
UNIT 4 ISLAM

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we define Islam and its historical development. The main emphasis will be on the fundamentals of the religion of Islam. We examine the essential belief system of Islam across the world with varying social and cultural contexts in order to gain an understanding of how this tradition has emerged and spread around the world posing new challenges.

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the origin and historical development of Islam;
- Identify its basic philosophical concepts and issues;
- Understand the philosophy of Divine Revelation;
- Recognise some ethical principles and law in Islam as a world religion; and
- Understand the sectarian philosophical nuances –Sunnism, Shiaism and Sufism.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

It is important at the outset of our discussion that we understand something about the Islamic heritage, upon which Muslims draw for inspiration. Islam is the youngest of the major world religions. It is also the fastest growing religious tradition. In many areas of the world, including Europe and North America, the number of Muslims is increasing rapidly. In this global context, Muslims exhibit as many differences among themselves as do the other great religions of the world. However, regardless of sectarian and other kinds of divisions, Muslims share core beliefs that bind them in a worldwide community.

ISLAM – It is pronounced with the accent on the second syllable: i-SLAM. The word literally means submission, obedience, or surrender. Islam, however, is derived

from Salam, the Arabic word for peace. So a literal definition Islam is “peace through submission to the will of Allah.” Islam is the name of the religion. The religion is not, as with Christianity, Buddhism, and other religions, named after its founder. Muslim is the person who practices Islam that is a surrendered one, one who has submitted to God. One becomes a Muslim not by birth, but by confession of the faith in Islam: “There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God”. Muslim is a person who can make the twin declaration of the faith in One God and a righteous life. Hence, Islam is less a religion, as many understand the word, and more of a total way of life. Politics, art, education, daily routine, diet, and many social customs are guided by Allah and are infused with the spirit of Islam. It is thus a way of life confidently embracing this world, and a preparation for the after-life, just as confidently embracing the other world.

4.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAM

A profound right-angle turn was made in the history of religion during the nineteenth century BCE. A man named Abraham dared to challenge his father’s authority and reject his household gods. He did so in the name of a new God he had experienced. It is important here to recognise that Adam was the first in the line of prophets (Quran 3:3) and although Islam was renewed by Noah, in Abraham’s time there was much corruption of the monotheism God intended in creation. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam confess Abraham to be the “friend of God and father of the faithful” and for each of them, the history of salvation began with Abraham and his covenant with God. This shared heritage played itself out in history is interpreted differently by the three religions. The general view is that Abraham is the tribal ancestor of Israel and Arab people by way of two women, Hagar and Sarah, and two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. God made covenant with Abraham and promised him that his family and its descendants would be many and blessed. Sarah, Abraham’s wife, did not believe God could fulfil the promise since she was well past child-bearing age. So she took matters into her own hands and encouraged Abraham to take another wife, her Egyptian maid, Hagar. Abraham and Hagar had a son who was named Ishmael, that is, “God hears” or “The Lord had given heed” – presumably to Sarah’s incapacity to have children. Soon after Ishmael was circumcised at the age of 13, a second son was miraculously born to Sarah. This son was Isaac, who figures prominently in the Hebrew story. Because Sarah feared, perhaps out of jealousy, that Ismael, the first-born and legitimate heir to God’s promise, might compete with Isaac for this heritage, she with Abraham’s consent forced Hagar and Ishmael out of the household. They were banished to fend for themselves in the wilderness.

God continued to look out for Hagar and Ishmael. After travelling for days in the desert, Ishmael and Hagar were provided water by God near where the first Kaaba would be built by Abraham. Eventually, as she had hoped, Hagar saw her son marry an Egyptian woman. From that marriage came twelve sons. Many years later Ishmael and Isaac were reunified as they returned to bury their father. The history of the Middle East has been forever shaped by this interpretation of Abraham’s covenant and submission to God. On this point hangs a 4000 year-old fratricidal struggle between Israel and Islam. It also explains why Jews could not accept Muhammad as the Messiah. Islamic logic concludes that all true followers of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus are Muslims.

