

The Religion of Islam

The first thing that one should know and clearly understand about Islam is what the word "Islam" itself means. The religion of Islam is not named after a person as in the case of Christianity which was named after Jesus Christ, Buddhism after Gotama Buddha, Confucianism after Confucius, and Marxism after Karl Marx. Nor was it named after a tribe like Judaism after the tribe of Judah and Hinduism after the Hindus. Islam is the true religion of "Allah" and as such, its name represents the central principle of Allah's "God's" religion; the total submission to the will of Allah "God". The Arabic word "Islam" means the submission or surrender of one's will to the only true god worthy of worship "Allah" and anyone who does so is termed a "Muslim", The word also implies "peace" which is the natural consequence of total submission to the will of Allah. Hence, it was not a new religion brought by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) I in Arabia in the seventh century, but only the true religion of Allah re-expressed in its final form.

Islam is the religion which was given to Adam, the first man and the first prophet of Allah, and it was the religion of all the prophets sent by Allah to mankind. The name of God's religion Islam was not decided upon by later generations of man. It was chosen by Allah Himself and clearly mentioned in His final revelation to man. In the final book of divine revelation, the Qur'aan, Allah states the following:

"This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion". (Soorah Al-Maa'idah 5:3)

"If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah (God) never will It be accepted of Him" (Soorah Aal'imraan 3:85)

"Abraham was not a Jew nor Christian; but an upright Muslim." (Soorah Aal'imraan 3:67)

Nowhere in the Bible will you find Allah saying to Prophet Moses' people or their descendants that their religion is Judaism, nor to the followers of Christ that their religion is Christianity. In fact, Christ was not even his name, nor was it Jesus! The name "Christ" comes from the Greek word Christos which means the annointed. That is, Christ is a Greek translation of the Hebrew title "Messiah". The name "Jesus" on the other hand, is a latinized version of the Hebrew name Esau.

For simplicity's sake, I will however continue to refer to Prophet Esau (PBUH) as Jesus. As for his religion, it was what he called his followers to. Like the prophets before him, he called the people to surrender their will to the will of Allah; (which

is Islam) and he warned them to stay away from the false gods of human imagination.

According to the New Testament, he taught his followers to pray as follows: "Yours will be done on earth as it is in Heaven".

THE MESSAGE OF ISLAM

Since the total submission of one's will to Allah represents the essence of worship, the basic message of Allah's divine religion, Islam is the worship of Allah alone and the avoidance of worship directed to any person, place or thing other than Allah. Since everything other than Allah, the Creator of all things, is Allah's creation; it may be said that Islam, in essence calls man away from the worship of creation and invites him to worship only its Creator. He is the only one deserving man's worship as it is only by His will that prayers are answered. If man prays to a tree and his prayers are answered, it was not the tree which answered his prayers but Allah who allowed the circumstances prayed for to take place. One might say, "That is obvious," however, to tree-worshippers it might not be. Similarly, prayers to Jesus, Buddha, or Krishna, to Saint Christopher, or Saint Jude or even to Muhammad, are not answered by them but are answered by Allah. Jesus did not tell his followers to worship him but to worship Allah. As the Qur'aan states:

"And behold Allah will say: "O Jesus the son of Mary Did you say to men, Worship me and my mother as gods besides Allah He will say-"Glory to you I could never say what I had no right (to say)" (Soorah Al-Maa'idah- 5:116)

Nor did he worship himself when he worshipped but rather he worshipped Allah. This basic principle is enshrined in the opening chapter of the Qur'aan, known as Soorah Al-Faatihah, verse 4:

"You alone do we worship and from you alone do we seek help".

Elsewhere, in the final book of revelation, the Qur'aan, Allah also said:

"And your Lord says:"Call on Me and I will answer your(prayer)."(Soorsh Mu'min 40:60)

It is worth noting that the basic message of Islam is that Allah and His creation are distinctly different entities. Neither is Allah His creation or a part of it, nor is His creation Him or a part of Him.

