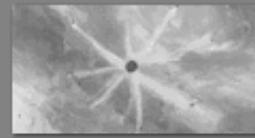
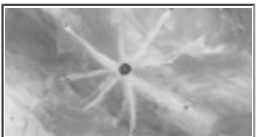


The Meaning of Islam



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The Meaning of Islam

by Sabdono
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The word Islam is derived from the Arabic "aslama", meaning surrender and from "salima" or "salamah" meaning "selamat" in Indonesian. Selamat means "salvation" but generally is more understood as prosperity. The word aslama gives also birth to "salam" which means peace. Islam can be understood as prosperity. The word aslama gives also birth to "salam" which means peace. Islam can be understood as "the surrender to God's will and purposes and the bringer of peace " or "to obey His commands and prohibitions". The first has a wider scope and a deeper meaning, but the last refer strictly to Islamic laws or the "syariat of Islam".

With these notions in mind, we may attempt to define Islam as follows:

Islam is the total and absolute surrender to God's will and purposes for the attainment of salvation and prosperity in this world and in the hereafter.

Luqman (Q 31:22) says:

"Whosoever surrendereth his purpose to Allah while doing good, he verily hath grasped a firm hand-hold. Unto Allah belongeth the sequel of things".

It is then proper when you know God that you will feel committed to do His bidding, be it in the hakikat way or the syariat way. The hakikat way means doing good because it is your personal will to do good; the syariat way means to do good because you are commanded so by the laws of God (/Islam).

It is a mistake to assume that Islam is limited to the religion brought forth by the prophet Muhammad some 1500 years ago. The name Islam is given to the divine teaching coming upon us from the time of the prophet Abraham to the time of the prophet Muhammad. It is true that the name "Islam" as derived from aslama is only mentioned in the Koran (not in the former scriptures).

The Koran says definitely that Abraham and his grandson Israel were teaching Islam, in its meaning as The Surrender. (Israel is a surname given to Jacob. Israel means God's ways – Jalan Tuhan). They were teaching that God is One (Tauhid) and that we ought to do his bidding. Until the end of his life, Abraham was teaching the oneness with God (to oppose the then prevailing idolatry).

Al Baqarah (Q 2: 124-128-131-133-136):

...Allah said: "Lo! I appointed thee a leader for mankind. Abraham said: "And of

my offspring?" He (Allah) said: "My covenant includeth not wrongdoers" (124).

"Our Lord, make us submissive (Muslim) unto thee and of our seed a nation submissive (Muslim) unto thee, and show us our ways of worship, and accept our repentance. Lo! Only thou art the relenting, the Merciful" (128).

(Remember) when his Lord said unto him (Abraham): "Surrender", he said: "I have surrendered (I have become a Muslim) to the Lord of the Worlds" (131).

The same did Abraham enjoin upon his sons (Ismail and Isaac), and also Jacob, saying: "O my sons! Lo, Allah hath chosen for you the religion (of surrender = Islam); therefor die not save as Muslim (save as men who have surrendered)" (132).

Or were ye present when death came to Jacob, when he said unto his sons: "What will ye worship after me?" They said: "We shall worship thy God, the God of thy fathers, Abraham, and Ishmael and Isaac, One God, and unto Him we are of those who have surrendered" (we are of those who are Muslims) (133).

Say (o Muslim): "We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and into Him we are Muslims" (those who have surrendered) (136).

Ali Imraan (Q 3:67):

Abraham was not a Jew, not yet a Christian, but he was an upright man who is a Muslim (those who surrendereth) and he was not of the idolaters.

An Nahl (Q 16:123):

And afterward We inspired thee (Muhammad): "Follow the religion of Abraham, as one by nature upright. He was not of the idolaters".

Al An'aam (Q 6:161)

Say: "Lo, as for me, my Lord hath guided me unto a straight path, a right religion, the religion of Abraham, the upright, who was no idolater".

