Introduction to Islam

The word "ISLAM" is derived from the Arabic words "salaam", which means peace and "taslim", which means submission. The follower of Islam is a Muslim. The word "Muslim" translated to English literally means "the one with peace". To the Muslim it has a greater meaning, Muslims believe that true peace is experienced only when Mankind acknowledges, obeys and worships the Creator, i.e. submits to the One God. So to the Muslim it means "the one who submits in peace".

According to Muslims, Islam is the way of God and the religion of all the prophets; from Adam to the final prophet of God Muhammad (peace be upon them all). The prophet Moses (peace be upon him) said to his people; "Shalom I bring to you". Shalom in Hebrew means Salaam (Arabic). The prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) said to the people; "With Peace I was sent and Peace I bring to you."

Muslims call God "ALLAH", in Arabic it means "the One God", it does not have a plural equivalent and is the only word in the Arabic language which does not have a gender.

The Holy Qu'ran is the book of the Muslims, it was revealed to the last of Allah's prophets and messengers, Muhammad, about 570 years1 after Jesus, in Arabia and took 23 years2 to be fully revealed. The Qur'an describes the nature of the Creator and their (His creatures) relationship towards Him. It conveys the duties of Mankind: to the Creator, to the rest of creation and to itself. To become a Muslim a person has to declare, " there is No god but Allah and Muhammad is His servant and messenger."-This known as the Shahada or the bearing of witness. The message of Islam is:

1. Truth

2. Peace

3. Justice

IMAN ... faith or belief

1. UNITY OF GOD

a) Belief in the ONE GOD (TAWHEED), Allah (Arabic)..... the One God); He is neither male nor female, He has no partners, He does not beget nor was He begotten, He is Omnipotent and Omnipresent, He is the All Compassionate and All Merciful. God does not occupy space, nor is He restricted by time, He does not eat, He does not sleep nor slumber and does not need rest. He is the Master of Time and there is none comparable to Him. He is not like anything or

.resembles any of His creation and He is the Most Just

DIVINE JUSTICE .2

Allah has commanded Mankind to be just while He Himself treats us with something even better, namely, grace. He says; "Whoso bringeth a good deed will receive tenfold the like thereof, while whoso bringeth an evil deed will be awarded the like thereof; and they shall not be wronged." [Qur'an 6:161] Justice (al-'adl) means that He requites a good act with a good act and an evil act with an evil act. The Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.&f) said; "None ever enters Paradise by virtue of their (good) actions, except by the mercy of Allah the Glorious and .Mighty

PROPHETHOOD .3

The belief in the prophets and Messengers that Allah sent as a Mercy and Guide to Mankind so that they would arrive at the truth and be at peace. Some of the prophets came with the Holy Books and are known as Messengers. Some of the prophets of Islam, mentioned in the Holy Qur'an are: Adam - the first man, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, Saleh, John, Jesus and Muhammad - the Last of the prophets and Messengers (peace be upon them all). The belief in One God and the finality of the .Prophethood of Muhammad is an article of faith

IMAMATE .4

The prophets were truthful and never committed mistakes3. They always left behind infallible vicegerents4 (deputies) and sometimes generations of vicegerents, to continue guiding in the same manner as they had done. Through the Imamate the covenant made with Abraham (as) .is preserved

DIVINE REVELATIONS .5

The books mentioned in the Qur'an are: Torah - Moses, Psalms - David and Solomon, Evangel .- Jesus, and Qur'an - Muhammad

RESURRECTION .6

Belief in the Day of Judgement when all of Mankind will be Resurrected from the dead and questioned on how they spent their time in the material universe. According to Islam all mankind above the age of puberty will be judged on their knowledge and how they acted upon it. For example a knowledgeable person will not be judged like a ignorant person. If a person knowingly commits an act which is evil/bad then he/she has sinned in the 'eyes of God'; for this reason Muslims believe that some non-Muslims will go to Heaven (those who unknowingly committed mistakes).

7. THE HEREAFTER

The Hereafter is Eternal and consists of Heaven and Hell. The good will occupy one of the seven Heavens and the Evil will occupy Hell.

8. THE BELIEF IN THE EXISTENCE OF ANGELS AND JINN

Belief in The Jinn and in The Angels. The Angels being created of the purest form of light, i.e. light with no heat; The Jinn being created of the purest form of fire, i.e. heat with no smoke and of course5 Man being created of the purest form of matter i.e. something that is affected by time, has mass and occupies space.

