



Frequently Asked Questions on Islam and the Muslims: Part 4

This is a series aimed at creating a thorough understanding of the essential teachings that underlie Islam, mainly for non-Muslims, in a brief, yet concise manner.

Question 4: Can you explain the Muslim's declaration of Faith and what it means and signifies?

The belief of a Muslim is summarised in the declaration of faith known as the kalimah (meaning: a word) and this is:

Laa ilaaha illAllaaha Muhammadur-Rasoolullaah

The meaning of this: "There is nothing which has the right to be worshipped except Allaah¹ (alone) and Muhammad is His Messenger", and it contains a negation and an affirmation. The negation is that of anything having the right of being worshipped, and the affirmation is the right of worship for Allaah alone.

Muslims believe that this Universe, by necessity, has a Creator. It is hard for a person's common sense to encompass that the Universe with all its order and regulation is a product of mere chance. One of the scholars of Islaam, known as Abu Haneefah (d. 150H) once debated some atheists. He asked them: "What do you say about someone who tells you that he had seen a loaded ship without a captain and a crew amidst a strong storm, but sailing well towards a safe harbour [thereby saving itself]? Do you intelligently accept this?" They said: "Our reasoning cannot accept this". Abu Haneefah then commented: "If your reasoning does not accept the story of a ship without a leading crew, then how do you accept a whole universe with all its varied conditions and complex nature running without a Creator in full charge?" So the atheists were dumbfounded and came to believe in Allaah. Allaah says in the Qur'aan:

Verily, in the creation of the Heavens and the Earth, and in the alternation of the night and day, and the ships that sail through the sea with that which is of benefit to human-kind, and the rain which Allaah sends down from the sky and makes the earth alive therewith after its death, and the moving (living)

¹ The word Allaah is comprised of two words: Al - which is the definite article and Ilaah - which means something that is worshipped. Thus, Allaah (a combination of these two words) means: The true object of worship. Allaah is the same 'God' that Jews and Christians believe in and it is wrong to assume that Allaah is the Muslim 'God'. In fact, the Hebrew word for 'God' is 'Eloh' which is similar to 'Ilaah' in Arabic.

creatures of all kinds that He scatters therein, and in the changes in the direction of the winds, and the clouds which are held between the sky and the earth, are indeed Aayaat (proofs, signs, evidences) for a people of understanding [Baqarah 2:164]

Thus, Muslims believe in the existence of Allaah, that He is the Originator and Creator of the Universe², (though is not actually the essence or the subject of the meaning of the kalimah). It follows therefore, that Muslims hold that the universe and everything within it has a definite purpose. As Allaah has said:

I have not created Men and Jinn except that they may worship Me [Dhaariyaat 51:56]

In this one short sentence, Allaah has explained clearly to human-kind the purpose of their existence, something, for which philosophers, scientists and intellectuals have never been able, in the duration of human-kind's existence, to provide a conclusive and unanimous answer. Worship, here, is a comprehensive term, covering every single aspect of life, whether related to one's personal life, or related to the others.

It is also possible for there to exist other 'gods' because the definition of a 'god' in Islaam, is something that is adored or worshipped or given obedience, or which is the centre of people's emotions - such as love, fear, hope, reliance, trust etc. Therefore, many things can

² One of the prominent historical Scholars of Islaam, Ibn al-Qayyim stated, "...Hence, the handiwork (of Allaah) is amongst the things that give the clearest of evidences to His Attributes and to the truthfulness of that which the Messengers informed about him. The handiwork of Allaah bears testimony to the truthfulness of the signs (*aayaat*) that are heard and indicate the [appropriateness and correctness] of seeking evidence in the signs in the handiwork (of Allaah).

The Exalted said, **"We will show them Our Signs in the universe, and in their own selves, until it becomes manifest to them that this (the Qur'aan) is the truth"**. (Fussilat 41:53)

Meaning that the Qur'aan is the truth. So he has informed that He will surely show them from the signs that are observed and witnessed what will make clear to them that His signs (verses) which are recited are true..." End quote (from "Al-Fawaa'id" of Ibn al-Qayyim).

In the Qur'aan Allaah has spoken of many natural phenomena in detail. So much so that when certain scientists were asked to investigate some of the statements in the Qur'aan they were quite surprised to find the kind of knowledge contain therein. Professor E. Marshal Johnson, (Chairman of the Dept. of Anatomy, Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, USA) when he became aware of statements in the Qur'aan about embryology commented: "The Qur'aan describes not only the development of external form but emphasises also the internal stages - the stages inside the embryo of its creation and development, emphasising major events recognised by contemporary science... If I was to transpose myself into that era, knowing what I do today and describing things, I could not describe the things that were described... I see no evidence to refute the concept that this individual Muhammad had to be developing this information from some place... so I see nothing in conflict with the concept that divine intervention was involved..." The famous embryologist, Dr. Keith Moore, author of the standard university text-book on embryology, 'The Developing Human', also commented: "It has been a pleasure for me to help clarify statements in the Qur'aan about Human Development. It is clear to me that these statements must have come to Muhammad from God or Allaah because almost all of this knowledge was not discovered until many centuries later. (Refer to the book "The Developing Human, with Islamic Additions" by Keith Moore, 1982, WB Saunders and Company).

become 'gods' and can be made into 'gods' by people. Such things include: money, status, power, leaders, parents, idols, music, pop-stars, drugs and other created things. People make these things into 'gods' because they believe that these things can give them whatever they want, that they can find true satisfaction in these things, as well as honour and power. So once they have decided that their goal in life is money, or drugs, or status, or power, or authority - they have made it their 'god' i.e. that thing they believe can provide them with satisfaction and freedom from anxiety. And all the actions that they perform in order to get these things or which will lead them to these things is their form of 'worship' of these 'gods'. Allaah has said:

And they have taken (for worship), besides Allaah, other gods, that they might give them honour, power and glory [Maryam 19:81]

This is why Allaah has forbidden the worship of other things since in that lies the greatest humiliation and subjugation: The enslavement and worship of man (or material things), by man. One of the generals of the Muslim army, in the earliest times of Islaam, in approaching a certain district said to its people: "We have come to liberate whomsoever Allaah wills from among His Servants, from the worship of men by men to the worship of the Lord of all Men."