From the above it should now be obvious that all the prophets were basically teaching the same religion and the same truth and that is: "The surrender to God's will and purposes" which in Arabic is called Islam. The same teaching was taught from the time of the Torah to the present, from the time of the prophet Noah to the prophet Abraham, Jacob, Salomon, Moses, and Jesus to the time of the last prophet Muhammad.

All these prophets were teaching Islam which means a way of living in total surrender to God's will and purposes. It is well possible that the outward appearance of the teachings is different. Therefore the unity of the teachings should not be sought after in the visible aspects, but rather in the invisible, namely the state of mind. Surrender to the will and purposes of God is first a state of mind, which will secondly be visible in acts and behavior. Thus Islam

means in the first instance a state of mind, a mind that is in a state of worship. An Arabic scholar by the name of Ibn Taymiyyah stated that the prophets were one in teaching Islam although the syariat – the outward appearance – were different because of the difference in time and location. The following quotation will support this view.

Asy Syuraa (Q 42:13):

He hath ordained for you that religion which He commended unto Noah, and that which We inspire unto thee (Muhammad), and that which We hath commanded unto Abraham, and Moses, and Jesus, saying: "Establish the religion, and be not divided therein. Dreadful for the idolaters is that unto which thou callest them. Allah chooseth for Himself whom He will, and guideth unto Himself who turneth".

Al Maidah (Q 5:44-111):

"Lo, We did reveal the Torah, wherein is guidance and a light, by which the prophets who surrendered, judged the Jews, and the rabbis and the priests by such of Allah's scriptures as they were bidden to observe, and there unto were they witnesses..." (44). And when I inspired the disciples saying: "Believe in Me and in My messenger", they said: "We believe, bear witness that we are Muslims (those who surrender)" (111).

In their sermons and other religious talks, the prophets always instruct the people to worship God the One, Who has no partners, and to abstain from worshipping other than the One God. The Koran always stresses the oneness of the God of Noah, the God of Abraham, the God of Hud, the God of Shaleh etc as can be seen from several verses in the Koran:

Noah in Al A'raf (Q 759):

..."O my people! Worship Allah. Ye have no other God save Him...".

Abraham in Al Ankabut (Q 29:16):

..."Worship Allah and keep your duty unto Him, that is better for you if ye but know".

Hud in Al A'raf (Q 7:65):

..."O my people! Worship Allah, ye have no other God save Him...".

Shaleh in Al A'raf (Q 7:73):

..."O my people! Worship Allah, ye have no other God save Him...".

From the beginning, God had sent prophets with one message only. This is made clear in the Koran in An Nabiya (Q 21:25): And We sent no messenger before thee but We inspired him saying: "There is no God save Me, so worship Me!".

A Muslim has to truthfully know God so that he will be able to worship Him and do His bidding in a right manner. Knowing God truthfully is in Islam called "marifat" and we worship him in a true manner is called 'hakikat". Marifat and hakikat mean complete and absolute surrender and are the true way to worship God.

Translator's note:

Aslama – the surrender to God's will and purposes, salamah – selamat = salvation, safety, prosperity, and salam – peace can be comprehended at two levels of understanding, the hakikat and the syariat (the traditional way).

a. The hakikat:

Surrender to God's will and purposes has a very deep and hence hidden meaning as it refers to the inception, growth/development and subsequent birth of the soul. The meaning is deep and hidden because the soul belongs to the invisible. Surrender in hakikat means the total surrender of the mind and soul. Surrender is a state of mind, worship is more a state of mind rather than ritual or ceremonial and so true religion is a state of mind.

In our day to day conversation, we use the phrase "soul" in a somewhat loose meaning without giving thought that it refers to a unique part in our existence. Usually we think that whatever is in our inner being, belongs to the soul, whether it is hate or love. In this translator's note, the phrase soul is given to an invisible counterpart of our physical body.

As a counterpart, the soul has all the organs, senses and other parts owned by our physical body. Hence we can also say "soul body" which is at the invisible level and for that reason beyond the grasp of our material / concrete mind. Soul has also mind and feelings but all at spiritual levels and this means that thoughts and feelings at the soul level are pure, noble, dignified, in short what is called "good" in Luqman (Q 31:22) as willed by God.

