

# **ISLAM: A BRIEF SUMMARY**

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## SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION:

Islam is a major religion followed by almost two billion people all over the earth. In a densely populated country like India, about 20% of its population identify themselves as followers of Islamic faith. While Islam has been a part of India for almost thirteen hundred years, its tenets remain largely unknown to the fellow Indian brethren who profess other beliefs. Part of the blame for this is borne by Muslims of India who never made a sincere effort to educate their fellow brethren about the tenets of Islam. The advancement in spread of information and constant presentation of Islam in a negative light by national and international media has further damaged the image of Islam in the eyes of the world.

This short article provides the overview of Islam and points out the reasons its adherents were successful in the past when majority of them were true to the beliefs and tenets of Islam.

For making the discussion more relevant to Indian brothers of different faith, this article discusses 'Philosophy' ('**Darshan**' - दर्शन) and 'Divine Revelations' ('**Shruti**' – श्रुति - 'that which is heard') from Islamic point of view.

# 'DARSHAN' – दर्शन (PHILOSOPHY) OF ISLAM

## OVERVIEW OF DARSHAN IN ISLAM:

ONE GOD - ALLAH: The philosophy of Islam begins with the concept of 'One God' - Allah / ईश्वर (Eeshwar) but Quran also declares that you can remember Him by any of His numerous attributes. It was only Him (एक अस्तित्व) that was always there. The timeline of Allah cannot be comprehended by the human mind as it is limitless (असीम) and His attributes (गुण) are infinite. He wanted to create the Universe (भ्रमाण) so that his attributes were recognized.

MA'RIFAT (معرفة / सही अनुभूति): The 'understanding of Allah' in Islam is termed. Ma'rifat does not have a synonym in English language. As the taste of a particular fruit cannot be described to the one who has never tasted it, 'Ma'rifat' or understanding of Allah cannot be explained in words. In the same way, 'Ma'rifat' of Allah is a relationship with Allah of a person at the highest level that cannot be described; only those who have reached that exalted position will be able to experience it. In a way, 'Ma'rifat' is 'to know everything about Him'.

For any creation of Allah to attain 'Ma'rifat' he requires intelligence and intellect (बुद्धि और विवेक) so that he utilizes them to make the right choices that would eventually elevate him closer to Allah. And man was fortunate that his nature (सृष्टि) was blessed with these two qualities. Thus man became Allah's ultimate creation and was placed him in a time bound place where his actions will become his deeds. (उसको कर्मों के सीमित क्षेत्र में छोड़ा).

CREATION OF UNIVERSE AND MAN: Before creating man Allah created the Universe (भ्रमाण) for him. It is likely that this process of creation of Universe began with the creation of Nebula (an interstellar cloud of dust and ionized gases). While we have no knowledge of how a nebula was created, we know that it was at this point that the timeline of Allah's creations that we know began. It is common sense to understand that where there is a beginning there is an end, and one which has no beginning will not have an end.

EVOLUTION AND CREATION: We probably have a better understanding of the process that went into the creation of Universe. It likely involved two separate processes:

1. Creation (कुछ नहीं था वो आगया)
2. Evolution (विकास की प्रक्रिया)

For most of Allah's creations these processes continued for millions of years. Laws were placed for the growth and maturation of each creation and these laws were unalterable. Allah's creations and the natural laws governing them are described as '*ayat*' (signs) in the Holy Quran – 'that which cannot be created by any other being'. Everything that was ever created in the universe and which is beyond our control is considered '*ayat*' of Allah. With time an environment evolved on the earth that was favorable for the survival of man. This was the moment Allah chose to create man and placed him on earth. So in contrast to other creations man did not undergo the process of evolution.