4.3 THE LIFE OF MUHAMMAD

One of history's auspicious moments occurred about 570 CE in the Arabian oasis town and commercial centre of Mecca. To a young couple of the Quraysh tribe and Banu Hashim clan was born Muhammad ibn Abdullah. He was born on the twelfth day of the third lunar month of Islam's calendar. This Arab boy, whose name meant "the highly praised one" would grow up to have an impact on the world out of all proportion to the wealth and status of his family. Not much was expected from this orphan whose father died two months before his birth and whose mother died when he was six. He became a foster child under the care of his grandfather for a short time and after the latter's death, Muhammad was adopted by an uncle, Abu Talib. The world which his tribal community opened up to him was a colourful and exciting one of camels, caravans, and the commerce which accompanied them. Mecca provided scenes of barter, visits to the shrine of the Black Stone in the Kaaba the imaginative language of soothsayers and poets, and the sale of statues and religious mementos. His reputation, reliable character, and good name increased as he matured physically into manhood. This reputation soon reached a wealthy widow and local business woman by the name Khadija. She hired him to work with her trading company and eventually to supervise her commercial enterprise. So successful was his management of her financial affairs and so responsible was his leadership, that her company prospered beyond expectations.

His most traumatic moment came at age forty around the 27th of the month of Ramadan when he was meditating in a cave on Mt. Hira. He called it the "Night of Power" better than 1000 months ...peace until the rising of the dawn. A voice as clear and distinct as if it were a friend next to him said, "Recite in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher who created man of a clot of congealed blood! Proclaim!" (96:1-2).

Muhammad was overwhelmed. "I can't read or write". How can I do what you command?" was his natural response. He soon realized that the person speaking to him with such clarity was none other than the angel Gabriel. This encounter caused him greater anxiety. He very quickly shared the whole experience with Khadija whose opinion he had long trusted. It is important to say here that, unlike other founders of religions, such as Jesus and Buddha, Muhammad felt it perfectly natural to be a husband and father with all the duties required of parenting. In this regard, he returned to the example of Moses and Abraham and other Hebrew messengers of God, for whom it would have been unthinkable not to be married.

Khadija found her husband's religious experience credible and became his first convert. In fact, his next two converts were people he knew well – a cousin, Warakha, Zaid and Abu Bakr.

Muhammad was drawn again and again to the cave at Mt. Hira, and Gabriel kept reciting words of Allah to him. The more Gabriel spoke, the more convinced Muhammad was that he was not mad (81:19-25). He memorised the words revealed to him and then recited them to his friends, who wrote them on any piece of scrap material they could find, be it stone, leather, leaves or bone.

4.4 BELIEFS OF ISLAM

The Oneness of God: (Tawhid)

La ilaha illa Allah, wa Muhammad rasul Allah

(There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah)

Say: Allah is One, the Eternal God. He begot noe, nor was he begotten. None is equal to Him (112:1-4).The foundation of Islam is the uncompromising unity and oneness of God, called *Tawhid* in Arabic. Allah is beyond distinction and division and has no equal or associate. Allah is the Arabic word for “God”. The un-translated usage of this Arabic term became increasingly more common in English and other European languages since the 19th century. The concepts associated with the term Allah (as a deity) though differed from tradition to tradition. In pre-Islamic Arabia, Allah was not the sole divinity. In Islam, Allah is the pivot of the Muslim faith who is the only God, all-merciful and omnipotent, transcendent creator of the universe, and the judge of humankind. The term Allah is most likely derived from a contraction of the Arabic article al and ilhah “deity, god” to Allah meaning “the (sole) deity, God “(*ho theos nonos*).

Ways of Understanding the Concept of God

The first part of the Muslim confession of faith (the Shahada) is the basis for this concept of God in Islam. The Muslim bears witness that : “there is no god but God”. Or “no divinity but (one) Divinity”. The revealed Scripture of Islam, the Quran, is like a vast commentary on this simple statement, drawing from it all its implications for human life and thought.