Muslims believe that Allaah - the One True God - alone has control over life and death, that He alone sends the rain and bestows sustenance, that He alone can save people when in distress and in trouble, that He alone controls and owns whatever is upon the Earth and in the Universe and may direct it in whichever way He wills. And hence, for true satisfaction and peace or ease of mind, He alone should be made the object of people's yearning and desire, and He alone, turned to for the things that people seek and need. From this perspective the worship of other things besides Allaah, can be seen to be futile and useless and this is why the worshipping of saints, prophets, angels, idols and other created, material things is considered the worst evil a human can commit.

Allaah mentions many times that when people are in distress they know deep inside that there is one thing alone that can save them or remove the harm from them, and that is Allaah. Even an atheist, when his life is in danger and there is no other way out will have a hope in his heart that something can save him. This 'something' he has a hope in is actually Allaah, since the hearts have an instinctive belief in and acknowledgement of a Supreme Creator and this is one of the proofs that Allaah exists. Allaah explains this reality many times in the Qur'aan:

It is He who enables you to travel through the land and sea, till when you are in the ships and they (the ships) sail with them (the people) while there is a favourable wind, they are glad due to it. Then comes a stormy wind and the waves come to them from all sides and they think that they will be engulfed by them - then - they call upon Allaah, making their faith purely for Him alone, saying: "If you deliver us from this, we shall truly be amongst the grateful." But when he delivers them, behold they rebel (disobey Allaah) in the earth wrongfully. [Yoonus 10:22-23]

So in times of dire hardship and need people return to the only thing they know can help and deliver them and that is the One True God - Allaah.

This, then is the meaning of: “None has the right to be worshipped except Allaah (alone)”, the first part of a Muslim’s declaration of his faith - that no created thing is deserving of, or has the right to subservience and worship. Rather, Allaah alone, by virtue of His being the Originator, Owner and Controller of the Universe has this sole right.

The second part of a Muslim’s declaration is: “Muhammad is His Messenger”. Muslim’s believe that from time to time Allaah sent Prophets to convey His Message - in order to inform human-kind about the purpose of their existence and how to fulfil that purpose. Thus, he sent Abraham, Noah, Moses, Jesus and also Muhammad (peace be upon them all), as well as all the other Prophets sent throughout history. Allaah said:

And We have raised in every community a Messenger (proclaiming): “Worship Allaah alone, and avoid false gods.” [Nahl 16:36]

Muslim’s believe that the Message of all the Prophets is one and the same, namely, the call to the worship of the One True God alone, and avoiding the worship of other things besides Him, as has been explained above.

The role of the Prophet’s is to exemplify to human-kind how they are supposed to fulfil their duty to their Lord and Creator, Allaah - the One True God and how they are to worship Him alone - without associating or setting up partners with Him. Thus every Prophet had with him a code, an example or a ‘model of behaviour’, which is essentially an exemplification of the meanings and requirements of the Scripture. Muslim’s believe that the example of Prophet Muhammad who is the last of the Prophet’s sent by Allaah to human-kind is the practical and physical way to perform one’s worship of Allaah - and therefore, the way to live a meaningful and purposeful life upon this earth. This code, termed the Sunnah (meaning: a way), is comprehensive. It includes such things as how to eat, how to dress, how to do business, how to pray, how to maintain a family, how to be an upright, decent and moral person, how to behave with other humans, how to behave with nature, how to govern a country or state. It includes every facet of life. And thus we can understand the saying of Allaah:

He it is Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger (Muhammad) from among themselves, reciting to them His Verses, purifying them (from the filth of disbelief and polytheism), and teaching them the Book (this Qur’aan,) and the Wisdom (meaning the Sunnah: legal ways, orders, acts of worship, etc. of Prophet Muhammad). And verily, they had been before in manifest error. [Jumu’ah 62:2]

There is in the Messenger of Allaah, a beautiful pattern of conduct for whoever hopes in (Meeting with) Allaah and the Last Day and remembers Allaah much. [Ahzaab 33:21]

To a Muslim therefore, the religion of Islaam is a complete and perfect way of life and hence the saying of Allaah in the Qur'aan:

This day have I perfected for you, your religion, completed My favour upon you and have chosen for you, Islaam as your religion. [Maa'idah 5:3]

This is what ties more than a billion Muslims - world-wide - together. This declaration of faith: "Laa ilaaha illAllaaha Muhammadur-Rasoolullaah (There is nothing that has the right to be worshipped except Allaah alone, and Muhammad is His Messenger)", which consists of just a few words but has a comprehensive meaning, touching upon every single aspect of a human's life.

It is also important to note that despite the kalimah tying the Muslims together, there are those amongst the Muslims who have innovated into the religion, that which is not from it, and as a result separated from the main body of the Muslims, in their beliefs, statements and actions. This does not mean that they are expelled from Islaam, but they have deviated somewhat. Hence, the existence of sects within Islaam. However, as Islaam is the final revealed way of life for all times, and as the Qur'aan and it's preserved explanation by the Prophet (sallallaahu alaihi wasallam) will always be known, the pure Islaam, therefore, will always remain and will always be accessible.

Those who have deviated from the sound understanding of the kalimah and what it requires are numerous and it is not appropriate to discuss them in answer to the current question. But they will be addressed later in this series.