### **MAN: A UNIQUE CREATION OF ALLAH**

Among all His creations Allah had chosen man as his representative to rule on this earth for a given time. For this reason, he was bestowed with intelligence and intellect (बुद्धि और विवेक) to make the earth a peaceful place. With intelligence and intellect, man was also given the capacity to make choices between right and wrong. These qualities would place man apart from the rest of Allah's creations, as all other living creations were given pre-programmed and blessed with intuition (their knowledge was already placed inside them). These inherent pockets of knowledge were time specific and would reveal themselves at different ages of maturity during a man's life.

The example for this natural pre-programming is a bird taking the first flight out of her mother's nest, or a hen turning broody when she begins to work on hatching the egg. That bird or the hen would have been unaware of these processes moments before they successfully attempted them.

On the other hand, man is not pre-programmed and enters this world without any knowledge or workable intuition that is needed for his survival and growth in this world. As he is growing up, man needs to acquire knowledge and get trained in skills that will help him survive and overcome the hurdles of life on this earth. Man acquires this teaching and training from two sources:

1. Surroundings: parents, society and the rest of the universe
2. Direct Guidance (मार्गदर्शन): that is sent to him from Allah

With the help of these, a man groomed and matures after several decades when he is able to present himself independently as a productive member of society.

Allah has placed man on this earth to test him and see if he makes the right choices that will help him to qualify and get close to Him. So man walks on this earth armed with intelligence and intellect surrounded by good and evil, right and wrong with a freedom to make a free choice between them. Often the 'evil' and the 'wrong' are alluring and seductive providing short-cuts to a seemingly glamorous and successful life while the righteous path is fraught with difficulties. Those who succeed and stay the course despite difficulties are the only ones who attain Ma'rifat.

To undertake the test of life and be successful, man is provided with 'roadmaps' (Guide - मार्ग-दर्शक) by Allah were meant to help him succeed. They acts as a 'for him.

## THE HEREAFTER

As there was a beginning, there would be an end - according to the timeline set by Allah. The man and the universe (सृष्टि) created for him will come to an end together. The whole mankind would then be raised again, re-assembled and brought before Allah. As each individual presents himself, the records of his actions (performed in this world) are replayed before him. The choices he made making use of the intelligence and intellect would decide his fate as he is recompensed with 'rewards and punishment'. It is possible that a small portion of these may have already commenced while man was still on the earth and rest were held Allah back to be delivered in the Afterlife. Quran explains the wisdom behind the delay in retribution of some sins: "And if Allah were to seize mankind for their wrong-doing, He would not leave on it (the earth) a single moving (living) creature, but He postpones them for an appointed term and when their term comes, neither can they delay nor can they advance it an hour (or a moment)" Quran 16:61.

But generally Man is provided ample warnings during the course of his life on earth to correct himself and save his Hereafter. In the Hereafter, there will be no reprieve for him. During the life on the earth, he was guided and provided a clear path to follow the laws of Allah. There were chosen men of Allah who acted as guides and set themselves as examples leading a life on the righteous path. But the one who was bent upon straying, ignore them and the guidance sent through them and made choices that fulfilled earthly desires.

In the Hereafter, we understand that there are no material bodies – the soul now unattached to the material body remains the same, and is the recipient of the results of the Hereafter.

As mentioned earlier, Man was created for Ma'rifat with instructions on how to lead a righteous life. Those who succeed to stay on this Path will be rewarded Paradise (परलोक). Heavens filled with peace, happiness and tranquility awaits them with the benevolence of the One that has all the power.

Those who will not make it to the paradise will be thrown into Hellfire for knowingly making evil choices. The analogy is similar to a product undergoing Quality Testing – the one that makes the grade is selected, if it does not then it is discarded, destroyed and thrown away. In a Man's life, his actions (कर्म) will decide his fate based on which in the Hereafter he is consigned to Paradise or Hell (स्वर्ग/ नरक) from where there is no return for remedial actions.

