

**A FEW
QUESTIONS
AND
ANSWERS**

By Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi

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Question: Are we self-existing? Or are we created? Who has created us?

Answer: We are not eternal; we have a beginning and an end. Also, we are not self-existing; someone must have created us, must have brought us into being. That Creator is God Who is free from all defects and shortcomings. In Islam God is called Allah.

Question: Was there any purpose behind our creation?

Answer: Doing a work without any reason or purpose is a defect; we do not like anyone to accuse us to working aimlessly. Obviously Allah too must have created us for some good purpose. He points to this fact when He asks mankind in the Qur'an. *What! do you then think that We have created you in vain and that you shall not be returned to Us?*

(Surah 23 aya 115). So there IS a purpose behind our creation.

Question: What is that purpose?

Answer: Let us ask the Creator Himself why He has created us. If He tells us, that would be the really authentic and genuine reason. And He, in His mercy, has already told us-without our asking. He says: *And I have not created the jinn and the human beings except that they should worship Me.* (Surah 51 aya 56).

Question: Then what is our responsibility?

Answer: Every man and woman must fulfil the purpose of his or her creation; everyone should submit him or herself to the Will of Allah and worship Him. When we worship Allah, we acknowledge His majesty and power and confess our helplessness and neediness, in a manner prescribed by Him; and we do it with sincere intention and pure heart, in obedience to Allah, in order that we may come nearer to Him.

Allah has sent Prophets, appointed Imams, revealed Books and prescribed laws of *shari'ah* in order to guide us to the Right Path, and to teach us the proper way of the divine worship. We must follow their guidance, because it is the only way by which we may attain to the goal of our life, fulfil the purpose of our creation.

Question: How can We find their guidance?

Answer: By following the way of Islam.

Question: What is Islam?

Answer: Islam is to believe and accept that there is none to be worshipped but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger. It means that one MUST believe in and accept all that has been brought by Muhammad (s.a.w.a.)

Question: How many groups are there in Islam?

Answer: There are two main groups: the Sunni and the Shi'a. We are Shi'a.

Question: What is the meaning of Shi'a?

Answer: The word 'Shi'a' is from Arabic word *At-Tashayo* which means 'to follow'. Thus the word, Shi'a, means "follower".

Question: Why are you called Shi'a?

Answer: We are called Shia because after the Holy Prophet we follow Sayyidana Ali and other sinless members of the family of the Holy Prophet.

Question: Why do you call yourselves Ithna 'ashariya?

Answer: Ithna 'ashar in Arabic means twelve. As we believe in 12 Imams (successors of the Holy Prophet of Islam), we are called Shi'a Ithna 'ashariya.

Question: Who can become a Shi'a Ithna 'ashariya?

Answer: Any person, irrespective of his race, origin, colour or language, can become a Shi'a Ithna 'ashari, if he sincerely believes in our tenets and acts upon them faithfully.

Question: Will you explain to me the main features of Islam in short?

Answer: Islam consists of three parts.

1. Matters concerning belief, which are called Roots of Religion.
2. Rules of shari'ah which govern every aspect of our lives; they are called Branches of Religion.
3. Islamic Ethics and Morality.

ROOTS OF RELIGION

Question: How many Roots of Religion are there?

Answer: There are five Roots of Religion.

Question: What are they?

Answer: They are called:

1. Tawheed: Oneness of God
2. Adl: Justice of God
3. Nubuwwat: Prophethood
4. Imammat: Vicegerency of the Prophet
5. Qiyamat: Day of judgement:

Question: What does Tawheed mean?

Answer: It means that there is only one God - Eternal, Self-sufficient; He has no beginning or end; He is Omnipotent, has power over everything and every affair, He is Omniscient, knows everything, nothing is ever a secret from Him. He has His own discretion in all affairs, does not do anything under compulsion. He is All-perceiving, All-Hearing, All-Seeing and Omnipresent, He sees and hears everything though He has

neither eye nor ear. He has no partner or colleague, nor has He any son, daughter or wife. He is neither made nor composed of any material substance. He has no body nor is He confined to a place. He is not afflicted by anything related to body; He is not governed by time, space, change or things like that. He is not visible. He has not been seen, and will never be seen either in this world or the hereafter. His attributes are not separate from His person.

Question: Will you throw some more light on the belief in oneness of God?