9. ENJOINING GOOD AND FORBIDDING EVIL (Amar bil Ma'ruf wa Nahy an al-Munkar)

To believe and practice; that the duty of all Muslims is to abstain from evil and direct others to goodness.

10. SALAT..... submission five times daily

This is the five daily submission and remembrance of Allah the Creator. Muslims must face the Ka'bah (the First House built by Mankind) in Makkah (Mecca) in Arabia. Salat also incorporates a prayer (du'a) but the prayer does not necessarily have to be said during salat. Prayers can be said at any time.

Salat is performed by every Muslim above the age of puberty6, who is sane and in good health; at dawn, afternoon, before sunset, after sunset and after nightfall. It involves physical movements of the limbs and recitation of short verses, in Arabic, from the Qur'an.

Salat involves making the intention of submission to the Creator, recitation of short verses from the Holy Qur'an, bowing, standing, sitting and prostrating on the earth with the forehead

and praising God while doing these acts. We commence salat by saying "God is Great" (Allahu Akbar) once and ending it by saying "God is Great" three times.

The intention for the Dawn Salat is: "Oh Allah my Creator and my Lord, I intend to offer two rakath of salat for Fajr. I face the Ka'bah and I submit only to You".

Each unit of: Recitation, bowing, standing, prostrating and sitting is called the Rakath.

The five daily prayers are:

* Fajr (the Dawn Salat) must be performed after the first appearance of light and before sunrise - two rakath.
* Dhur (the Mid-day Salat) time for salat starts immediately after "proper" noon and must be performed before the afternoon salat - four rakath.
* Asr (the Afternoon Salat) starts immediately after the Mid-day Salat and must be performed before sunset - four rakath.
* Maghrib (the Dusk Salat) starts in between dusk and nightfall and can be said up to mid-night "proper"- three rakath.
* Isha' (the Night Salat) starts immediately after the Dusk salat has been performed and must be completed before Dawn - four rakath.
* While travelling the Dhur, Asr and Isha' prayers are shortened7 to two rakath.

If two or more people are present, the salat should be said in congregation, where the salat is lead by one person (imam).

When performing salat the person has to be physically and ceremonially/spiritually clean. Physical cleanliness is maintained by washing unclean (najis) things away from the body, i.e. washing after using the toilet, touching dead or unclean animals, blood etc..... . Spiritual cleanliness is carried out by performing ablution; before praying or reading the Holy Qu'ran. The place of salat has to be clean and the consent of the owner of that place must be obtained beforehand in order to perform salat.

SIYAM..... fasting in Ramadan .11

It is obligatory for a sane person who has attained the age of puberty to fast during the month of Ramadan except if the person is travelling or is ill; or if a woman is in her monthly periods or is bleeding after the delivery of a child. The intention of fasting from Dawn to Dusk must be made beforehand. e.g. "I intend to fast tomorrow in the month of Ramadan to attain nearness to you Oh Allah, my Lord and Creator, I only fast for You." Fasting for Muslims is abstaining from all things which invalidate it. According to Shari'ah (Islamic Law) the following in validate a fast:

* eating

* drinking

* sexual intercourse

* to take liquid enema

* to allow dust, smoke or steam to enter into the throat

* to remain in the state of uncleanness until dawn

* to submerge ones' head under water to tell lies (by words, writing or sign) about Allah, His Prophets or Imams

* to vomit intentionally

* to become ill

The end of Ramadan is celebrated as Eid-ul-Fitr one the 1st of Shawwal (the 1st day after the end of the month of Ramadan) by giving alms (zakat-ul-fitr) to the needy, attending morning .prayers (Salat-ul-Eid) and a feast. Children receive presents on this day

Zakath and Khums8 ..... poor-tax and one-fifth tax .12

ZAKAT poor-tax: to be distributed to the poor One and a half percent of the total value of the9 following items after all expenses have to be paid as zakat:

* foodstock

* livestock

* gold coins

* silver coins

It is also recommended to pay zakat on business capital; and also on profits gained from business. It is obligatory to make intention when paying zakat.

II. KHUMS one-fifth or wealth-tax; payable by the wealthy.

In addition to Zakat it is an obligation on wealthy Muslims to pay Khums.

Khums means one-fifth from the word khamsa in Arabic for five. Twenty percent of the total value on the following items must be paid as khums:

* wealth which is gained after a just war

* minerals like: gold, silver, oil, iron, salt ...etc.. extracted from ores or the ground buried treasure

* wealth from the sea e.g. pearls.