This might seem obvious, but, man's worship of creation instead of the Creator is to a large degree based on ignorance of this concept. It is the belief that the

essence of Allah is everywhere in His creation or that His divine being is or was present in some aspects of His creation, which has provided justification for the worship of creation though such worship may be called the worship of Allah through his creation. However, the message of Islam as brought by the prophets of Allah is to worship only Allah and to avoid the worship of his creation either directly or indirectly. In the Qur'aan Allah clearly states:

"For We assuredly sent amongst every people a prophet, (with the command) worship me and avoid false gods " (Soorah Al-Nahl 16:36)

When the idol worshipper is questioned as to why he or she bows down to idols created by men, the invariable reply is that they are not actually worshipping the stone image, but Allah who is present within it. They claim that the stone idol is only a focal point for Allah's essence and is not in itself Allah! One who has accepted the concept of the presence of God's being within His creation in any way will be obliged to accept this argument of idolatry. Whereas, one who understands the basic message of Islam and its implications would never concede to idolatry no matter how it is rationalized. Those who have claimed divinity for themselves down through the ages have often based their claims on the mistaken belief that Allah is present in man. They merely had to assert that although Allah according to their false beliefs, is in all of us, He is more present in them than in the rest of us. Hence, they claim, we should submit our will to them and worship them as they are either God in person or God concentrated within the person.

Similarly, those who have asserted the godhood of others after their passing have found fertile ground among those who accept the false belief of God's presence in man. One who has grasped the basic message of Islam and its implications could never agree to worship another human being under any circumstances. God's religion in essence is a clear call to the worship of the Creator and the rejection of creation-worship in any form. This is the meaning of the motto of Islam:

"Laa Elaaha Illallaah" (There is no god but Allah)

Its repetition automatically brings one within the fold of Islam and sincere belief in it guarantees one Paradise.

Thus, the final Prophet of Islam is reported to have said, "Any one who says: There is no god but Allah and dies holding that (belief) will enter paradise". (Reported by Abu Dharr and collected by Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim).

It consists in the submission to Allah as one God, yielding to Him by obeying His commandments, and the denial of polytheism and polytheists.

THE MESSAGE OF FALSE RELIGION

There are so many sects, cults, religions, philosophies, and movements in the world, all of which claim to be the right way or the only true path to Allah. How can one determine which one is correct or if, in fact, all are correct? The method by which the answer can be found is to clear away the superficial differences in the teachings of the various claimants to the ultimate truth, and identify the central object of worship to which they call, directly or indirectly. False religions all have in common one basic concept with regards to Allah. They either claim that all men are gods or that specific men were Allah or that nature is Allah or that Allah is a figment of man's imagination.

Thus, it may be stated that the basic message of false religion is that Allah may be worshipped in the form of His creation. False religion invites man to the worship of creation by calling the creation or some aspect of it God. For example, prophet Jesus invited his followers to worship Allah but those who claim to be his followers today call people to worship Jesus, claiming that he was Allah!

Buddha was a reformer who introduced a number of humanistic principles to the religion of India. He did not claim to be God nor did he suggest to his followers that he be an object of worship. Yet, today most Buddhists who are to be found outside of India have taken him to be God and prostrate to idols made in their perception of his likeness.

By using the principle of identifying the object of worship, false religion becomes very obvious and the contrived nature of their origin clear. As God said in the Our'aan:

That which you worship besides Him are only names you and your forefathers have invented for which Allah has sent down no authority: The command belongs only to Allah:

He has commanded that you only worship Him; that is the right religion, but most men do not understand ". (Soorah Yoosuf 12:40)

It may be argued that all religions teach good things so why should it matter which one we follow. The reply is that all false religions teach the greatest evil, the worship of creation. Creation-worship is the greatest sin that man can commit because it contradicts the very purpose of his creation. Man was created to worship Allah alone as Allah has explicitly stated in the Our'aan:

"I have only created Jinns and men, that they may worship me"(Soorah Zaareeya 51:56)

Consequently, the worship of creation, which is the essence of idolatry, is the only unforgivable sin. One who dies in this state of idolatry has sealed his fate in the next life. This is not an opinion, but a revealed fact stated by Allah in his final revelation to man:

"Verily Allah will not forgive the joining of partners with Him, but He may forgive (sins) less than that for whom so ever He wishes"(Soorah An- Nisaa 4:48 and 116)

THE UNIVERSALITY OF ISLAM

Since the consequences of false religion are so grave, the true religion of Allah must be universally understandable and attainable, not confined to any people, place or time. There can not be conditions like baptism, belief in a man, as a saviour etc., for a believer to enter paradise. Within the central principle of Islam and in its definition, (the surrender of one's will to God) lies the roots of Islam's universality. Whenever man comes to the realization that Allah is one and distinct from His creation, and submits himself to Allah, he becomes a Muslim in body and spirit and is eligible for paradise. Thus, anyone at anytime in the most remote region of the world can become a Muslim, a follower of God's religion, Islam, by merely rejecting the worship of creation and by turning to Allah (God) alone-It should be noted however, that the recognition of and submission to Allah requires that one chooses between right and wrong and such a choice implies accountability. Man will be held responsible for his choices, and, as such, he should try his utmost to do good and avoid evil. The ultimate good being the worship of Allah alone and the ultimate evil being the worship of His creation along with or instead of Allah. This fact is expressed in the final revelation as follows:

"Verily those who believe, those who follow the Jewish (Scriptures), the Christians and the Sabians any who believe In Allah and the last day, and work righteousness *hall have their reward with their Lord;They will not be overcome by fear nor grief (Soorah Al-Baqarah 2:62).