Answer: The belief in the Unity of God is the foundation stone of Islam. This belief governs the religious faith, designs the social patterns and gives life to the moral codes.

The first sentence of the Islamic *Kalimah*, i.e. “There is no god except Allah”, leads a Muslim throughout his life not only in

religious matters but in social behaviour also. “There is no god” shows a Muslim that nothing in the Universe is superior to him. It is observed in Qur’an that “He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth.” So a Muslim knows that nothing in this world is to be worshipped. Neither stones nor trees; neither animals nor human-beings, neither the Sun nor the Moon nor the Stars can be worshipped, because everything is created, and created for his benefit. When a Muslim, thus, has rejected every falsehood and every idea of Nature-worship, Idol-worship of Human-worship, he is ready to believe in the positive truth of the Unity of God. Believing in a Supreme being gives an aim to our life and provides a purpose for our actions. Had a man been left with the wrong impression that there was no God at all, his life would have been aimless, and an aimless life is dangerous. So it is added that there is no god “except Allah”. This sentence has a negative as well as a positive aspect. Both are instrumental in

creating the belief that every man is equal to every other person. When nobody is superior, nobody is inferior. Thus, the belief in the Unity of God promotes the sense of brotherhood and equality and equity which is another brilliant feature of Islam.

Question: What is the significance of ‘Adl?

Answer: ‘Adl means that Allah is just; He does not do injustice to anyone. He has ordered us to do justice to our fellow creatures - but He Himself treats us not only with justice but with grace. He created us for His worship, in order that we may attain spiritual perfection through it. That spiritual perfection enables us to reach near to Allah.

For this purpose, He has given us freedom of will and choice . When we choose, by our own free will, the Straight Path (prescribed by Allah) we are assured in the next world of everlasting happiness and glory by Grace of Allah.

Question: And what is Nubuwwat?

Answer: To show us the Straight Path, Allah has been sending His Representatives to the mankind. They are called *nabii* (Prophet) and *rasūl* (Messenger). The rank of the Messengers was higher than the Prophets.

Question: How many prophets came into the world?

Answer: There came in all 124,000 Prophets, 313 of which were Messengers. The prophethood started with the first man, Adam, and ended with Muhammad, the Holy Prophet of Islam.

All the Prophets and Messengers brought the same religion-which nowadays is called Islam. It was but natural. As all of them were sent by the same God, naturally the Messenger could not be more than one. The beliefs and morals taught by them were always the same,

although the rules of shari'ah were changed from time to time according to the conditions of the society.

The Messengers who brought new shari'ah are called Ulul-'azam.

Question: How many Ulul-'azm Messengers were there?

Answer: We know of five. They were Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), 'Isa (Jesus) and Muhammad. Only the shari'ah brought by Muhammad (which is generally known as Islam) is valid now, it has abrogated all the previous shari'ah.

Question: Was Muhammad given any revealed Book?

Answer: Yes. He was given the Qur'an by Allah. As he is the Final Prophet, his Book is the last Book revealed by Allah. It was

revealed to Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) as the Guidance for mankind.

Question: What is the belief of the Shi'a about the Quran?

Answer: We believe that the Qur'an is the word of Allah which was revealed to God's last Prophet, Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) as a miracle and guidance for the mankind. It is the truth, around which falsehood cannot reach. It is the foundation of Islamic shari'ah. It is the Complete Book of God-nothing has been added to it, nothing has been removed from it, nothing has been changed in it. Even non-Muslim scholars admit that the Qur'an is free from all types of interpolation, change and defect-since the time of the Prophet to this day. In this respect, it differs from previous revealed books which have been extensively changed and altered.

Question: Did the Prophet make any

arrangement for guidance of people after his departure?

Answer: Yes. He has left two things for this purpose: the Qur'an and his sinless progeny. He has said: "I am leaving behind among you two precious things, one of them is greater than the other: the Book of Allah which is the covenant of Allah from the heavens upto the earth, and my Descendants who are my family members. So look how you deal with them, and surely they both will not be separated from each other ..."

Question: Who are those Family Members who have been given the responsibility of guiding the mankind to the Right Path?

Answer: First of them is 'Ali. the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet (s.a.w.a), whose name was declared at a huge gathering at Ghadir Khumm, when the Prophet was returning from his last pilgrimage.

