

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION

What is religion? How is it defined? How the people with different thoughts, regions and religions interpret it? When, why and how did it start? Why do people follow it? Why do we need it? All these and many other similar questions lead us to this discussion in order to find answers before starting the religious studies.

Etymology:

Religion, derived from old French word "Religiun" means "Respect for what is sacred" or Latin word "Religionem" means "Reverence for the gods".

Modern Sense: "Recognition of, and obedience to a higher unseen power". Words "Creed", "Cult" & "Faith" are used as synonyms.

In Urdu, we use word "Mazhab مذہب" which is originally an Arabic word means "A way to go", "A path to walk", "A style", "A method" etc.

In Arabic, in the sense of religion, the word "Deen دین" is used commonly which literally means "Retaliation", "Recompense", "Requital", "Commandment", & "Judgment" etc, for example, Qur'an says "مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ"The Master of the Day of Judgment".

Word Religion in Qur'an:

The most appropriate of the above mentioned Arabic words in the sense of religion, is

"Deen". Although, Qur'an uses some other words as well in this sense like "صِرَاطٌ", "مِلَّةٌ...Millah", "سِرَاطٌ...Siraat", "مِنْهَاجٌ...Minhaaj", & "شِرْعَةٌ...Shir'ah", but the word preferred and used most often in the divine guidance i.e. Qur'an and Hadith, it is "Deen دین" as it indicates to the requital and the recompense of the deeds in after life. The word "Mazhab مذہب" has not been used anywhere in divine scripture in the sense of religion as it does not express the exact sense of religion except in Urdu, instead, it is used for "Point of view" & "School of thought".

Definitions & Concepts:

People from various areas, eras and thoughts have interpreted religion in different ways in the light of their own knowledge and experiences. Here are some of the opinions of western scholars and philosophers along with the Islamic perspective to get an idea about different views and attitudes towards religion.

Edward Burnett Tylor 1832-1917 (defines in his book "Primitive Culture")

"The belief in spiritual being"

David Emile Durkheim 1858-1917 (writes in his book "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life")

"Unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things"

William James 1842-1910 (describes in his book "The Varieties of Religious Experiences")
"The feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, whatever they may consider the divine."

The crux of the **western ideas** is that the Religion to them is "A relationship to sacred & spiritual things, feelings in solitude & experiences of individuals."

Divine Perspective: (Eastern Perspective)

"Religion is a complete code of life set and sent down by the Creator, the Lord (God) through His messengers from time to time to guide His slaves (Mankind & Jinn) to the success in life and afterlife".

Analysis:

By a look upon all these view points, few facts are unveiled that....Western scholars, however, interpret religion as it is something related to thought only, not stressing upon the practical aspect of the religion. This attitude can easily be observed in the western society as they dislike the interference of religion into their daily lives as well as in economical and political bodies. Secondly, their interpretation shows that religion to them is a personal matter of every individual, because people are different in their thoughts and association with spiritual & sacred beings. This approach can also be observed in the western society particularly in modern era. On the other hand, it appears that religion to divine perspective is more practical than it is theoretical as it is a complete code of life and almost 90% of Islamic teachings are practice based. Besides, it is a collective and inter-related issue more than it is a personal matter because success in worldly life cannot be considered without collectiveness.

Need for Religion:

Religion is an essential need of mankind as it gives meanings to the essence of life, creates objective of existence and establishes the core of mankind. This conversation requires further elaboration on these aspects.

Demand of Nature:

This is mentionable that liberty and freedom have ever been fascinated and desired for human beings and the fact is that man, on account of his natural desire, prefers liberation and emancipation over all kinds of confinements and limitations which are the core of the religion, besides, on ground reality demonstrates that almost 80-85 % of the world population is affiliated to some religion preferring restrictions and confinement set by the religion over emancipation and freedom which is astonishing for man himself. This enigma is uncomplicated to solve.

In fact, association with some religion is the demand of the innate human nature man has been created with. Nature refers to an essential feature or characteristic of something by which that particular object is recognized and known. In case, if this feature is removed, that particular object remains not the same object any more. For instance, water is recognized and known for its liquidity and flow, if this feature is removed, it might be called as ice but not water any more.

In the same way, man is created with a proviso to be bound to believe in some unseen super natural power. No matter if man recognizes him or not, because it is experienced more than once and proved that one decides and determines for some task and struggles hard to achieve the goal, one eventually fails despite all his determinations. Besides, suffering from undesired diseases, mishaps, demises and disasters demonstrate even compel man to believe in some other contradictive powerful being existing as dominant and more influential than man himself. Man,

on account of his nature, is frightened that this power may cause to harm or destruct him in case if gets angry with man. As an end result, man yields to that power to secure himself from any expected or unexpected failure and mischief and to collect maximum benefits and advantages. It is thus the religion takes birth and it is only the belief in God which can give security to the self and mind, peace to the soul, meaning to the individual and the satisfaction to the human nature.

The Innate Human Nature:

The word "Innate" refers to built in essential human features. Man has been created with an innate nature that compels him to believe in an unseen super natural power as God. Qur'an reveals about an incident that occurred in Heaven before Adam (AS) was sent to earth which is identified as "The Initial Covenant". As per the details described by the Holy Prophet (pbuh), Allah, the Exalted, created all of the human souls from Adam (AS) and presented Himself to them and questioned them, "**Am I not your Lord?**" They all replied, "**Why not**" which means they all agreed upon it. This covenant has been set as the innate nature of the human beings by Almighty Allah. This is the nature termed as "Fitrah" in Qur'an and everyone takes birth with same "Fitrah" that leads to the acceptance of the Ultimate Reality "God".

