

Islam, the last of the Abrahamic religions, literally means “**Submission to God’s will.**” It was proclaimed by Muhammad (born 570 C.E.), the Prophet of Islam and the founder of Islamic public order, in the seventh century C.E. in Arabia. The beginning of Islam in 610 C.E. was marked by a struggle to establish a monotheistic faith and create an ethical society embodying divine justice and mercy. Muhammad, the Prophet and the statesman, instituted a series of reforms to create his community, the *umma*, on the basis of the teachings of the **Qur’an**, the holy book of Muslims, that connected human beings in relationship to one another in society, and all together to God, the Creator of all beings.

In the history of Islam, the year 610 C.E. also marks the beginning of Islamic revelation, the Qur’an. The Prophet was forty years old when the Angel Gabriel visited him in the cave in Mt. Hira, outside Mecca. It was the month of Ramadan. The Prophet and his family used to spend some days in this remote place for reflection and meditation. In this particular year, the Angel appeared during one of the nights during the last ten days of Ramadan while the Prophet was engaged in intense prayers. He brought the revelation from God with a message: “**Iqra’** – Recite!” “I am not a reciter,” the Prophet responded. The Prophet himself relates: “The Angel took me and engulfed me in his embrace until he had reached the limit of my endurance. Then the Angel released me and said, ‘Recite!’ and I said, ‘I’m not a reciter,’ and again the Angel took me and engulfed me in his embrace, and again when he had reached the limit of my endurance, he released me and said, ‘Recite!’ and again I said, ‘I am not a reciter.’ Then a third time he engulfed me as before, then released me and said:

[O Muhammad!] Recite: In the name of thy Lord who created, created human of a blood clot. Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Generous who taught by the pen, taught human that he knew not. (Q. 96:1-5)

The Message that began on that auspicious night almost 1400 years ago when

there was only one reciter, Prophet Muhammad himself, now has more than 500 million followers who recite the Qur'an all around the world. Almost one in every six individuals in the world proclaims the Message: *La ilaha illallah* – There is no deity but God and *Muhammadun rasulullah* – Muhammad is the prophet of God.

The Qur'an consists of the revelations the Prophet received intermittently from the time of his call as the messenger of God in 610 C.E. until his death in 632 C.E. Muslims believe that the Qur'an was directly communicated by God through the archangel Gabriel, and accordingly, it is regarded as inerrant and immutably preserved. It has served as the source for ethical and theological doctrines and principles for the public organization.

The Sunna (meaning “trodden path”), has functioned as the elaboration of the Qur'anic revelation, providing details about each and every precept and deed, traced back to the Prophet's own precedent. The narratives that carried such information are designated as hadith.

In the ninth century, Muslim scholars developed an elaborate system for the classification of these hadith-reports to ascertain their reliability and to derive from them the beliefs, practices and ethics for the community.

In line with the other Abrahamic faiths, namely, Judaism and Christianity, Islam has linked entire humanity to the unique and single Divine Authority through the affirmation of one God. Islam leads humanity to the essential knowledge, which integrates our existence by making us aware what we are and what we need to be. The acceptance of the Divine authority brings up the commitment of living according to the Divine Will. The root “salama” in Arabic, from which Islam is derived, has two meanings: one, “peace” with a sense of security, and the other, “submission” to peace generating authority. One who submits to the Divine Will – “a Muslim”- gains peace and security in this world and the next. The core message of Islam is that through the use of reason, which discerns between right and wrong, and between absolute and relative, one should accept to do good and to submit to the Will of the Absolute

Divine Being. This Divine Will was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) in the form of the revelation of the “Qur’an”, the Holy Book for the Muslims. This is the external expression of God’s Will. God’s Will also seeks expression internally in human creation, the vessel for Divine Nature – “fitrat Allah.” This nature is the source for the guidance that all humans need as humans. Through constant performance of good and pursuing the right human mind is enabled to discover the laws of nature that guarantee the prosperity of all those who heed to the call of the Divine Nature in them.

Islam, then, is a universal message that includes humankind and the Universe about him. Its essential meanings and guidance need to be discovered in three areas:

By practicing what God wants us to do (this is the meaning of the word ‘ISLAM’)

By understanding the true nature of things (this is the meaning of the word ‘IMAN’) and,

By transforming ourselves so that we can live in harmony and love with all other beings (this is the meaning of the word ‘IHSAN’).

In this way, Islam corresponds to the three dimensions of human activity in this world:

To practice (Body)

To understand (Mind); and

To transform oneself through perfection (Heart).

Essentially, the Qur’anic revelations to the Prophet Muhammad nearly fourteen hundred years ago are founded upon the principle of the Unity of God -tawhid, the sole Creator of the entire universe and the source of human unity as God’s creatures. Every aspect of Islam revolves around the doctrine of Divine Unity, implanting in humanity the ability to realize its inner and outward life in such a way that every action should manifest sincerity, love, virtue and perfection.