

Introduction

What is Islam?

*Islam*¹ means “submitting or surrendering one's will to the will of Allah.”² Humankind's innate disposition naturally submits to the reverence of God; this natural feeling was born with him or her on the day of creation. In reality, the entire universe, through its ordered workings, all submit to the will of God. Modern science calls these phenomena “the laws of nature,” but these laws of nature, from an Islamic perspective, are not just any laws of nature but the laws of God for nature. Human beings depend on, and are in need of God's sustenance and guidance throughout their entire lives; thus, man must yield his self-will and desires to the will of the Creator.

Submission to God does not entail self-humiliation or a denial of human intellect; rather, it means trusting the knowledge, wisdom, and fairness of the Creator. In some form of an act or instance, people involuntary trust and depend on the safety of their lives to others. Hence, the decision to trust a person with more knowledge is logical; therefore, trusting the wisdom of God would not constitute abandoning one's intellect, but rather, it would constitute following one's natural inclination.

Islam has other meanings; one of which is “to have peace.” God says in the Quran,³ **“He is Allah, there is no Allah but Him—the King, the Holy One, and the Peace”** (59:23). Moreover, the Quran states **“And Allah invites to the abode of peace”** (10:25).

By its connotations of peace and safety, Islam indicates that the religion is free from any deficiencies or defects. As a religion, Islam is considered *perfect* because it was ordained by God and not invented or marked by humankind. **“This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion”** (5:3).

Commanded by God, Prophet Abraham was the first person to use the words *Islam* and *Muslim*.⁴ **“It [Islamic monotheism] is the religion of your father Abraham. He [God] has named you Muslims both before and in this [Quran]”** (22:78). **“Abraham was neither a Jew, nor a Christian, but he was a true Muslim [submissive to God] and was not one of the polytheists”** (3:67). Not only did Prophet Abraham call his religion Islam, but the prophets after Abraham also called their religion Islam. Prophet

Joseph, in the chapter entitled “**Joseph**” of the Quran states:

My Lord! You have given me authority and taught me the interpretation of things. O Creator of the heavens and earth! You are my guardian in this world and in the Hereafter. Cause me to die as a Muslim, submitting to Your will, and join me with the righteous (12: 101).

Thus, God declares in the Quran, “**Truly the religion before Allah is Islam**” (3: 19).

Who are the Muslims?

Muslims are the followers of the religion of Islam (those people who submit to the will of God as explained in the Quran and the traditions⁵ of Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Islam). Today, the Muslim population is about 1.2 billion, and it is spread over a vast range of races, nationalities, and cultures.

Approximately 18% of the Muslims live in the Arab world, but the majority live in Asia and Africa. The largest Muslim population is in Indonesia, and a significant number of Muslim minorities exist in Russia, China, and Europe, North America and South America. The Muslim population in the United States is estimated to be around six million.

How does one Become a Muslim?

The basic requirement to become a Muslim is to declare, “*Ashhadu an laa ilaaha illa Allah, wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasul Allah.*” In English this means “I testify that there is no God, but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” Anyone who proclaims this phrase joins the ranks of the Muslim nation (*ummah*).

The statement marks the beginning of one's physical and spiritual journey in practicing the aspects of Islam. A Muslim strives to become one who the Quran terms as the *faithful (mumin)*. Although this journey in becoming faithful may be long, its rewards are numerous for those who embark on it with sincere will and intention.

Practicing Islam requires learning Islamic ideas, teachings, and practices, then adhering to them. Moreover, Islamic practice requires some sacrifice. However, the necessity of sacrifice should not be a deterrent. Prophet Muhammad states, “*Whenever someone gives up something for the sake of God, God will replace it with something better.*”

Sincerity of belief also develops over time. When Prophet Muhammad began spreading the message of Islam, some people came to him and informed him that they were believers in Islam. In reply, God revealed the following verse, “**Say [Muhammad]: 'You believe not,' but say, 'We have submitted to Islam,' for faith has not yet entered your hearts**” (49: 14).

The successor to the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib⁶, has described the dynamic process

of following Islam:

I am defining Islam as no one has defined it before me: Islam is submission, submission is conviction, conviction is affirmation, affirmation is acknowledgement, acknowledgement is performance of obligations, and the performance of obligations is good deeds. [77](#)

- [1.](#) From the Arabic verb aslama, meaning surrender.
- [2.](#) The Arabic word for God.
- [3.](#) Quran: Islam's divine book.
- [4.](#) Muslim refers to a follower of the religion of Islam.
- [5.](#) Hadiths, Sunnah, or traditions are actions, words, and consents of the Prophet Muhammad in matters pertaining to the meaning and practices of Islam which have been transmitted through a line of narrators.
- [6.](#) Imam Ali was Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. Since the age of six, Imam Ali was raised and educated by the Prophet.
- [7.](#) Nahj al-Balagha (The Peak of Eloquence), sermon #125.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/discovering-islam-sayyid-moustafa-al-qazwini/introduction#comment-0>