The soul is important because we will enter the after-life in this invisible "spirit-body". As the after-life belongs to the invisible, we can only maintain life in this dimension by something equally invisible.

So the hakikat also belongs to the invisible, hence the difficulty to explain it to a concrete mind which is programmed from the external world. The hakikat wants to say: whatever we do bodily or in our mind by feeling, thinking, willing, etc, it should have spiritual content because the soul is conceived and grown from spiritual qualities. This is what the Koran means when it says: surrender to God while doing good (Luqman quoted above).

Doing good means: whatever you do, it must have a spiritual content because only what is spiritual is good. Whatever you do, bodily or in your inner life, it must be spiritual, it must be spiritually colored. It must be God-directed, it must center on God in His will and purposes.

Abraham is called "the upright" because in every moment of his life, in

whatever he was doing, he was always God-directed and God centered with God centrally in his mind. This God-centeredness is beautifully expressed in the Islamic prayer: Inna shalati wa nusuki wa mahjaya wa mamati lillahi Rabbilalamiin = In truth, my prayers, my works, my life and my death are only for the sake of the Lords of the Worlds.

The salat in Islam can be seen from the hakikat point of view or from the syariat point of view. From the syariat point of view and in on extreme end, the syariat is 100% formality. This is true when a child of say 5 years is doing the salat. The salat has the purpose to bring us to a state of God-centeredness or God-directness, to a state of mind that is only filled with God-awareness or with God-consciousness.

God-centeredness is a state of mind in which our whole being is filled with an energy that can only comes from God or from His power. The presence of this energy can be felt, this energy has the ability to create a sensation of peace and happiness in Islam called khusuq. So the purpose of the salat is to attain this state khusuq in which the mind is totally or 100% directed toward God. In the normal situation, this 100% God-centeredness is seldom attained. It depends on how far the soul has grown because only the soul can perceive spiritual values, not the material/concrete mind which can only perceive the things of this world.

If the soul has been grown to a very advanced stage, we main attain a maximum state of khusuq of a strength say 10. In someone where the stage of imum state of khusuq, peace and happiness may be lower, say 7 to 9. In people belonging to the syariat, the state of soul-growth may still be lower and the state of khusuq attained is only say 3 to 5.

If someone is able to attain a khusuq of 9 to 10, he will be constantly in a state of khusuq, of happiness and peace, whether he is in or out of salat. His feeling of having known God is so deep and intense that he feels to know God very intimately. It is this state of God-knowingness accompanied by peace and happiness that is called marifat in Islam.

- b. The syariat or the traditional understanding of religion (Islam or any other religion).

In the traditional understanding of religion, the understanding is limited to the wordily interpretation of the teaching. The understanding does not go further than what is visible to the eyes. The salat is performed as something having a worldly importance. In the syariat, it is the visible acts that are important, not the state of mind.

The same applies to the fast. It is the abstinence from food and

drinks that are important, not the abstinence from wrong feelings, wrong desires or wrong thoughts in the mind.

Although some times the muballiq (Islam teacher) put some stress on the state of mind.

God's will and purposes with man as taught from the days of Abraham to the days of Moses, to the days of Jesus and Muhammad, are basically the same, and that is: to live in such a way as to facilitate the introspection, growth/development and subsequent birth of the invisible part of man which is called the soul, the immortal part of man that will continue to grow and live in a hereafter life.

The teaching that promotes this kind of living is called the "surrender to God's will and purpose" which is known as "Islam" in Arabic. In his last hours, Jesus called out of God: "Thine will be done, not mine will". This is Islam, and it is this state of mind that had been taught by all the prophets.

The differences in religious performance are temporary, caused by the limited grasp of the human mind. These differences will cease when man ultimately arrives at the true meaning of religion. The present differences should not make us blind to the ultimate goal of soul development.