If only they had stood by the law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that was sent to them from their Lord, they would have enjoyed happiness from every side. There is from among them a party on the right course; but many of them follow a course that is evil.". (Soorah Al-Maa'idah 5:66)

RECOGNITION OF ALLAH

The question which arises here is, "How can all people be expected to believe in Allah given their varying- backgrounds, societies and cultures? For people to be

responsible for worshipping Allah they all have to have access to knowledge of Allah. The final revelation teaches that all mankind have the recognition of Allah imprinted on their souls, a part of their very nature with which they are created.

In Soorah Al-A'raaf, Verses 172-173; Allah explained that when He created Adam, He caused all of Adam's descendants to come into existence and took a pledge from them saying, Am I not your Lord? To which they all replied, " Yes, we testify to It:'

Allah then explained why He had all of mankind bear witness that He is their creator and only true God worthy of worship. He said, "That was In case you (mankind) should say on the day of Resurrection, "Verily we were unaware of all this." That is to say, we had no idea that You Allah, were our God. No one told us that we were only supposed to worship You alone. Allah went on to explain That it was also In case you should say, "Certainly It was our ancestors who made partners (With Allah) and we are only their descendants; will You then destroy us for what those liars did?" Thus, every child is born with a natural belief in Allah and an inborn inclination to worship Him alone called in Arabic the "Fitrah".

If the child were left alone, he would worship Allah in his own way, but all children are affected by those things around them, seen or unseen.

The Prophet (PBUH) reported that Allah said, "I created my servants in the right religion but devils made them go astray". The Prophet (PBUH) also said, "Each child is born in a state of "Fitrah", then his parents make him a Jew, Christian or a Zoroastrian, the way an animal gives birth to a normal offspring. Have you noticed any that were born mutilated?" (Collected by Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim).

So, just as the child submits to the physical laws which Allah has put in nature, his soul also submits naturally to the fact that Allah is his Lord and Creator. But, his parents try to make him follow their own way and the child is not strong enough in the early stages of his life to resist or oppose the will of his parents. The religion which the child follows at this stage is one of custom and upbringing and Allah does not hold him to account or punish him for this religion.

Throughout people's lives from childhood until the time they die, signs are shown to them in all regions of the earth and in their own souls, until it becomes clear that there is only one true God (Allah). If the people are honest with themselves, reject their false gods and seek Allah, the way will be made easy for them but if they continually reject Allah's signs and continue to worship creation, the more difficult it will be for them to escape. For example, in the South Eastern region of the Amazon jungle in Brazil, South America, a primitive tribe erected a new hut to house their main idol Skwatch, representing the supreme God of all creation. The homage to the God, and while he was in prostration to what he had been

taught was his Creator and Sustainer, a mangy old flea-ridden dog walked into the hut, The young man looked up in time to see the dog lift its hind leg and pass urine on the idol. Outraged, the youth chased the dog out of the temple, but when his rage died down he realized that the idol could not be the Lord of the universe. Allah must be elsewhere. he now had a choice to act on his knowledge and seek Allah, or to dishonestly go along with the false beliefs of his tribe. As strange as it may seem, that was a sign from Allah for that young man. It contained within it divine guidance that what he was worshipping was false.

Prophets were sent, as was earlier mentioned, to every nation and tribe to support man's natural belief in Allah and man's inborn inclination to worship Him as well as to reinforce the divine truth in the daily signs revealed by Allah. Although, in most cases, much of the prophets' teachings became distorted, portions remained which point out right and wrong. For example, the ten commandments of the Torah, their confirmation in the Gospels and the existence of laws against murder, stealing and adultery in most societies. Consequently, every soul will be held to account for its belief in Allah and its acceptance of the religion of Islam; the total submission to the will of Allah.

We pray to Allah, the exalted, to keep us on the right path to which He has guided us, and to bestow on us a blessing from Him, He is indeed the Most Merciful. Praise and gratitude be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, and peace and blessings be on prophet Muhammed, his Family, his companions, and those who rightly follow them.

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