his son, nor a son be of help to his father». [31:33].