If we are to be more concrete by using figures, we can say that what God wants from us is that our lives constitute say 30% acts and behavior (outward living) and 70% a state of mind (inward living, spiritual living for the growth of the soul). But in the actual situation it is the other way around, that is 70% outward living (worldliness) and 30% inward living (spiritual living).

What God wills is that we should make every effort to improve the balance of worldly living compared to spiritual living from the figures 70:30 to say 60:40 – 50:50 – 40:60 and ultimately 30:70. This is actually a spiritual process which is called transmutation and nowadays in Muslim circles called jihad. The problem remains: "How to accomplish this transmutation, how to accomplish this spiritual change?"

RELIGION WITH GOD

Religion is mind. The prophet Muhammad has said: Religion is mind, one who has no mind, has no religion. Mind or akal in Arabic is "Al Aqlu". Mind/akal has three components:

1. Thought (cipta)
2. Feelings (rasa)
3. Will (karsa)

Religion with the prophet is based on two premises:

- a. Freedom of thought
- b. Freedom of will

When the prophet said that religion is mind, we should always use our mind, not only when studying science, but also in studying spiritual matters. In the study of religion that led us to God, we should use mind as the main tool to find true knowledge.

The knowledge of the spirit should be subject to deep investigation to prove its truthfulness and to be comprehended by the mind in a clear understanding. In the study of the spiritual, we should not only believe without proof, but we should investigate and use the mind before accepting something as true. Knowledge gained this way should also be applied in every day activities and this knowledge should be disseminated to bear fruit.

Allah taught us the following on mind:

Az Zumar (Q 39:18):

Who hear advice and follow the best thereof. Such are those whom Allah guideth, and such are men who have mind to understand.

Yunus (Q 10:100):

It is not for any soul to believe save by the permission of Allah. He hath shown displeasure upon those who are not using their mind.

Ali Imraan (Q 3:7):

He it is Who hath revealed unto thee (Muhammad) the scripture wherein are clear revelations, they are the substance of the Book and others which are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is doubt, pursue, forsooth, that which is allegorical seeking dissension by seeking to explain it. None knoweth its explanation save Allah. And those who are of sound instruction say: "We believe therein, the whole is from our Lord", but only men who have mind to understand really heed.

Religion with God is one. The messages brought by the prophets have the same one source, God Almighty, The All-knowing, The All-understanding and the All-wise. Because of that, all the teachings are one road to be followed by all people from early times to the present. From our study of the teachings of the prophets contained in the Koran, we can only conclude that all the prophets taught the same one teaching and that is Islam. Let us look into the following verses:

Ali Imran (Q 3:19-83):

Lo, religion with Allah is Islam (the Surrender) (19). Seek they other than the religion of Allah, when unto Him submitteth whosoever is in the heaven and the earth, and unto Him they will be returned (83).

In saying of the prophet Muhammad one will find: "In truth, all the messengers brought one and the same religion. They were brothers to each having one father but different mothers. Their religion is one and they worship only one God, The One God, He has no partners. Concerning the one religion, Allah said:

Al Ambiya (Q 21:92-93):

Lo, this your religion, is one religion, and I am your Lord, so worship Me (92). And they have broken their religion among them. All are returning unto Us (93).

Al Mu'minun (Q 23:52-53):

Lo, this your religion is one religion and I am your Lord, so keep your duty unto me (52). But they have broken their religion among them into sects, each rejoicing in its tenets (53).

An Nashr (Q 110:1-3):

When Allah's succor and the triumph cometh (1), and thou seest mankind entering the religion of Allah in troops (2), then hymn the praises of thy Lord, and seek forgiveness of Him. Lo, He is ever ready to show mercy (3).

Al Hajj (Q 22:78):

And strive for Allah with the endeavor which is His right. He hath chosen you and hath not laid upon you in religion any hardship, the faith of your father Abraham. He hath named you Muslims of old time and in this (Al Quran), that the messenger may be a witness against you, and that ye be witnesses against mankind. So establish worship, pay the poor-due and hold fast to Allah. He is your protector, the best patron and the best helper.