A Brief Introduction to Islam

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Article

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Islam is the only religion in the world that says that its precepts are natural. The Holy Quran says:

"..It is Allah's Nature on which Allah has created humans. There is no change in Allah's creation. This is the established religion (***deen al-qayyim***) ***but many of the humans know not."*** (***Surat al-Room, 30:30***).

In Islam, the beliefs have primary position; they are the roots, and the practices are branches that are dependent for their existence on the roots. The primary belief is that of the Unity and Supreme Sovereignty of Allah, the Almighty, the Everpresent, the Everlasting, the All-knowing. Allah is Just. He sent prophets to convey His message.

He selected Imams to safeguard His message. He ordained a Day of Judgement when the deeds of His creatures will be measured and rewarded or punished accordingly. Belief in Allah, therefore, entails belief in all of the above.

Islam is the last divine religion and Prophet Muhammad (s) is the last Messenger of Allah. In Islam, Allah has encompassed all His commandments and decrees – decrees that will suffice for humankind til the end of the world. The commandments are there not only to guide His creatures to proper belief, but also to show them the proper way to live their lives. Islam says that its practices are for benefit of the followers, benefit in this world and in the hereafter.

The ethical and moral degeneration of the western society and the predominance of suicide, drug abuse, and crime, seem to clearly indicate that spiritual health of an individual and a community is as important as physical health. The factors of physical and spiritual well-being form the basis of Islamic practices. All that is necessary for a person's spiritual and physical well-being is obligatory, and all that is harmful is haram (prohibited).

Islam shows ways of dealing with the world around us; the responsibilities of a person to oneself, to parents, to siblings, to offspring, to spouses, to neighbors, to society, to nation; what habits to cultivate and what to avoid; what things to possess and what to give away; what time to sleep and what time to wake up; when and how to make love and when and how to refrain from it; when to speak up and when to remain silent; what to eat; how to eat; how to seek knowledge, etc. In short, Islam teaches values and priorities concerned with every walk of life.

Islam fulfills all the needs of the human nature in such a way that by following the path of Islam, a person can attain a state of perfection that is close to divinity. Here is a very brief look at some of the general guidelines that Islam provides for living an ideal life.

The Prophet (May God bless Him and His Descendents) in one of his sermons that have been preserved, said:

O people! Reach the signs that have been fixed for you and get to the destinations that have been determined for you. Verily, the believer strives between two fears: the fear about his past, concerning which he does not know how God would judge it; and the fear for the future, concerning which he does not know what God has decreed therein.

Let the believer take from his (transitory) self that which shall benefit his (abiding) self and from the world that which shall benefit him in the hereafter. Let him benefit from youth before old age comes upon him, and from life before death seizes him. By Him in Whose hands is the life of Mohammad. There is no possibility of penitence after this world and there is no abode after it save heaven or hell (*Usul al-Kafi*, Hadith 191/1599).

Islam has always stressed upon the importance of acquiring knowledge. The book *Nahjul Balagha* quotes the first Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (a):

"O' Kumayl, knowledge is better than wealth. Knowledge guards you, while you have to guard the wealth. Wealth decreases by spending, while knowledge multiplies by spending, and the results of wealth die as wealth decays. O' Kumayl, knowledge is belief which is acted upon. With it man acquires obedience during his life and a good name after his death. Knowledge is the ruler while wealth is ruled upon."

One of the most important relationships in a person's life is that between parents and offspring. In an invocation in *as-Sahifat al-Kaamilah*, the fourth Imam, Ali ibn al-Husayn (a) sheds light on how this relationship should be handled:

O Allah, make me such that I may fear my parents the way one fears a cruel king, that I may act towards them like a merciful mother. And let my obedience toward them and my doing good unto them be more satisfying to me than the sleep of a sleeping person and the quenching of thirst of a thirsty person, so that I may give priority to their desires over my own, and their happiness over my own..... Let my voice be lowered before them, and let my speech be good before them, and let my nature be soft toward them and let my heart be kind toward them and let me be their companion...

What practices should one undertake in dealing with the world around oneself? A part of the answer can be found in the fourth Imam's words:

O Allah, I beg your forgiveness: for not helping the oppressed who suffered oppression in my ken; for not offering thanks in return for some good done unto me; for not accepting the apologies of one who apologized for doing bad unto me; for refusing to give priority over my own needs to the needs of one who had petitioned me.....

Abu Basir says: "A man said to Abu Jafar (the fifth Imam, God's benediction be upon him), 'I am feeble of deeds and my fasts are few. However, I try to eat nothing but that which is lawful.' The Imam said to him, 'What endeavor is better than the effort to remain chaste in respect of one's livelihood and sex

relations?'" (*Usul al-Kafi*, 201/1638).

Usul al-Kafi quotes the sixth Imam, Jafar al-Sadiq (a) as saying: "The noble characteristics are ten. Cultivate them if you can, for these qualities may be found in a man but not in his children, or they may be found in the children but not in their father (i.e. they are not hereditary), or they may be found in a slave and not in a freeman." "What are they?", he was asked.

The Imam said, "They are: sincerity of indifference (to what is in the hands of people), truthfulness, trustworthiness, consideration and care of one's relatives, hospitality, giving food to the beggar, returning the favors done to one, care for one's neighbor, care for one's companion, and modesty, at the head of them all." (190/1552).

In conclusion, a point to remember is that according to Islamic spirit, the first and foremost aim of a believer in following the practices laid down by Islam is to seek Allah's pleasure.

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