

ISLAM *is not a religion*



In the name of Allah,
the Compassionate, the Merciful

Islam is not a religion. The word religion as it is used today has a special connotation. While religion may affect a “religious” person’s attitude, moral character and behavior as a public servant, the collective affairs of the people seem to be void from divine (or spiritual) guidance in our present secular world. Islam demands that Allah (SWT) be at the center of all human affairs, the individual/private and the collective/public. Islam is a way of life.

Islam is a system based on an ideology. This ideology is called Tawheed (oneness) or Unity of God. Tawheed is the basic philosophy of Islam. This philosophy is derived from a set of beliefs that are purely based on the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Islam is a divinely inspired system or social order that is a complete code of life for the benefit of humankind, unlike communism, socialism, capitalism, and secularism, which are manmade social orders. Islam is a comprehensive social, political, and economic social order.

Implications of Tawheed

Tawheed has certain implications on both the individual and public spheres. At the individual level, man is to submit to his creator and serve none but the Master, Allah (SWT), “And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Allah...” (17:23). This sincere submission can only result in total inner peace, no matter what the economic condition of a person. Similarly, there are certain implications to tawheed at the political, economic, and social levels of human affairs.

The three corollaries of Tawheed

Political: Total negation of human sovereignty

The first and most important corollary of tawheed at the political level is its clear negation of any form of authority for any person or group of people. We have been instructed, in numerous places in the Qur’an that sovereignty and authority belong to God and is His alone. “...Legislation is for none but Allah. He has

commanded that you serve none except Him. That is the correct deen, but most people do not know.” (12:40) He has absolutely no partners and will not accept anyone to share His sovereignty, “...and He allows none to share His legislation.” (18:26).

Therefore, no person or group of people (tribe, nation) has any right to claim sovereignty for themselves. The entire universe belongs to Allah (SWT), and He is the only rightful ruler. He is the King.

A serious warning is issued by Allah (SWT) for those who do not rule or judge according to His directive. “And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed, they are (no better than) unbelievers... wrongdoers...rebellious.” (5:44, 46, and 48).

Man, on the other hand, is God’s vicegerent on earth. This decision of Allah was made very clear to the angels before the creation of man. He (SWT) informed the angels, “I am making a vicegerent (Khalifah) on earth...” (2:30). A vicegerent is “a deputy appointed to act on the authority of a ruler or magistrate, especially in administrative duties.” The management of human affairs lies in man under the rulership of Allah (SWT). Autonomy is granted to man by Allah (SWT) as a privilege. Man may legislate, provided the laws he enacts do not violate Allah (SWT)’s laws. Man does not have the authority to make permissible what Allah (SWT) has forbidden and forbid what Allah (SWT) has permitted.

Prophet Dawud is a classic example of the concept of vicegerency. Allah (SWT) instructed Dawud (AS), “O Dawud, We have made you a vicegerent on earth, so judge between the people in truth and do not follow your own desire...” (38:26).

Therefore, man is God’s representative (vicegerent) on earth. This is the basis of the Islamic Political System. Sovereignty belonging to a man (king) or a group of men (people, parliament, congress, etc.) violates this principle and takes this authority away from Allah (SWT).

Economic: Complete negation of ownership

The second corollary of tawheed at the economic level

is the complete negation of ownership. Unlike Western capitalistic ideology, which believes that man owns what he possesses, Islam teaches the exact opposite. Man owns nothing. He does not own his own body limbs, let alone any worldly possessions. This point is made clear in many places in the Qur’an. The following ayah, for instance, supports such a claim, “...and to Allah are the treasures of the heavens and the earth...” (67:7). Although the wealth we have is acknowledged by Allah (SWT) as belonging to us, He (SWT) makes it clear that in fact it is His, “...and give them from the wealth of Allah that He has given you...” (24:33). Therefore, man, being a vicegerent of Allah (SWT) on earth, is considered to be a trustee and what he has is only a trust from Allah (SWT). Hence, one needs to be faithful to the owner of that trust.

Recently, and particularly with the advent of unrestrained capitalism in the West, it would be safe to describe man as becoming an economic animal. Working to be self sufficient and independent is no longer man’s ambition. Man has become infatuated with wealth and material possessions. This obsession has led many individuals and corporations to usurp the wealth of common people and the poor. This exploitation has made common and poor people subservient to the wealthy individuals, thus becoming economic slaves to their wealthy masters. Unchecked and uncontrolled capitalism allows the gap between the haves and the have-nots to grow. The main purpose of the Islamic economic system is, “...so that it will not be a perpetual distribution among the rich among you...” (59:7). The aim is to eliminate the gap between the two classes.

Islam strictly prohibits the interest-based economy and promotes the barter system. Some have tried to persuade others that interest is not usury and that interest is like trade. In acknowledgment of this unfortunate reality, Allah (SWT) refutes such a notion by saying, “...they say, ‘Trade is [just] like interest.’ But Allah has permitted trade and has forbidden interest...” (2:275).