* wealth where halal & haram has been unintentionally mixed and the amounts are unknown

* all profits from business, agriculture, industry or rent from land or property or any other source of income. After deducting yearly expenses Khums becomes due on net profit.

* land bought by non-Muslim Zimmi (a non-Muslim citizen paying a fixed tax) from a Muslim.

Khums is divided into five parts and each part is allocated for:

* Jihad

* Propagation of Islam

* needy Muslim relatives of the Prophet

* the poor and the orphans

* travellers who have unwittingly become short of funds

Khums can only be distributed by a legitimate ruler of an Islamic State or a10 mujtahid or a pious descendent of the Holy Prophet.

The following Qur'anic Verse commands Muslims to pay the Khums and how to distribute it: "And know that out of all that ye may gain a11 fifth share is assigned to Allah and to the apostle and to near relatives, orphans, the needy and the wayfarer if ye do believe in Allah and in the revelation We sent down to Our servant on the day of testing the day of the meeting of the two forces. For Allah hath power over all things." (Qur'an 8:41)

It is clear from the above Qur'anic verse and the Hadeeth12, that to pay the khums is obligatory on all Muslims. In the above verse Allah says ..only those who pay the khums believe in Allah .and the Revelations

Hajj ... pilgrimage to Makkah (MECCA) .13

The yearly Pilgrimage13 to Makkah where the First House that was built by Adam and rebuilt by Abraham (Arab-Ibraham) and his first born - Ishmael (Arab-Ismail). This House is known as the Holy Ka'bah. The pilgrimage day also commemorates the day when Abraham was commanded by God to give his first born as a sacrifice.

The last day of Hajj and the two days following are called Eid-ul-Ahza, day of sacrifice, on this day a special congregational morning salat is offered and an animal is sacrificed to thank Allah for the sparing the life of Abraham's son, the meat (4/5th) being distributed to the poor. All the rituals performed during Hajj are re-enactments of the deeds and actions of Prophet Abraham (a.s) and his Household.

On one corner of the Ka'bah, which is a cubic shaped house built of bricks and covered by a black cloth, is placed the black stone. The stone was sent from heaven as a sign to mankind and Adam (peace be upon him) was instructed to place it in one corner of the House of God. !The black stone is the corner stone of the building

JIHAD..... Striving in the way of God .14

Working for an honest living, studying to obtain knowledge, being kind to fellow creatures, helping the needy, being obedient to parents and teachers is Jihad. It is also Jihad when fighting to liberate the oppressed (the oppressed can be any of Allah's creatures) against the aggressors. Striving for justice in the way animals are treated can be classified as Jihad. The ultimate Jihad in Islam is fighting within one's self in order to destroy false pride, hate, envy .and greed

THE MUSLIM SOCIETY .15

The Muslims adhere to a strict dress code (hijab), abstain from certain types of food and drink. The Muslim men and women have to be modest in the way they dress. They must not dress provocatively in order not to offend others. They must not dress too extravagantly in order to avoid others envy.

Muslims are not allowed to eat pork or the flesh of unclean animals. They are not allowed to eat the flesh of animals which may be clean, but they have not been bled since blood is also forbidden. When the animal is slaughtered without invoking the name of God, then the meat is also forbidden (haram). Alcohol, drugs and all intoxicants are haram. Anything that is acquired by haram means i.e. theft, selling alcohol is haram.

Everything that is forbidden is called haram, and everything that is permissible is known as .halal

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND RACIAL EQUALITY .16

Islam places great importance on social justice and equality of man. Muslims are taught that all mankind is14 equal in the eyes of God, be he rich or poor, black or white, man or woman, Arab or non-Arab, except for the pious who are always superior. We believe that each individual is responsible for his or her actions so that the parent is not responsible for the actions of the child and nor the child responsible for the action of the parent. We also believe that God the Most Just (al-Adhil) will only judge us according to our knowledge and how we .acted upon that knowledge

THE SHI'AH AND SUNNI (The two Orthodox Islamic Schools) .17

After the death of the Holy Prophet the Muslims were divided into two schools - the Shi'ah and

the Sunni. Both agree that the religious rites and law (Shari) depend on existence of a vicegerent (deputy) and the representative of the Prophet. This person is the religious leader (Imam) of the faith and the faithful, the Supreme Jurist (Marja) and the Head of the Muslim Nation (Caliph).