## FOUNDATIONS OF DARSHAN IN ISLAM:

### GUIDANCE (मार्गदर्शन)

It is made up of two parts in Islam:

1. Belief (आस्था – Astha / إيمان – Iman: what does one believe?)

2. Actions (कर्म –Karm): to perform actions as per the belief.

Beliefs and actions follow each other. Beliefs are not visible but actions are.

### I. BELIEF / إيمان –IMAN / आस्था – ASTHA

The root letters of Iman in Arabic signify A,M,N - अ म न which means peace. It is further divided into three main parts.

1. Unitarianism (توحيد – tauheed / एक ईशवरवाद - Ek eeshwarvad)
2. Understanding the goal of this life (الآخرة - Al-Aakhira)
3. Belief that Allah sent his Prophets (ईशदूत - Eeshdoot / رسالة - Risalah) to guide mankind

1. UNITARIANISM (توحيد – tauheed / एक ईशवरवाद - Ek eeshwarvad): belief in One God – Allah and the belief that there is none other like him. He has been there for all the time and will remain forever. He created everything and has power over all the creations and controls them. All the prayers (पूजा - ceremonial worship/ प्रार्थना - prayer / उपासना - worship) are only for Him. He has no associates. So worship, servitude and devotion - बंदगी / بندگی can only be performed to Him alone. It is only His law that should be followed without corrupting or diluting it.

Our creator Allah remains unchanged. His knowledge is unlimited (असीम) and he knows the past, present and the future. It is for this reason unlike the man made laws, His laws don't change.

Belief ("मानना") means to attest there is One God, and to follow his commands. Unfortunately a majority of those who claim to be believers do not follow the Commands of Allah altogether or selectively follow them.

2. MEANING OF THIS LIFE (الآخرة - Al-Aakhira): It is important for a man to know the purpose of this life (जीवन का उद्देश्य क्या है?) on earth. When the life of mankind ends on this planet, each individual will be raised on the Day of Resurrection (القيامة – Qiyamah), and called to account for his actions. This is the beginning of Al-Aakhira phase. As the timeline of mankind is straight it does not go into circles and there is no return back to earth.

3. BELIEF THAT ALLAH SENT HIS PROPHETS (ईशदूत) – (رسالة / Risalah): To guide mankind and guide them towards the righteous path in this life on earth, Allah sent Prophets who were humans like the rest of us. These were true men who led ideal lives and stayed on the Straight Path overcoming the difficulties along the way. These were men chosen by Allah and carried His Guidance and commands in the form of revelations which were sometimes in the form of scriptures. These scriptures are known as 'shruti' (श्रुति-'that which is heard' or 'divine revelations'). भगवान ने उनको अपना संदेश अवतरण किया और उन्होंने लोगो को सुनाया। ये श्रुति कहलाति है।

All the prophets brought the same message (धर्म) but actions / कर्म were a little different as they were tailored to local culture and society. These prophets were sent by Allah to all corners of the world and brought His message in the local language. "We sent not a Messenger except with the language of his people, in order that he might make (the Message) clear for them (Quran 14:4)."

## II. ACTIONS / कर्म –KARM / عمل - A'MAL

Islam (इस्लाम / الإسلام) means peace (शांति-shanti / امن-Aman). Man is bestowed with the primordial instinct (فطرة / Fitrah) of discerning between right and wrong whether he is a believer or a non-believer. (अपने स्वभाव से जानता है). For example, he knows stealing is a sin. If a man makes a wrong choice knowingly and then does not repent for his mistake, he will fail to achieve peace (शांति - shanti / امن - Aman) in life and as a result will not find *Iman* or *Islam*. This peace was meant for his inner was meant for his inner self, the environment around him and in his relationship with Allah and would have completed his *Iman* and *Islam*. शांति-shanti / امن-Aman – खुदसे, वातावरण से और भगवान से।

### FOUNDATION OF ISLAM

There are four foundations of Islam that are meant to build a society. The objectives of these are to - build a bond between an individual and his society, cleanse and purify him and help him to live the life based on the wishes of Allah. (इस्लाम के ये चार मूल सिद्धांत स्वच्छ समाज के निर्माण में मदद करते हैं।). These four foundations are exercises that are obligatory (अनिवार्य) for all Muslims.