This concept of the Deity is strictly monotheistic and Unitarian. God alone has absolute being, totally independent and totally self-sufficient. Whatever exists or ever could exist does so by His will. He has no “partner” either in creating the universe or in maintaining it in existence. He is Himself un-caused. The Quran tells us” “Say: He is Allah, One, the utterly Self-sufficient; He begets not, neither is He begotten, and there is nothing that is like unto Him”. It tells us also that: “When He wills a thing to be. He but says unto it –Be! And it is! He is al-Ahad, “the One”, absolute unity. This is in sharp contrast to the Christian contention of the Trinity. The One cannot be divided, nor can it be diminished or “humanised” by incarnation in any created form. God does not become His own creature, in fact He does not “become” anything: He is. Although God is One, there are many names for God. The Quran contains ninety-nine “most beautiful names of God.” (7:180). The Unity (Tawhid) of Allah is reflected in the unity of Allah’s creation and the order of the world. This especially means the unity of the human family. Brotherhood and sisterhood of all peoples is the logical consequence of the Unity of God; we are all related. This is the reason for the clarion call of all inclusiveness in Islam and the basis of its universal appeal.

The Kalima (six articles of faith):

- 1) Belief in One God (Tawhid),
- 2) Belief in Angels,
- 3) Belief in the Book (Quran),
- 4) Belief in the Prophets,
- 5) Belief in the Last Day, and
- 6) Belief in Predestination

4.5 DIVINITY OF THE QURAN AND ITS MESSAGE

No book ever commanded as wide as deep a reverence as did Quran; none has been copied and recopied, passed from generation to generation, memorized in part or in total, recited in solemn worship as well as in market places, and school rooms as much as the Quran. Above all, no book has ever been the cause of such deep religious, intellectual, cultural, moral, social, economic, and political change in the lives of millions, or of peoples as ethnically diverse, as has the Quran (Ismail R. Al-Faruqi).

Within 28 years, under Caliphate of Uthman, the Quran was canonized into its present form. This became the authorised version and has remained the same to this day. It was at this time, as well that the numbering, titling, and ordering of chapters were added to the revelation. Quran is divided into 114 chapters (Suras) with the longest, “The Cow,” having three verses. The word ‘sura’ really means “step” or ‘gradation” by which the believer ascends closer to Allah. “Ayat” is a sign, pointing to God’s revelation of wisdom and mercy.

Summary of Quranic Themes:

- The Oneness and Unity of God
- The Mercy and Compassion of God
- The Authenticity of Muhammad as a Messenger of God
- The Unity of the Message delivered by earlier prophets like Adam and Jesus
- The Final Accountability of our deeds
- The Ethical Guidance for Personal Morality and Social Justice
- The Resurrection, Last Judgment, and After-Life

It is widely accepted by Muslims that Sura 2 is the Quran in miniature. In turn, the Fatiha or Sura, 1 is a distillation of Sura 2. Appropriately, Fatiha literally means “key” it opens the door to the Quran, leading us to all its basic beliefs. It serves also as the Muslim’s perfect prayer. The pervasiveness and influence of the Quran is unavoidable in the daily life of the Muslim. It is used in daily prayers, and the Friday noon-day liturgy; it is memorized and recited for devotional purposes and always heard at rites of passage and other celebrative occasions.

4.6 PROPHETHOOD OF MUHAMMAD

The humanity of Muhammad is central to Islam. He is not divine, not even the shadow of God on earth. The Prophet himself goes to great lengths to persuade us of his humanity. The Quran records that he asked forgiveness of sins. Once, Allah rebuked him for being more interested in explaining the Quran to people than helping a poor blind man (80:1-15). However, Muhammad was much more than an ordinary man, perhaps more than an Apostle. We shall examine how he was the chosen one of God.

He was chosen to receive Allah’s final revelation of scripture. Moses was given the Torah; David the Psalms, Jesus, the Gospels; and of course, Muhammad was given the Quran. The latter is the “Standing Miracle” of Islam and remains a living testimony to the religious genius of Muhammad and his sheer trust in God.