According to the Shi'ah school, this leadership can only be occupied by the descendants of Abraham through his son Ishmael (peace be upon them) and his descendants (i.e. Muhammad and his descendants). The Imam (leader) must also be infallible (masoom) and cannot perform any sin or mistake, since God will not allow the Muslims to be led astray by a wrongful person because he will not send any other Prophet after Muhammad to guide mankind. The Shi'ah also believe after Muhammad (peace be upon him & his descendants) there are only Twelve Imams;

the first being Ali (peace be upon him), the cousin, the adopted son and son-in-law of the Holy Prophet (also accepted by the Sunni's as the fourth Caliph); and the last being the Mahdi (peace be upon him), the Awaited Saviour. Both Shi'ah and Sunni believe that the prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) will reappear during the time of the Twelfth Imam.

Islam teaches the Muslims to live their lives according to what is revealed in the Holy Qur'an and the way or example of the Prophet Muhammad (the Sunnah). The Shi'ah claim that the Sunnah can only be taught by the Twelve Imams (peace be upon them), because only they, like the prophets are infallible; and cannot knowingly or unknowingly mislead the People. The Shi'ah also believe that the head of the government (Caliph) is a function of the Imam.

The Sunni school believe the head of the government (Caliphs) does not have to be infallible and also does not have to be a descendant of Ishmael. After the death of the Prophet they accepted the caliphate of Abu Bakr a companion of the Prophet. They accept the Twelve Imams as very pious scholars;

along with others, but do not accept them as leaders of the community. They accept religious teachings from the Imams as well as from the companions of the Prophet; and even some disciples of these companions; and make religious decisions on consensus (the Shi'ah accept only the teachings from the Imams who according to them are the direct authority from Allah and his Messenger and there is no need for consensus regarding their judgement).

The Sunni's themselves are divided into four other schools which have some minor differences in religious law.

Although differences exist between the Shi'ah and the Sunni schools, they cannot be compared to the differences between, for example, the Catholics and Protestants in Christianity since; both Shi'ah and Sunni follow the same Holy Book (The Qur'an), they accept each other as

Muslims, they pray in the same mosques, and Shi'ah-Sunni marriages are accepted by both schools.

Today, the World Muslim population is around two billion, the majority (70%) comprising the four Sunni schools and the rest being Shi'ah.

Heretical Sects

There are other groups such as: the Nusairi, the Ismaili, the Nation of Islam, the Qadhiani etc... comprising less than 5% of the total Muslim population, who claim to be Muslim but are rejected as heretics by both Shi'ah and Sunni schools.

References :

1- The Prophet was born on 29 August 570 A.C. (after Christ).

2- Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) declared his Messengership (Risalaa) at the age of 40 years, the Qur'an was revealed piecemeal over 23 years and the Prophet passed away six months after its completion.

3- Infallible.

4- Imams. According to some of the Muslims the Imam does not necessarily have to be appointed by Allah and neither be infallible. To them the matter of Imamate is not different from the position of Caliphate (governorship) and is an issue of fiqh (jurisprudence) and not a part of belief. All Muslims agree that after the death of the Holy Prophet a person had to replace his leadership to such an extent that some of the people decided to elect a leader even before the burial rites of the Prophet (sawas) had been performed.

5- Man was created in body and soul last; according to the Qur'an, long after the creation of the Jinn, but the Spirits (ruh') of Man were the first of all creation.

6- 9-10 years of age for girls and 14-15 years age for boys, in general.

7 Known as kasr.

8- Zakat and Khums are not payable on jewellery worn by women, regardless of quantity. How much is for personal use i.e. for wearing and how much is for investment is solely left at the discretion of the female owner. However, zakat and khums is payable on gold and silver owned as an investment by both men and women. It is haram for men to were gold articles. Gold plated articles like watches etc. may be worn by men. (Articles of Islamic Acts by Imam Al-Khoei)

9- Basically surplus food, clothes and wages.

10- Recognised Islamic Jurist.

11- Arabic-khums: English- a fifth.

12- Utterances and actions of Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family, recorded in different collections of books. Completely different than the Qur'an which is the Revelation from God, Muhammad being only the conveyer of this Revelation. These Collections are similar to the Four "Gospels" recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John making up the New Testament of the Christian Bible, since they are not the revelations from God but only what the authors claim to be the actions and utterances of the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him).

13- A Muslim must perform Haj at least once in his or her lifetime if physically and financially able.

14- The Sermon of the Mount, delivered by the Last Prophet and Messenger of Allah; Muhammad, peace be upon him and his descendants, on his farewell Pilgrimage in Makkah a few months before his death. (.....All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; the wealthy have no superiority over the poor nor the poor have superiority over the wealthy; ; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action ...).