These are:

1. Namaz (prayers/ Salat / صلاة)



2. Zakat (that which purifies –the wealth)
3. Saum (fasting)
4. Hajj (pilgrimage)

### 1. **NAMAZ (Prayer / Salat / صلاة)**

It is obligatory for a Muslim to perform salat five times a day. These have to be performed during specified periods of time in the 24 hour day.

Quran says that *salat* restrains man from shameful and evil acts. “Surely salat restrains one from shameful and evil acts” (Surah Al Ankaboot Q 29:45). This is a guarantee given by Allah, if somebody claims to offer the five times salat regularly but continues with actions that are abhorred by Allah, there is a problem in the way he is performing his *salat*. He should seriously review and take remedial action to correct it.

*Salat* is made up of three components:

- a. ‘Spirit’ (आत्मा – Aatma /روح - Ruh)
- b. Specific physical postures (आसन)
- c. Recitations (पाठ)

#### **a. ‘Spirit’ of Salat:**

Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) has stated that ‘one should worship Allah as if he sees Him, and if he cannot achieve this state of devotion then he must consider that Allah is looking at him’. This is the ‘spirit of *salat*’, without which, the prayer and meditation remains incomplete.

As one begins his salat, he disconnects himself of all worldly thoughts and presents himself before Allah by taking a pledge which is well described in the Holy Quran as follows:

“I have, indeed, turned my face straight towards the One who created the heavens and the earth, and I am not one of those who associate partners with Allah (Surah An’am Q6:79).”

This is essential, otherwise an individual cannot concentrate as his mind will be inundated by distracting thoughts and the *salat* will be over even before he enters the meditative state (ध्यान कि अवस्था) that was described by Prophet Muhammad (SAWS). To reach this meditative state requires practice (अभ्यास). It is similar to a person who is yearning to learn cycling. In the beginning, he has to understand each step and learn to co-ordinate the mind and body so that with time they all function in tandem to balance the cycle successfully when moving. Initially,

each action requires one to fully concentrate consciously at every step to make the ride smooth. With practice one gains expertise (the co-ordination of mind and body is now stored at the subconscious level) – no conscious effort is required from now on to make future rides.

Similarly, reaching the meditative state of *salat* requires practice. That kind of state we often experience when watching our favorite movie or cricket match animatedly. During these shows we are totally disconnected from our surroundings.

If those moments of meditative states are reached, the sound of the words recited during *salat* (part of them are *ayat* of Quran and others glorify Allah) penetrate the mind and are gradually etched in our sub-conscience.

During *salat* as one is concentrating to be in the presence of Allah and seeing Him he may be distracted by images (आकार) that try to lead him away from Allah who is invisible (निराकार) and has no limits (असीमित). One way to overcome this intrusion is to imagine that Allah is watching him.

Doing this exercise five times a day, every day throughout the year will improve the quality of *salat*. In one of the narrations attributed to Prophet Muhammad (SAWS), it is said that the person who performs *salat* for forty days continuously completes his Iman.

Reaching this higher meditative state will change the man completely in a comprehensive way. With practice now, he enters the presence of Allah each time he offers *salat*. The effect is so deep and enlightening that it does not terminate with end of *salat*, and continues until the initiation of the next *salat*. Thus the man is in a state where his creator is with him not only during the prayers but also in between the prayers when he is attending to his worldly responsibilities. When Allah is with him, the subconscious mind is continuously active helping him to stay away from shameful and evil acts (जो कर्म इस मनोसथिती के साथ की जाएगी के ईश्वर साथ है तो हर काम तपस्या बन जाएगा). This was a promise of Allah to those who would perform *salat*.