In his famous “Night Journey to Heaven” Muhammad was taken from Mecca to Jerusalem and from a rock on Mount Zion ascended to the seventh heaven. On that flight he talked with Biblical prophets such as Moses and Abraham. While there he had a glorious vision of Allah. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem enshrines the place from which Muhammad, by wings of the spirit, made his divine visitation. One practical result of this spiritual trip was Muhammad’s instruction to pray five times a day – a subsequent pillar of Islam.

According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad was foretold in Hebrew Scriptures. For many Muslim scholars, Isaiah 42 predicts the coming of a servant who is associated with Kedar one of Ishmael’s sons whose tribe survived in Arabia (Isaiah 42, 21:13-17). That servant who is to appear in Arabia is believed to be Muhammad.

Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets- the last, the final messenger from Allah (33:40). Muhammad supersedes all previous revelations and prior prophets, Jesus is considered the most significant Prophet in the Quran next to Muhammad, but Jesus is only one in a succession of Prophets, of which Muhammad is the culmination. Just as Christians seal the canon of Scriptures, that is, no more books will be added to the Bible, Islam seals forever the canon of prophethood with Muhammad. The Quran summarizes Muhammad’s prophethood in this way: “Prophet we have sent you forth as a witness, a bearer of good news, and a warner, one who shall call men to Allah by His leave and guide them like a shining light” (33:45).

Check Your Progress I

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

- 1) What are the salient features of Holy Quran?
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- 2) How do you see Prophet Muhammad as the real Prophet of Allah?
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4.7 FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

Islam prescribes guidance for all of life; family life, individual behaviour, business transactions, social relations, how to dress, and what to eat. It is natural, then, to find prescriptions for religious obligations and practice. They are distinguishing marks of a

Muslim and practiced by all Muslims of whatever sect everywhere in the world. You could say that Islam is a house built on the rock of submission and supported by these five pillars: Witness, Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving, and Pilgrimage. Though all five pillars are generally seen as a unit, and a believer must do all five, one pillar, the Shahadah, stands in the middle. It is the pillar around which all the rest revolve.

Witness to the Faith (Shahadah)

The first pillar is a profession: “There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the Prophet of God.” There is nothing more important than this testimony; it is sufficient for conversion and makes a Muslim a Muslim. So it is chronologically first because it is foundational and all else—the rest of the pillars, ethics, the entire Muslim’s life depends on this declaration of faith. This affirmation constitutes acceptance of the whole message of Islam. Shahadah is a capsule version of the Fatiha which is an abbreviation of the Quran. There are five main elements in Islam’s faith (Iman) which is subsumed under the Shahadah:

- 1) Belief in one God—who alone is worthy of worship;
- 2) Belief in angels-spiritual beings who do the will of God;
- 3) Belief in sacred books including Torah (Taurah) and Gospel (Injil), all inspired by God;
- 4) Belief in the Prophets—as examples to follow and as spokesmen of God: Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, primary among others; and
- 5) Belief in the Day of Judgment and Resurrection.

These words of the Shahadah are said fourteen times a day if a Muslim does all his daily prayers. It is heard at every significant occasion from birth to death and at countless times in between. The Muslim’s goal is to be able to make this witness perfectly. The Shahadah has a negative aspect: “There is no God but God.” It clears away any potentially idolatrous debris so the Muslims can focus on God alone and thus develop an authentic spirituality. There is also a positive dimension to the Shahadah: “And Muhammad is the Prophet of God.” By this affirmation, we look to an historical example for the guidance of an ethical life. So the Witness unites the vertical and the horizontal, the spiritual and the ethical. Muhammad said: “I have brought to the world nothing more important than this.”