The main pillar of the Islamic economic system is Zakah, which means to purify. Zakah, or poor-due, is

a means to wealth and spiritual purification, in other words piety. In Islam, there is a direct relationship between religious piety and economics.

Man has to discharge and distribute his material belongings according to Allah (SWT)'s commands. This is the basis of the Islamic Economic System.

Social: Complete social equality

The third corollary of tawheed at the social level is the idea that all human beings, regardless of one's color, race, language, gender, ethnic background, or religion, at the moral and spiritual levels are absolutely equal. All human beings are recognized as the creation of One Creator belonging to one family, Adam and Eve. The principal clause for equality can be found in surah 49, ayah 13, "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female..." Human relations and interactions in Islam are based on fraternity. The ayah continues, "... and made you into peoples and tribes that you may know one another." Superiority or inferiority in Islam is based on religious piety and righteousness. The ayah concludes with the statement, "Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted."

This statement was revealed in the seventh century, laying down the main foundation of equality and fraternity among the human race. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW), in his farewell address to the Muslims, reminded and stressed the importance of equality. He (SAW) proclaimed, "There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, nor is a non-Arab superior to an Arab. No black is superior to white and no white is superior to black except in piety."

It is the divine decree for people to belong to different races and have different skin colors and speak many languages. The intent is not to tolerate each other, but accept one another and celebrate this diversity in God's creation. The purpose is to learn from each other thus cultivating the sense of fraternity and brotherhood. Piety or righteousness is the only criteria for superiority in the eyes of God, which will be determined on the Day of Judgment.

In summary, those fundamental guiding principles at the political, economic, and social levels, if adhered to and implemented, would guarantee humanity the much needed peace and harmony in which Allah (SWT) in two places in the Qur'an promised. "And when guidance comes to you from Me, whoever follows My guidance there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve." (2:38). In another place, He (SWT) said, "There shall most certainly come unto you guidance from Me; and he who follows My guidance will not go astray and neither will he be unhappy." (20:123).

Facts:

Over the past several hundred years and more notably after the demise of the Ottoman Caliphate, the practice of Islam has gradually decreased from a "deen" to just a religion. The essential components of human life, the political, economic, and social affairs, or the public and civic affairs, were taken out of the domain of Islam, reducing Islam to just a religion. In essence, Islam was reduced to merely a dogma (a set of beliefs); the belief in the One God (Allah-SWT), Angels, Books, Prophets, Resurrection, Judgment Day, and Heaven and Hell; a set of rituals such as offering the five daily prayers (salah), charity (zakah), fasting the month of Ramadan (sawm), and pilgrimage (hajj); and the social customs detailing celebration and mourning of major life events such as birth, marriage, and death, are personal and private affairs.

According to the third surah, Aal-Imran, ayah 19, in the Qur'an, Allah (SWT) stresses, "Verily, the Deen with Allah is al-Islam." Here, "deen" cannot be translated as religion; rather "deen" means a complete way of life including both private and public spheres. To be satisfied with just the private/religious dimension of Islam is equivalent to compromising Tawheed, the foundation of Islam.

Through the teachings of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), humanity is provided with the guidance necessary to lead people rightly in their private/religious and public/social affairs. The divine system or structure is the only structure that is suitable for man, as Allah (SWT) Himself made it clear that if anyone adopts a way other

than His way, it will never be accepted (3:85). It is against logic and beyond human reasoning to accept that a manmade system can be superior to Islam, the system Allah (SWT) chose for the human race as the final guidance. Allah (SWT) confirms this when He revealed in the Qur'an, "This day I have perfected this deen for you, completed my favor upon you, and am pleased with Islam as your deen (way of life)." (5:3).

Islam is a deen that covers all aspects of human life, including the individual as well as the collective. When Islam's domain is reduced to just the individual level, consisting only of a set of beliefs, rituals, and social customs it becomes a religion. Therefore, the deen of Islam must be practiced in all realms of society – social, political, and economic – in order to truly fulfill the Islamic foundational philosophy of tawheed.

"Whoever seeks a Deen (way of life) other than Islam never will it be accepted of him; and in the hereafter he will be among the losers." [Aal Imran, 3:85]

About IONA

The Islamic Organization of North America, IONA, is an organization dedicated to reviving the Qur'an in the hearts of Muslims while bringing its message to non-Muslims.

The obligations of a Muslim, as ordained by the Qur'an and Sunnah, can be understood as having four levels:

1. A Muslim is required to develop real faith and conviction in one's heart – **Iman**.
2. A Muslim is required to live a life of complete submission to the will of Allah (SWT) – **Ibadah**.
3. A Muslim is required to propagate and disseminate the message of Islam to humanity as a whole – **Shahada 'alan-Nas**.
4. A Muslim is required to try his/her utmost to promote and struggle for the establishment of justice – **Iqamat-ud-Deen**.

The objective of IONA is to assist North American Muslims in fulfilling the above obligations as well as inviting non-Muslims toward Islam, for the sake of our salvation in the hereafter and for seeking the love and mercy of God Almighty.



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**IONA is a non-violent movement whose aim is to
promote and struggle for the establishment of justice**