There the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) delivered a long Khutba (lecture), at the end of which he asked the Muslims: “Do not I have more authority upon you than you have got upon yourselves?”. All of them responded by saying. “Surely O Messenger of Allah!” Then the Prophet took the arms of ‘Ali, and showing him to the audience, declared: “He whose Master am I, this Ali is his Master.”

Question: Was any number fixed for this chain of the Guides?

Answer: Yes, According to many accepted traditions, the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) has said: “Imams after me will be twelve.”

Question: Who are those twelve Imams?

Answer: They are as follows:

1. ‘Ali
2. Hasan
3. Husayn

4. ‘Ali Zaynul ‘Abideen
5. Muhammad Bāqir
6. Ja‘far Sādiq
7. Mūsa Kāzim
8. ‘Ali Riḍā
9. Muḥammad Taqi
10. ‘Ali Naqi
11. Hasan ‘Askari
12. Muhammad Mahdi

Question: Who is the Imam these days?

Answer: The Imam these days is the 12th Imam, Muḥammad al-Mahdi.

Question: Tell me some more about him.

Answer: Imam Mahdi, the twelfth Imam, is alive, but is hidden from our eyes by order of Allah. He will re-appear, when Allah allows him, to establish the Kingdom of God on the Earth. It will be near the end of the world, when he will establish justice and equity in

the world after it would have been devastated by injustice and oppression.

Question: What is the significance of the Day of Judgement?

Answer: After re-appearance of Imam al-Mahdi, there will come Qiyamat, the day of resurrection, the day of judgement. All people will die; then the whole mankind will be resurrected to face the reckoning of their faith and deed. People having correct belief and doing good deeds will be placed in the paradise; while people having wrong belief will go to the hell.

BRANCHES OF RELIGION

Question: And what are the Branches of Religion?

Answer: There are many many branches, i.e. the rules of Shari'ah. But generally ten are

considered most important, because they are in fact Acts of Worship. All of them are performed jointly by heart and body; but some have stronger connection with heart, others with body; yet others are primarily related to worldly wealth. These ten are as follows:

1. Salat - prayer
2. Saum - Fasting
3. Hajj - Pilgrimage to Mecca
4. Zakat - Welfare tax
5. Khums - Paying one-fifth of saving
6. Jihad - Fighting in the cause of religion
7. Amr bil ma'ruf - To enjoin good
8. Nahy 'anil munkar - To forbid evil
- 9 + 10) To love the Prophet and his family members; and to remain aloof from their enemies.

Question: You have counted jihad as a branch of religion. How can you justify war as a desirable thing?

Answer: I am glad that you asked this Question: Let us look at this matter in a dispassionate way.

Islam does not like to exterminate wrong-doers, it wants to remove the wrong. Evil deeds are like diseases. They need treatment and every doctor wants to cure the ailments with medicines as far as possible. But sometimes the ailment reaches a stage where no medicine can do any good; he feels that surgical operation is necessary if the life of the patient is to be saved. Then he decides, not happily but reluctantly. to amputate one of more limbs of the patient. It may cause hardest pain for the time being; but it is not torture, it is mercy.

Likewise, suppose that this humanity is a compact body, some of its parts become infected with spiritual disease and every medicine of sympathetic persuasion and rational pleading has failed. And there is a

danger that their infection is causing harm to and inflicting hardships upon, other parts, and the spiritual doctor, I mean the Prophet or Imam who is guided by Allah, is confident that now the surgical operation is essential to save other parts of mankind from trouble. Then, and only then, he will order a Holy-War; and then also it will be limited to that part which is most necessary to remove.

But even if you feel that there is necessity of a surgical operation you will never entrust this most dangerous task to an unauthorized person. It will be a very foolish and irresponsible action. You can never be satisfied that the operation is essential unless a qualified doctor tells you so. Therefore, according to Shia Ithna-‘asheri law, a war cannot be started unless specifically authorized by the Prophet or Imam himself, and that also to the limits prescribed by that Representative of Allah. After all, life is a creation of God and it should not be

destroyed unless it has been authorized to do so by a Representative of God. Accordingly, the Holy-War is forbidden for the Shi'a Ithna-'asheri during the period when our Imam is hidden from us. The Prophet himself never started any war unless it was thrust upon him by the enemies. A study of the map of Arabia will show the actual facts. When the Prophet took refuge in Medina, the Meccans became infuriated because they could not satisfy their anger against him. So they made repeated attacks on him. The battle places of three important wars will tell the story. The first war 'Badr' was fought at Badr in the second year of Hijra. Badr is 80 miles from Medina and 170 miles from Mecca. Is there any doubt that the Meccans were the aggressors? The second war named 'Uhud' was fought next year at Uhud. Uhud is 3 miles from Medina and 247 miles from Mecca. Three years after Uhud Medina was surrounded by Meccans and Jews for about one month. They had come 250 miles from