Prayer (Salah)

Probably the visual image most non-Muslims have of Islam is rows of men in a mosque or in a large outdoor space, rhythmically bowing and prostrating in unison. This is Salat, which really means worship, of which prayer is an essential ingredient. This worshipful prayer is pure devotion; it is unconditional praise of God where nothing is asked for, nothing is sought but God alone. There are two specific words for prayer: *dua*, which refers to petitions and supplications; and *dhikr*, the word for “remembrance” used by the Sufis in mystical meditation. These prayers may be spontaneous, unrehearsed, and uttered at any time. Salat, however, is a prescribed liturgy which includes bodily movement, saying of prayers in Arabic, and recitation of the Quran, all of which are preceded by ritual ablution. Five times a day, at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and at night, the muezzin (*Muadhdhin*—one who calls, a public crier) chants the call to prayer. And then, individually, but preferably with a congregation in the mosque, Muslims gather for Salat. If a mosque is unavailable, a prayer rug may serve as a “mosque.” Each rug will have a point in its design to orient the prayer to

Mecca. In the absence of a prayer rug, a Muslim can pray any place that is clean. The Prophet said, “The entire earth has been made a masjid (mosque) for me.” Before Salat begins, ceremonial bathing occurs at a fountain in the forecourt of the mosque. Without this ritual washing, a symbolic restoration of the believer to original purity and balance, the Salat is not valid.

Salat consists of a number of Rakat, or units of prayer. A Rakah (singular) includes certain bodily movements with accompanying words of prayer and scripture. These are learned by all Muslims at the age of seven and performed in the same manner the world over. This is how a Rakah progresses: 1. Standing facing qibla with hands raised to ears, reciting (Takbir)-Allahu Akbar or God is greatest; 2. Still standing, folding hands in front of your waist, reciting the Fatiha; 3. Bowing from the hips with hands on knees, reciting another Takbir; 4. Resuming standing position, followed by prostration (3 bodily symbol of our humility and submission to the will of God); 5. Raising your body to a sitting position (a form of kneeling), saying Takbir; 6. From this position, performing another prostration, repeating Takbir; and 7. Then sitting for silent prayers, blessing God, turning your face from side to side to acknowledge your neighbours in Salam.

A prayer (Salat) consists of two to four units. Dawn salat has two; at evening there are three, and the rest of the prayer times have four each, with a total of seventeen units per day. The basic physical positions are standing, bowing, sitting (kneeling), and prostration. As we have mentioned, the Quran is always used during prayer. Any Sura or part of a Sura may be recited, depending on the individual’s preference for verses. But some of the most used passages are the Fatiha, Sura 112 (The Oneness of God), 114 (Humankind), 2:255 (the famous “Throne Verse”) 24:35 (Light), and 59:22-24 (some wonderful names of God). The weekly noonday prayers on Fridays are a communal Salat. They are directed by an Imam who leads rows of men in prayer. Women may join men, but must stand in separate lines. More typically, women perform their acts of worship at home.

“Fasting” (Sawn)

Prayer and fasting, the second and third pillars, are disciplines found in every religion and Islam makes a significant place for both of them in the lives’ of Muslims. Fasting is primarily reserved for the month of Ramadan. Even the most assimilated Muslim will observe this fast for the ninth month of the lunar year. In Sura 2:183-185, the Quran spells out the rationale for fasting and what is required of the Muslim during this time of self-purification. The month of Ramadan was chosen for the annual period of personal spiritual renewal because it was in the last ten days of Ramadan that Muhammad experienced his “Night of Power” and first received revelations from Allah which were to become the Quran. Ramadan punctuates the year with a holy time in much the same way prayer time sanctifies each day. There are two sides to Ramadan-one is negative (self denial) and the other is positive (appreciation for the simplest gifts of Allah-food and drink and charity for the neighbor). From sunrise to sunset for the entire twenty-nine to thirty days of the month one is to fast from food, drink (including water), gambling, sexual activity, and all sensuous pleasures (including music). One also attempts a fast from evil, thoughts and desires. Total abstinence reminds the Muslim that his or her life is one of sacrifice and a life finally dependent on God. Since the calendar is a lunar one, the ninth month of Ramadan comes at different times during the year. When it falls in winter and the days are shorter, the sacrifice is less. But one’s spiritual commitment is tested when one has to fast on long summer days.

Furthermore, Ramadan helps the Muslims appreciate, in a very special way, the significance of the seasons and the wondrous thing that is the universe created by Allah.

