

“Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travellers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God.”
(Quran 2:177)



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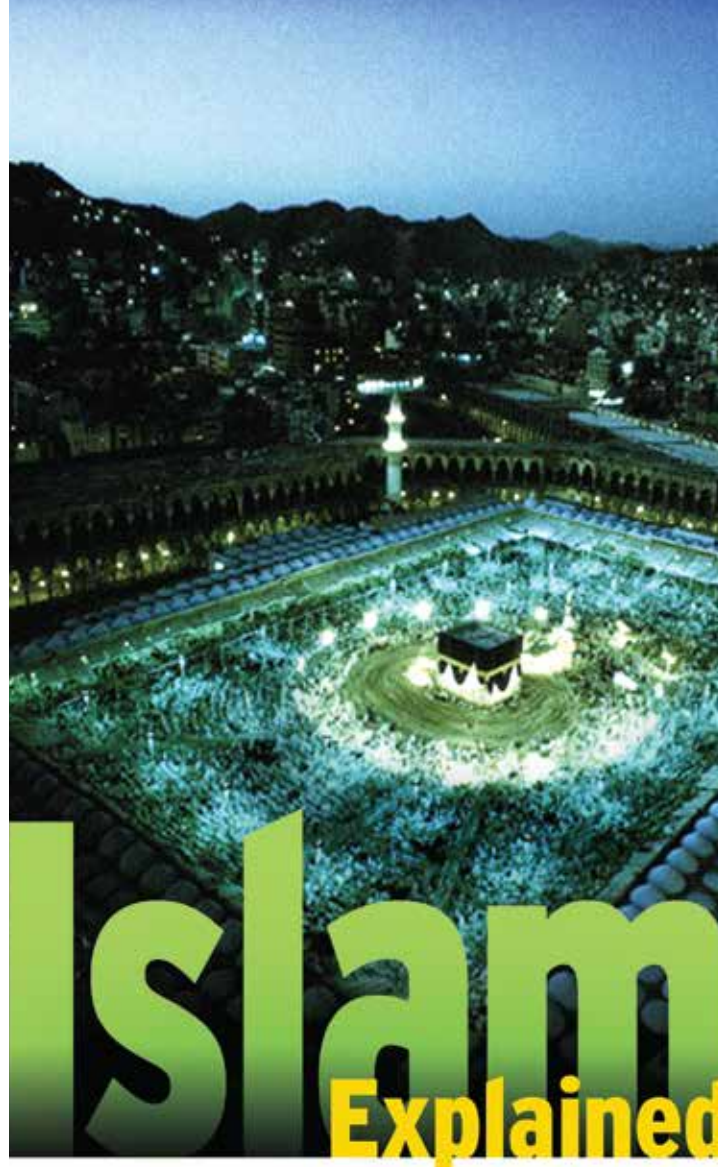
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AN ICNA PROJECT

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Islam completes the long chain of guidance from God to humanity. Meticulously preserved and thoroughly documented, Islam’s message has a familiar resonance with other Abrahamic religions, owing to their shared history and common values. As such, Islam emphasizes a return to basic principles of faith: belief in one God, righteous living, holistic worship and conviction in the afterlife – along with remembering our purpose in life.

Islam is a faith and comprehensive way of life that literally means ‘peace through submission to God.’ It provides a clear understanding of a person’s relationship with God, purpose in life and ultimate destiny. A **Muslim** is someone who adopts the Islamic way of life by believing in the Oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad^P. Today, Islam is one of the fastest growing religions and is practiced by more than 1.6 billion Muslims across the world.

The most essential principle in Islam is the purely monotheistic belief in one God. God is the Creator of everything in the universe and is unique from His creation. Muslims are encouraged to develop a direct and personal relationship with God without any intermediaries. Muslims often refer to God as *Allah*, which simply means “God” in the Arabic language. Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians also refer to God as *Allah*. God describes Himself in the holy book of Muslims, the Quran (also spelled ‘Koran’), by stating:

“Say, ‘He is God the One, God the eternal. He begot no one nor was He begotten. No one is comparable to Him’” (Quran 112:1-4).

A UNIVERSAL FAITH

Islam is the culmination of the universal message of God taught by all of His prophets. Muslims believe that a prophet was chosen for every nation at some point in their history, enjoining them to worship God alone and

delivering guidance on how to live virtuously. Some of the prophets of God include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, peace be upon them all. The prophets all conveyed the consistent divine message of worshipping one God, along with specific societal laws for each nation’s circumstances.

However, after the prophets delivered the divine guidance to their people, their message was lost, abandoned or changed over time, with only parts of the original message intact. God then sent another prophet to rectify their beliefs. In order to restore the original call of all prophets, God sent Muhammad^P as the final prophet to all of humanity in the 7th century C.E.

In 610 C.E., Angel Gabriel visited Muhammad^P with the first divine message. For the next 23 years, he continued to receive revelations until the message was completed. Muhammad^P called people towards the belief in one God and encouraged them to be just and merciful to one another. He was a living example of God’s guidance for the benefit of the entire humankind.

“Then We revealed to you [Muhammad], ‘Follow the creed of Abraham, a man of pure faith who was not an idolater’” (Quran 16:123).

Muslims also believe that God sent revealed books as guidance to humanity through His prophets. These include the Torah given to Moses, the Gospel conferred

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upon Jesus and the Quran received by Muhammad^P. The Quran is the last revelation from God, consisting of God's literal speech. It confirms the truths that have survived from the previous scriptures and maintains the same core message of worshiping God and living righteously. God has ensured that the Quran is protected from corruption, safeguarding it for all of humanity to benefit from until the end of time. It is the only holy book that has been meticulously preserved in its original text.