Mecca to attack Medina. Is there anybody who can say that the Prophet should not have fought in self-defence? The first Ayat of Qur'an permitting the war, after 14 years of continual oppressions, speaks for itself. Qur'an says: "Permission to fight is given to those upon whom war has been thrust, because they are oppressed."

Question: But we were told that Islam was spread by sword. Is it not correct?

Answer: Absolutely wrong. It is a propaganda started by enemies of Islam which has no basis at all. You have just seen that the Muslims had to fight in self-defence, the Holy Prophet of Islam did not start any war; and no war was fought "to spread Islam", it was done to defend the Muslims. And all the wars were fought with minimum required force and always keeping the love of humanity in heart. A good proof may be found in the fact that in all the wars fought during the life of the

Holy Prophet, the total loss of life (on both sides) was less than seven hundred.

ISLAMIC ETHICS

Question: What is the importance of good morality in the eyes of Islam?

Answer: The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) has explained the most important objective of his mission in these words:-

“Indeed I have been sent only to perfect good manners.”

Question: Can you enumerate here some things which are good and important in Islamic ethics?

Answers: To do good deeds with sincerity and honesty; Dependence upon God; To do justice to one another; To do good to both parents; To look after one's blood-relations; To help each other in good deeds; To

reconcile people; Truth.

Cultivating Good Habits; Acquiring Knowledge, Bravery; Humility; Mercy and Gentleness; To deal well with people, Generosity; Leading a moral life; Helping the weak.

To salute aloud; Patience; Forgiveness; Fulfilling peoples needs; Equity; Fearing God; Cleanliness; Respecting others; Thanking God.

Question: And some forbidden and bad things?

Answer: Rebelling against and disobeying parents, Fornication/Adultery Sodomy; Lesbianism; Drinking liquor; Gambling; Eating Flesh of Swine and other forbidden things, Usurping other people's property; Bribery.

Foresaking Duties; Stealing; Pimping and helping in adultery; Lying; Backbiting and creating Discord; Usury; Murder; Embezzlement; Oppression.

Extravagance, Snobbery; Annoying People; Betraying Secrets; Hoarding foodgrains; Looking at Forbidden Women; Attending Dance and Cinema; Singing and Listening to Music.

Masturbation, Breach of Promise; Cheating; Adulteration in merchandise; Spying in other peoples' Affairs, Abusing and Recrimination, Indecent Dressing by Women; Helping the Oppressor, Judgement against the tenet of Islam.

Niggardliness, Envy; Cowardice. Lack of Courage; Treachery and enmity , Vengeance: Complaining when in Distress. Boasting, Greed; Laziness; Vain Talk; Self-humiliation.

Question: I want to know more about Islam. Where can I get such knowledge?

Answer: You may contact our Bilal Muslim Mission for books.

You may also enroll yourself in one of our correspondence courses. There are courses of higher and junior grade

Question: Please tell me first about the junior grade

Answer: It is available in English and also in Swahili language. The English course is called “Islamic Religious Course” (IRC, in short), and the Swahili one is called “Masomo Ya Ki-Islamu Kwa njia ya Posta. (MYK, in short).

Question: And what about the higher grade?

Answer: It is available to those who have completed Secondary education or are

in secondary Schools. It is called Islamic Correspondence Course (ICC, for short).

Question: How can I enrol in these courses?

Answers: Write to any of the following addresses:

1. Bilal Muslim Mission of Kenya
P.O. Box 82508,
MOMBASA/Kenya.
2. Bilal Muslim Mission of Kenya
P. O. Box 10396,
NAIROBI/Kenya
3. Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania
P. O. Box 20033,
DAR-ES-SALAAM
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