Beyond the ascetic aspect of Ramadan, there are positive goals. One is to listen to or recite the entire Quran during the month. This is made easier for the average person by having the Quran divided into thirty equal portions. Another positive goal is that fasting helps the Muslim identify with the needs of the “have-nots.” So each day, a Muslim is expected to do a good deed and contribute to a charitable cause. At the end of Ramadan, there is a day of celebrating (*Eid A/Pity-Feast* of the Breaking of the Fast). It is a grand time for family reunions and gift-giving, and a holiday that children, in particular, enjoy.

Almsgiving (Zakat)

This is another example of Islam’s concern for the poor, Zakat, the fourth pillar, is a kind of social security system and organized-welfare program which helps a Muslim society share its wealth and maintain an equitable society. Zakat is a tax of two-and-one-half percent of one’s annual savings-what remains after personal and business expenses. This tax is beyond what one might donate to charity and the many different state taxes which become a part of a public fund to be used for the general welfare and a number of human services. Almsgiving is an act of worship, very much like prayer and fasting, and is earmarked for the poor, needy, disabled, and other deprived people. It represents the universal religious impulse in people to share their wealth with those who are less fortunate. Zakat literally means “purification”; it purifies the giver and what is given. A Muslim leader in early Islam observed how prayer, fasting, and almsgiving were related: “Prayer carries us halfway to God; fasting brings us to the door of His praises; almsgiving procures for us admission.”

Pilgrimage (Hajj)

This last pillar is the crowning experience of a Muslim’s life and moves his or her heart as nothing else. Once in a lifetime, if health and material means permit, a Muslim is expected to make a religious journey to Mecca. The pilgrimage usually involves a good deal of personal sacrifice-time, effort, and perhaps a life’s savings. It is imperative that money for the pilgrimage be earned by the pilgrim. A Hajj is invalid if one has to go in debt to make the trip. But for the Muslim, the journey to and presence in Mecca is the ultimate act of worship.

Hajj also allows the participant to experience the egalitarian nature and radical unity of Islam. Muslims from around the world-all classes, colors, nationalities, and races-are there in the same dress, performing the same rituals. The pilgrimage is also a foretaste of the Day of Judgment, especially as the pilgrims stand in pious devotion on the plain of Arafat near the Mount of Mercy. Hajj has the meaning of “to set out for a definite purpose” or “to visit a revered place.” The rationale for pilgrimage and certain prescribed activities surrounding it are found in Suras 2:196-203 and 5:98-100. About sixty days after the end of Ramadan, the month of pilgrimage (Dhu al-Hijja) begins. During the first ten days of this twelfth month of the year, around two million Muslims will travel to Mecca. If one cannot make the trip, and the majority of Muslims do not perform Hajj, a substitute is prescribed. It is the feast of *Id al-Adha* (Feast of Sacrifice) which is performed on the tenth day of the month at home to coincide with the same feast the pilgrims are enjoying in Mecca. The feast is a one-day ceremony for prayer and, if the family or person can afford it, the sacrifice of an animal. This sacrifice

remembers the ram provided to Abraham by the angel and consequently celebrates Ishmael’s freedom. A portion *of* this sacrificial meal is given to the poor.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

- 1) Explain the first Pillar of Islam.
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- 2) What is the important of Prayer in Islam
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- 3) Explain Hajj as a Pilar of Islamic Faith.
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4.8 LET US SUM UP

As we have repeatedly noted, Islam sees itself as the fulfilment of the Jewish and Christian religions, its Quran as the apogee of Scriptures (Torah and Gospels) and its Prophet Muhammad as the Seal of all Prophethood from Jesus back to Adam. Islam completed the religion of Jesus, which Christians believe completed Jewish religion. This link of “fulfilment” of Biblical religion, scripture, and prophets is one illustration of continuity. It is to be noted that no other religion in the world until the Bahais, has made acceptance of the truth of other religious conditions for its membership. We must view Islam as a revealed religion with an authentic scripture and strong oral and written traditions. Islam is not a mixture of Arab, Jewish, Christian and Hellenistic religions. The source of Islam’s absolute assurance of its validity lies in reason and revelation. One can now understand the utter loyalty Muslims have for the Quran, their undying allegiance to Allah, and the uncritical confidence in the “rightness” of their religion. Quran seeks an appropriate and practical balance between free will and

predestination, Revelation and reason, this world and the next, faith and works, and human egoism and altruism.