There are many more benefits on performing this 'spiritfull *salat*'. Fear and grief are the major barriers for success of man in this world. Fear of something bad happening and grief for the wrongs done in the past haunt him. The feeling of fear affects him from outside while the feeling of grief develops from within. When a person starts performing 'spiritfull *salat*', he now has Allah with him all the time for company. Fear and grief will disappear away. सर्वशक्तिमान का साथ होता है तो ये एहसास खतम हो जाता है।

Although, men belonging to all religions whether Muslim, Hindu or Christian – they all claim that Allah / God is with them, but it is only a superficial thought without any deep feeling. साथ होता है, पर साथ का आभास नहीं होता है।

Just imagine walking through a thick forest trail when suddenly it gets dark and you are filled with fear of an attack by a wild animal or a bandit, at the same time if you had a friend accompanying you, you will experience that fear because of the company. In the same way, if you regularly perform your regular 'spiritfull *salat*' you are always in the company of Allah, our creator – and no fear or grief would ever come close to you.

With 'spiritfull *salat*', the positive energy (सकारात्मक शक्तियां) increases and even those things that were thought to be impossible will now become possible and make you successful.

### **b. Specific physical postures (आसन)**

The different postures assumed during the performance of *salat* are a perfect combination to achieve the highest level of meditation in the eyes of Allah.

### **c. Recitations (पाठ)**

As man stands deep in meditation completely disconnected from the rest of the world and all his senses are aligned to connect with Allah, he is in a state of 'trance'. It is at this time, the words of Allah that are recited (either by the Imam - leading the prayer in the mosque, or himself when he is offering prayer alone) that touch the inner core of his heart. For those even with a little knowledge of Arabic, this meditative trance does wonder as they are 'hypnotized' by these 'celestial suggestions' of Holy Quran that demands highest levels of righteous attitude. The body and the soul come together to follow the course that is in perfect harmony with the rest of the universe and performing acts that are willed by Allah.

This is the summary of various components of *salat*, the obligatory prayer and one of the foundations of Islam. In the Holy Quran, Allah does not say – 'offer *sala*' instead He commands – 'establish *salat*' because, it is not just a ritual or an act but a life changing process for the individual and the community that lives around him.

If the Muslims had truly followed 'Spiritfull *salat*', many of the ills found in the Muslim world today would not have existed. They would have not only succeeded in all the endeavors that they were undertaking but also spreading positive energy all around making this a better place for all.

There are other advantages of *salat*. It is highly recommended that each *salat* is performed in the mosque at a specified time. An important part of posture in *salat* when performed in a group is discipline. All the worshippers gather together in a straight line shoulder touching shoulder, facing the direction of the Holy Kaabah and are led by the *Imam* who guides them through the prayer. The closeness helps develop a brotherhood among the worshippers and builds a social bond. It is during the *salat* that one learns the important lesson of equality as

none of the believers receive any preferential treatment based on their race or economic or social status, thus further strengthening the relationship between them.

## 2. ZAKAT (that which purifies –the wealth)

This is the next pillar of Islam. *Zakat* is not charity or money given out of pity, instead it is an obligation that a Muslim is required to fulfill annually by spending a part of his wealth / income in the way of Allah and support others. Allah states in the Quran: 'And (would assign) in all that they possessed a share due into such as might ask (for help) and such as might suffer privation (Az-Zariyat 51;19).

In the same way that our children, wives and family have a right over our wealth and possessions, the poor and needy have a right to a part of our wealth as well. So when giving *Zakat*, one is expected to be grateful to the person who accepts it as he was instrumental in helping you fulfill an important religious obligation.

Islam clearly defines the poverty level that divides those who are obligated to give *Zakat* and those who can accept it, this is one of the earliest instance of definition of 'below poverty line' an important economic benchmark. Those individuals who after meeting all their basic needs for living do not have assets worth above 87 grams of gold are entitled to receive *Zakat*.