PURPOSE OF LIFE

Islam clearly addresses one of the most central and challenging questions in human history: "What is the purpose of life?" God declares in the Quran, "*And I did not create ... mankind except to worship Me*" (Quran 51:56). For Muslims, the purpose of life is to worship God, the Creator of all things. Worship in Islam is a comprehensive concept that urges people to be conscious of God throughout their daily lives and provides a framework to help people live a balanced and virtuous life.

This way of life promotes strong moral character, good relations with people as well as just and harmonious societies. Devoting one's self to a life of submission to God is the key to attaining a true sense of peace because it produces a balance of spiritual needs with worldly affairs. It also lends special meaning to the concept of living one's life responsibly, aware of the accountability to come in the hereafter.

Belief in the Day of Judgment is extremely important in Islam. This event will signal the transition between the temporary life of this world to the eternal life in the hereafter. On that day, people will be resurrected and held accountable for their deeds in life, which will determine their eternal destination in Heaven or Hell. Many verses in the Quran describe the events on the

Day of Judgment in great detail and give a description of Heaven and Hell.

WORSHIP IN ISLAM

Worship in Islam is woven into the daily life of a Muslim and is not confined to a holy place. The fundamental aspects of worship in Islam are encompassed within five pillars, which enable Muslims to cultivate their relationship with God.

1. Testimony of Faith (Shahadah): The first of the five basic foundations is knowingly and voluntarily asserting that, "There is nothing worthy of worship except God, and Muhammad^P is the Messenger of God." This statement is the basis of faith in Islam, affirming that no partners can be associated with God and Muhammad^P is His final prophet. As a result of this belief, Muslims seek guidance in life through God's revelation (the Quran) and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad^P.

2. Prayer (Salah): Muslims are required to pray five times a day to maintain a spiritual connection with God and remind themselves of their ultimate purpose in life. Through sincerity, repentance and direct prayer to God, Muslims strive to establish a personal spiritual relationship with their Creator all throughout the day. This prayer includes physical motions of bowing and prostrating, which were also performed by Jesus, Moses and the prophets before them, peace be upon them all.

3. Charity (Zakah): This is an annual charity given to the poor. Muslims must give 2.5% of their wealth to help the poor, the needy and the oppressed. Charity is one of the vital sources of social welfare in Islam, encouraging a just society where everyone's basic needs are provided for.

4. Fasting (Sawm): Muslims fast during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim lunar calendar, by refraining from eating, drinking and sexual

interaction from dawn to sunset. It is an act of self-restraint and spiritual cleansing that increases one's empathy for the less fortunate and enables one to consciously control bad habits such as foul language, idle talk and anger. Fasting also helps people develop strong willpower as they overcome the essential desires of their body and the damaging acts of their speech.

5. Pilgrimage (Hajj): The pilgrimage (journey) to Mecca is an act that every Muslim must perform once in their life if they are physically and financially able. It symbolizes the unity of humankind as Muslims from every race and nationality assemble together in equality to worship God, following the traditions of Prophet Abraham.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

These primary acts of worship urge individuals to fulfill their purpose in life by becoming more conscious of God and serving the practical needs of society. However, worship is not limited to simply completing these acts. Islam promotes a holistic approach to worship that encompasses spreading justice and compassion in the world through one's daily interactions with people. Smiling at someone, visiting the sick and defending an innocent person who is being oppressed are all considered acts of worship as well. These forms of worship exemplify the importance of good manners in Islam. Muhammad^P once said, "**The best among you are those who have the best character.**"

Islam is a practical way of life that positively transforms people's individual connection to God and fellow humans. Islam offers guidance on all matters of life, including one's diet, manners and social relationships. God tells Muslims to eat everything "*good and pure*" while adhering to simple dietary restrictions such as avoidance of pork, alcohol and anything slaughtered in the name of other than God. When it comes to dressing and behavior, modesty and humility are ordained for both men and women. Muhammad^P has stated, "**Every religion has an essential character and the essential character of Islam is modesty.**"

Islam acknowledges the many filial and social roles of humans and urges active participation. Parental obedience and dutifulness is integral to Islam. Men and women are to sanctify their relations in a marital contract, taking their spousal roles and family units seriously. Raising children who are morally upright and responsible participants in their communities is also a significant obligation. The preservation of family ties is a fundamental principle of Islam, along with kind treatment of orphans, widows, travelers and neighbors. Professional and philanthropic contributions to one's society are encouraged in order to nurture individual and collective success.

God calls on people to remember Him in all of their actions and purify their hearts so that they can live a truly balanced life. Spirituality in Islam is about nurturing tolerance, kindness, control, righteousness and forgiveness while shunning arrogance, pride, ego, anger and selfishness. This spirituality and God-consciousness should be reflected in a person's interactions with other people. Therefore, Islam stresses the importance of treating people with respect, mercy and dignity.

In conclusion, Islam is not a new way of life; rather, it maintains the same message God sent to humanity through all of His messengers. Islam teaches people how to have a meaningful relationship with God, without any intermediaries, and how to reform their souls, beautify their character and be part of a vibrant, healthy community. Through this message, God encourages individuals to draw closer to Him and fulfill their purpose in life.

"Truly it is in the remembrance of God that hearts find peace"
(Quran 13:28).

Note: The superscript "^P" next to Prophet Muhammad^P represents the invocation Muslims say with his name:

May God's peace and blessings be upon him.