Craves of Mind for the Knowledge of Essential Facts:

The human need for a creed primarily derives from man's crave to know himself and the universe around him. The need to find answers has always occupied the concern of human philosophies without reaching the definite solutions. Since their creation, people have had the nagging questions "From where?", "To where?" and why?" They are sometimes distracted by the demands of daily life, but they one day return to these eternal questions. Man wonders: from where did I and this immeasurable universe come? Did I come into existence on my own or is there a creator who brought me to existence? Who is he? How am I related to him? What about this vast land, sky, animal, vegetable, mineral, planets and stars? Did they come into existence on their own or is there some sovereign creator? What is after this life? What is after death? Where do we go after the short journey on this planet Earth? Does the story of life from birth to death have nothing beyond that? Do the virtuous who sacrifice their lives for good and truth meet the same end as the wicked and villainous who sacrifice others for their own desires and pleasure? Does life culminate only in death? Or is there some other life after death in which the virtuous are rewarded and the villainous are punished? And why was mankind brought into existence? Why were people endowed with mind, wisdom, knowledge and volition which distinguish them from all animals? Why does everything in heaven and on earth seem to be in his service? Is there a purpose to his existence? Does he have a mission in life? Or was he brought into existence only to eat as animals do and then expire as animals do? If there is a purpose to existence, what is it? How can this purpose be realized?

These questions have haunted man in every age and demanded answers that satisfy the intellect and soothe the heart. Answers like that are only found in religion or in a pure religious belief. It is religion that primarily teaches man that he came into existence neither by chance nor on his own but he was created by a great Creator Who is his God, That God made man, fashioned him perfectly, gave him due proportion, breathed soul into him, endowed him with hearing, eyesight, mind and heart and granted him all sorts of blessings starting as an embryo in a mother's womb.

History & Background:

Through the history of religions, we come to know that religion has ever been the essential part of human life in every society. The Greek historian Plutarch (46-120 AD) writes, “In history, I have found cities without forts, cities without palaces, cities without schools, but never have I found cities without places of worship”. For history of religion, we find archaeological evidences as well; likewise tablets of law by Hammurabi (2300 BC), a king of Babylon lived in Nineveh, the capital of Babylon, almost in the age of Ibrahim (AS). These tablets describe the laws containing some clauses derived from the divine teachings. Moreover, the ancient cemeteries like tombs & pyramids provide the big evidence for religion, because, burial itself, is the teaching of religion taught to mankind through the crows as per the revelation of Qur'an.

But, when and how did it start actually, history is silent and provides no definite answer. But, the divine scriptures like Qur'an & Bible reveal it well that the religion started with the very first person on this earth named Adam (AS).

Universal Features of Religions:

A large number of religions existing in the world are having a massive variety of thoughts and teachings, but some fundamental features are considered as universal and common between all of them, these are following....

- 1- **Faith & Beliefs:** All of the existing religions have the teachings consisting of thoughts called as beliefs. Although, these beliefs vary religion to religion in details, but are common being a theoretical part.
- 2- **Rituals & Customs:** All the religions hold some practical rituals being followed by the followers which later become the identification of that particular religion. This is the second feature common between all of the religions whether they are revealed or non-revealed. But, likewise beliefs, these rituals also vary religion to religion.
- 3- **Ethics & Morality:** All of the religions form their own concepts of good & evil and the curbs of ethical and moral values derived from their own thoughts and rituals. Although, some of the moral values are universal like speaking truth, not telling a lie and not killing the innocent one, but some may vary in various religions. This is very much possible that one value might be considered good in one religion but might not be in the other one.

Religion & Human life:

There is no second opinion in the fact that religion has ever been very influential and put a great impact on humanity, their personal as well as their collective life. Man, being follower of a religion, lives a satisfactory life as he thinks that he has established an awesome relationship with the sacred super natural power that is dominant and holding the authority to beneficiate or destruct the human life. Besides, man needs psychological peace and spiritual strength occasionally and also needs a mighty and unfailing supporter at times of hardship and crisis. This is religion that holds man's life, hope and courage, when a person loses something or someone he loves, or fails to achieve something, or is stricken by misfortune and illness. The religious faith provides him support, strength, hope, condolence and patience.

Religion also affects the collective life of mankind. In fact, the societies are always established on the basis of religion and form their own civilizations and cultures. All the world's great civilizations are known by their religion like the Buddha civilization, the Hindu culture and

civilization and the Muslim civilization are named after their religions. Moreover, the religion controls and governs the relationships between society members and makes every member observe his limits, refrain from trespassing the rights of others and not to overlook the welfare of the community for personal immediate gains.

Classification of Religions:

There are almost **nine thousands religions** including the tribal religions existing in the world. These religions have been classified into two major categories, Revealed & Non-revealed. Revealed refers to the claim by the followers in order to have some divine scripture for human guidance. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are considered as the revealed religions. Rest of the religions have been declared as non-revealed religions as they do not claim to have the divine scripture despite they have some sacred and holy books.

Theological Ideas:

Theology is the systematic and rational study of concepts of God and of the nature of religious truths. It is a knowledge that refers to God, His reality and the relationship with mankind. God is a super natural being and an ultimate reality, but man, despite all his association with God, is unable to reach and explore His reality as He lies beyond man's approach of senses and imaginations. However, people tried to explore Him through their rational and as an end result; they differed and formed several concepts. Some of them are as follow,

1- Atheism:

Denying the existence of God & religion and believing in the self-existence of the universe.

2- Agnosticism:

Not being certain about the existence or non-existence of God, instead, being in doubt about it.

3- Deism:

Believing in God but denying the revelation & the interference of God in universe.

4- Pantheism:

Identifying and equating God with the law & nature of universe, declaring universe as God.

5- Monotheism:

Believing in that there is not but one God (this one is supported by the divine scriptures)

6- Polytheism:

Believing in the plurality of God i.e. numbers of God.