Annual amount of Zakat: *Zakat* is based on income and the value of all of one's possessions. Any property that is not in personal use will require *Zakat* which is 2.5% on its current valuation. Once this property is put to use for business then *Zakat* is paid on the income accrued.

### Zakat Recipients:

Eight groups of recipients identified in Quran:

1. Those living without means of livelihood (Al-Fuqarā'), the poor[
2. Those who cannot meet their basic needs (Al-Masākīn),the needy
3. To *Zakat* collectors (Al-Āmilīyn 'Alihā)
4. To persuade those sympathetic to or expected to convert to Islam (Al-Mu'allafatu Qulūbuhum, recent converts to Islam, and potential allies in the cause of Islam
5. To free from slavery or servitude (Fir-Riqāb),slaves of Muslims who have or intend to free from their master [clarification needed] by means of a kitabah contract
6. Those who have incurred overwhelming debts while attempting to satisfy their basic needs (Al-Ghārimīn),debtors who in pursuit of a worthy goal incurred a debt
7. Those fighting for a religious cause or a cause of God (Fī Sabīlillāh),or for Jihad in the way of Allah by means of pen, word, or sword,[56] or for Islamic warriors who fight against the unbelievers but are not salaried soldiers.
8. Wayfarers, stranded travelers (Ibnu Al-Sabīl), travelers who are traveling with a worthy goal but cannot reach their destination without financial assistance

It is important to note that money spent for building and upkeep of mosques or schools cannot be considered *Zakat*.

To some it may appear a burden to part away from some of the wealth, but Quran reassures Muslims that *Zakat* does not reduce but wealth, instead it increases it.

“The likeness of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah, is as the likeness of a grain (of corn); it grows seven ears, and each ear has a hundred grains. Allah gives manifold increase to whom He wills. And Allah is All-Sufficient for His creatures’ needs, All-Knower. [Surah al-Baqarah 2:261]

In this way, part of one’s wealth and income is constantly in circulation thus discouraging hoarding of money which leads to economic stagnation. When *Zakat* is paid sincerely, the economic conditions of those who are poor improves as a result the economy grows rapidly increasing the wealth of those who live in that community.

If Muslims start paying their *Zakat* sincerely, then within a few years those who will be below the poverty line will disappear from the community, which was the case in the city of Madina few years after the death of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS).

### **3. SAUM (Fasting)**

Allah states in the Holy Quran that Fasting not only protects you in this world but also raises the level of piety.

“O you who believe! Prescribed for you is the Fast, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may deserve God’s protection (against the temptations of your carnal soul) and attain piety.” (Al-Baqarah, 2:183)

Fasting in Islam requires an individual to refrain from eating, drinking, stay away from bad things and not have intimate relations with their wives from sunrise to sunset. It is obligatory for a healthy Muslim to fast for one month during Holy Ramadan. Generally it is easy for an individual to fast for a few days but fasting continuously for the whole month is arduous task which is accomplished because of faith (आस्था – Astha). Ramadan, the month of fasting, follows lunar calendar which is shorter by ten days when compared to the Gregorian calendar. As a result, the month of Ramadan moves back each year, so that in an average lifespan of man, it appears three times in different seasons. Fasting during summers is difficult, as the thirst begins to bother within an hour after beginning the fast. On the other hand, during the winters when it is dark and cold, it is not easy for one to get up in the middle of the night and eat to begin the fast. While science has shown innumerable benefits of fasting, the most important experience for a man is to spend the day experiencing the life of those who live in and suffer poverty.

### **3. HAJJ (PILGRIMAGE):**

It is the last pillar of Islam. It is to be performed at least once in the lifetime by those who can afford to undertake the long journey. Hajj is similar to an international peace conference held annually by representatives from different parts of the world, where they exchange information and plan to help each other who are in need.

There are rituals to be performed during the Hajj that connect all the pilgrims to a center. It is almost an invisible force that pulls the believers centripetally towards the center and bonds them with the Almighty.