4.9 KEY WORDS

- Covenant** : A covenant, in its most general sense, is a solemn promise to engage in or refrain from a specified action. More specifically, a covenant, in contrast to a contract, is a one-way agreement whereby the covenanter is the only party bound by the promise.
- Predestination** : Predestination is a decree by God that there are certain souls that were previously appointed to salvation.

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4.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) The Oneness and Unity of God, The Mercy and Compassion of God, The Authenticity of Muhammad as a Messenger of God, The Unity of the Message delivered by earlier prophets like Adam and Jesus, The Final Accountability of our deeds, The Ethical Guidance for Personal Morality and Social Justice, and The Resurrection, Last Judgment, and After-Life
- 2) The humanity of Muhammad is central to Islam. He is not divine or even the shadow of God on earth. However, Muhammad is much more than an ordinary man, perhaps more than an Apostle. He was chosen to receive Allah’s final revelation of scripture, the Quran. In his famous “Night Journey to Heaven” Muhammad was taken from Mecca to Jerusalem and from a rock on Mount Zion ascended to the seventh heaven. One practical result of this spiritual trip was Muhammad’s instruction to pray five times a day. According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad was foretold in Hebrew Scriptures. Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets- the last, the final messenger from Allah. All the above indicates that Muhammad, while not being divine or actually worshiped, is held in high esteem and venerated as the model of what every Muslim hopes to be.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) The first pillar is a profession: “There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the Prophet of God.” There is nothing more important than this testimony; it is sufficient for conversion and makes a Muslim a Muslim. The entire Muslim’s life depends on this declaration of faith. This affirmation constitutes acceptance of the whole message of Islam. There are five main elements in Islam’s faith (Iman) which is subsumed under the Shahadah:

Belief in one God-who alone is worthy of worship;

Belief in angels-spiritual beings who do the will of God;

Belief in sacred books including Torah (Taurah) and Gospel (Injil), all inspired by God;

Belief in the Prophets-as examples to follow and as spokesmen of God: Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, primary among others; and

Belief in the Day of Judgment and Resurrection.

- 2) Among their religious worship, prayer is an essential ingredient. This worshipful prayer is pure devotion; it is unconditional praise of God where nothing is asked for, nothing is sought but God alone. Salat is a prescribed liturgy which includes bodily movement, saying of prayers in Arabic, and recitation of the Quran, all of which are preceded by ritual ablution. Five times a day, at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and at night, the muezzin (*Muadhdhin-one* who calls, a public crier) chants the call to prayer. And then, individually, but preferably with a congregation in the mosque, Muslims gather for Salat. If a mosque is unavailable, a prayer rug may serve as a “mosque.” Each rug will have a point in its design to orient the prayer to Mecca. In the absence of a prayer rug, a Muslim can pray any place that is clean.
- 3) Hajj the last pillar is the crowning experience of a Muslim’s life and moves his or her heart as nothing else. Once in a lifetime, if health and material means permit, a Muslim is expected to make a religious journey to Mecca. The pilgrimage usually involves a good deal of personal sacrifice-time, effort, and perhaps a life’s savings. It is imperative that money for the pilgrimage be earned by the pilgrim. A Hajj is invalid if one has to go in debt to make the trip. But for the Muslim, the journey to and presence in Mecca is the ultimate act of worship. Hajj also allows the participant to experience the egalitarian nature and radical unity of Islam. Muslims from around the world-all classes, colors, nationalities, and races-are there in the same dress, performing the same rituals. The pilgrimage is also a foretaste of the Day of Judgment, especially as the pilgrims stand in pious devotion on the plain of Arafat near the Mount of Mercy.