Millions of pilgrims gather from around the world for Hajj and represent different nationalities and races. They cover themselves with two pieces of unstitched white clothes—similar to the cloth that wraps the dead body, symbolizing that they are all dead for this world.

Some of the rituals performed remind them of the historical events that signify ultimate sacrifices (त्याग) made in the way of Allah.

The main reason for this gathering is '*zikr*' (to remember Allah). It also means interacting with all the other pilgrims, exchanging notes about each other's problems and trying to solve them. The importance of this social interaction assumes significance in the light of a narration attributed to Prophet Muhammad (SAWS). It states that on one occasion, he took Allah as his witness three times and said that a man cannot have '*Iman*' who eats well and his neighbor goes hungry. A neighbor is considered one who lives up to forty houses away. If everybody decides to implement this call of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) then the scourge of poverty will be resolved to a large extent forever.

Creation of 'brotherhood' (सामूहिकता) between human beings is the theme underlying of these four foundations of Islam. Standing together shoulder to shoulder in discipline and following the Imam during the *salat*, the spiritual awareness created during the one month of fast when they undergo deprivation of food and water and struggle to follow a straight path in all their dealings, distributing part of their wealth with honor to those who are stricken with poverty and finally displaying the peak of brotherhood during the *Hajj* when Muslims from all over the world gather together and bond with each other trying to understand each other's problem in the Holy Land are all meant to spread peace happiness among the believers which when completed is called Islam.

## 'SHRUTI' OF ISLAM: QURAN

Overview of 'Shruti' (श्रुति- 'that which is heard' or 'divine revelations'): 'Shruti' of Islam is the Holy Quran. It was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) more than fourteen hundred years ago and illustrates the doctrines (सिद्धांत) of Islam. It provides general principle and guidance to be followed during one's lifetime and leaves the minor details to a man's intelligence and intellect. Since man is blessed with the 'the primordial human nature' (Fitrah- فطرة) which has the ability to discern between right and wrong, Quran generally provides guidance to mankind in the areas where there is a possibility of confusion and probability of man making the wrong choices leading to disruption in peace around him e.g., it provides a clear guidance on penal laws and laws of inheritance. But for most issues, it trusts the intelligence and intellect of man to make the right choices.

Preservation of Quran: Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) was the last prophet sent by Allah, because by his time mankind had developed technology that would preserve the last scripture, the Holy Quran brought by him to his people. In contrast to the previous scriptures, the Holy Quran would be revealed in the light of modern history and its message would be protected by several methods and passed down to the future generations until the end of this world.

Since the advent of paper technology (आविष्कार) in China in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE and the later advances in its development that took place in Arabia, it has become near impossible to corrupt any part of written literature. It was during this age that the Holy Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (SAWS). Quran carries with it the final Guidance of Allah for the mankind, there was no further need for anymore revelations. It is interesting to note that in a narration (Hadith/ حديث) attributed to Prophet Muhammad (SAWS), he urges his companions to go to China to seek knowledge (ज्ञान अर्जित करो चाहे तुम्हें चीन जाना पड़े). Many of his companions (संत संधि) are known to have visited China and as a result the paper making technology became popular in the Middle East and later in Europe. So the Holy Quran became the first scripture to be written and after the death of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) master copies were made and distributed all over the Muslim world. In parallel to this, the traditional method of transmission had continued, where selected Muslims in every generation memorized the entire Quran and acted as the protectors of Quran. They are called *Huffaz* (حَفَظ / guardians) of Quran who revise the Holy Quran from memory several times a year.

Prior to the time of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS), scriptures were only transmitted from memory. The recitation and memorization of these scriptures was restricted to the priestly class and in many cases the common man was forbidden from coming near them. As a result, some of it was lost because of memory lapse and other parts were intentionally corrupted by the priestly hierarchy to serve their own personal interests. Each time a scripture was corrupted, another prophet had to come to remove the corruption and restore the spiritual and moral balance on the earth.

Thus with the preservation of Holy Quran, Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) became the last prophet and messenger of Allah on this earth.

During the time of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS), whenever he received the revelations from Allah, his companions would note them down and some would memorize them as well. They would read it back to him for verification. Thus during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) the revelation of entire Quran was completed. One of the last ayat that was revealed to him informed him about the completion of his mission.

“This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion (Quran 5:3)”.

It was a divine indication that the revelations from Allah were coming to an end, and Quran was now complete. A few months later, Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) passed away.

The copy of Holy Quran in Arabic we hold today is exactly a copy of the master copies that were sent out by the companions of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) more than fourteen hundred years ago. Even the Arabic language spoken in the Quran has miraculously remained unchanged and is easily understood by a common man who learns the basics of Arabic language.

Salient features of Quranic discourse: It has been clearly stated in the Holy Quran that everything is created for survival of man on this earth. “He it is Who created for you all that is on earth (Surah Al-Baqarah [2:29])”. And whatever does not benefit is removed “while that which is for the good of mankind remains in the earth (Ar-Ra'd 13:17)”. Thus an ecological balance is maintained. इन्सानो के लिये जो भी लाभदायक है वही रहता है। संतुलन कायम रहता है। This is the general principle.

Quran is filled with a discourse that creates positive thinking in those who understand its deeper meaning and apply it in their lives. It warns that to succeed one has to change their inner thinking, only then they will make progress. “Indeed Allah does not change a people’s lot, unless they change what is in their souls” (Quran 13:11).

Quran states that an individual should work hard and aim for the long term success. For this one has to toil patiently over a period of time to reap the dividends. And those who attain a truly ‘happy state’ as a result, are described as ‘*muflihun*’ (مفلحون). It is derived from the root word ‘F-L-H’ - ‘Fallah’ - فلاح: in Arabic means a farmer, the one who is patiently works hard and is ultimately blessed with a successful harvest at the end of the season. Those who aim for short term successes and corrupt themselves to reach their goals are considered among those who have taken their desires as their Gods (Quran 45:23).

In contrast to many other philosophies Islam does not prohibit man from harboring worldly desires, instead it encourages him **to align his desired in line with the purpose of his creation**. In fact Allah reprimands those who forbid men from enjoying Allah’s Blessings which are pure (Quran 7:32). The way to ultimate salvation in Islam, is not by renouncing and bypassing the world, instead one is urged to walk through the middle of this worldly life while staying on the Righteous Path. Quran states “And has subjected to you all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth; it is all as a favor and kindness from Him” (Quran 45:13). And Allah promises that if one remains a true believer, he will excel in his endeavors “you will be superior if you are indeed (true) believers” (al-Imran 3:139).



Identifying the corruption in previous scriptures with the help of Quran: Several methods can be undertaken to check and remove the later additional material that made its way into the Holy Scriptures and corrupted them.

1. Since the Holy Quran has come down to us protected, it is accepted as the final authority (balance / زانيم) from Allah. Statements in the previous scriptures that directly contradict the commands of Allah in the Quran are the parts that were corrupted.
2. These corrupted statements were inserted by human beings and generally have internal contradictions (परसपर विरोधी).
3. Contemplating on the statements of these previous scriptures by using 'common sense' - intelligence and intellect (बुद्धि और विवेक) will help identify the true words of Allah.
4. Statements that are similar in all scriptures are also the true words of Allah (ईशवर वाणि).

## SUMMARY

In summary, Islam means peace and its pillars are meant to foster peace and brotherhood among human beings. If this brotherhood does not evolve then the 'true spirit of Islam' is missing from its followers. *Salat* is meant for meditation, *Saum* to invoke love of Allah, *Zakat* is part of one's wealth that belongs to those who are poor and *Hajj* – the pilgrimage to Makkah brings all together on a single platform to address and solve the disparities between nations.