


In popular speak, Islām is a religion. By religion, we mean a set of beliefs and principles by which people conduct their lives. In that very simple sense, Islām is our religion, our faith. In reality however, Islām is more than that. For you and I and our families who follow Islām, it is a complete way of life.

 **So, Islām is not just something we undertake only in the *masjid*?**

That’s right. Islām does not just govern the way we pray in the *masjid* [mosque] or the way we fast, or the way we perform other acts of worship. No. Islām governs all our affairs. For example, it shows us how we should eat and sleep, conduct business dealings, treat others around us, how we should form our own governments and so on. It tells us how to live our day-to-day lives both on a personal basis as well as collectively within families and society at large. Again, it is a complete way of life.

 **What does the word Islām mean?**

Islām is an Arabic word. It comes from the root verb, *aslama*, which means ‘to submit.’ Islām is to submit to the Will of Allāh.

 **Please explain some of those words. What do you mean by ‘Will of Allāh’?**

The word ‘will’ basically means ‘wish’ or ‘desire’. To use a very simple example, if it is your parents’ ‘will’ that you brush your teeth before going to bed, then that is their ‘wish’ for you, that is the thing they want you to do, that is their ‘will’, which they would like you to follow.

 **So similarly, there are things, which Allāh would like us to do?**

Yes. There are so many things that Allāh سبحانه وتعالى¹ wants from us as His creation. There are so many actions he would like us to undertake and so many others that he wishes us to avoid.

 **What is the meaning of ‘submit’?**

To ‘submit’ means to ‘give yourself up’, to ‘surrender’. ‘Surrender’ and ‘submit’ are common words in everyday usage. For example, if two armies are fighting on a battlefield and one of them feels they are losing, they may well put up their white flag in surrender. By doing this what they are saying to the other army is:

*‘We don’t want to fight or resist you anymore.
We will put down all our weapons.
Take us, we are at your mercy,
but because we have surrendered peacefully to you,
please treat us kindly and don’t harm us.
We will follow whatever you say,
We surrender ourselves to you.’*



¹ *Subhān wa ta’āla* - The Glorious and Most High, reads in Arabic as سبحانه وتعالى



So, Islām means to give yourself up totally to the Will of Allāh?

Yes. To conduct yourself in the way that He has commanded. To do those good actions that he has ordered of us and to keep away from those evil actions that He has forbidden.²



Can't we make our own decisions based on our own will? If I surrender myself to the Allāh's Will, does that mean I don't have a will of my own?

Allāh reminds us in the Qur'ān that there is no compulsion in religion. He says,

لا إكراه في الدين ۖ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ ۚ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِن بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ
الْوُثْقَى لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا ۗ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

*There shall be no compulsion in (acceptance of) the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So, whoever disbelieves in tāghūt³ and believes in Allāh has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allāh is Hearing and Knowing
Sūrah al Baqarah, 2:256*

You have free will. You can choose to obey or disobey Allāh. However, if you wish to gain His pleasure and adhere to the tenets of Islām, your will or desire to do things must not be contrary to the Will of Allāh.

Imagine you decided everyday at four o'clock you wanted to have a chocolate donut with a cup of tea. Could you do it? Would it be okay?



Yes, of course. Why not? It's a normal thing to do. It doesn't go against the Will of Allāh.

That's right? You can do whatever you want so long as it lies within the Specific Will of Allāh.

Now let us say that instead of tea and a donut everyday at 4pm, you wanted to have a ham sandwich. Could you do that and still say that you are surrendering to the Will of Allāh?



Eating pork is forbidden in Islām. Although you are exercising your own free will, that will is now against the Will of Allāh and so should not be done. Right?

Yes, speaking as a Muslim, correct. You can do anything you like during your time on this earth. However, if you are seeking Allāh's pleasure and wish to stay within Islām, you must make sure that your will is within the things allowed by Him. If you want to do something that is not in accordance with His Specific Will, then you should know that you have disobeyed Allāh and may incur His anger. Unless you ask His forgiveness and that forgiveness is accepted, you may well have to face any resulting punishment either in this world or the next. Remember. Islām means to submit to the Will of Allāh.

² It is worth noting that in our discussion of this behaviour of a person, they are not seen to be challenging Allāh's *General Will*. This is known as *Al Irāda' Al Qownīyyah* and is the type of will with which Allāh created creation, decreed life and death, decreed earthquakes for example and decrees good and bad incidents irrespective of His love for good and hate for bad. Rather in this discussion they are being disobedient towards something known as His *Specific Will*. This is *Al Irāda' Ash-Shar'īyyah*. It is the type of will by which Allāh decrees only that which he desires and loves for His servants, for example praying, fasting, eating halāl, not eating pork, not stealing etc.

³ False objects of worship such as idols, heavenly bodies, spirits, human beings etc.



Who gave us the name 'Islām'? Did Muhammad ⁴ صلى الله عليه وسلم invent this name for his followers?

No. Allāh تعالى سبحانه gave us the word 'Islām.' He says in the Qur'ān,

الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا

This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed my favour upon you and have approved for you Islām as religion.

Sūrah al Mā'idah, 5:3



What does the word 'Muslim' mean?

The words *Islām* and *Muslim* are from the same root. A *Muslim* is a person who has *submitted* himself or herself to the Will of Allāh.



So, a Muslim is a person who follows Islām?

Yes. A person who totally lives their life according to the rules, warnings and advices in the Qur'ān and who follows the practice of His final Messenger, Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم. You may well have the word Muslim in your passport, but do the above words describe you?



Does the word Muslim also come from the Qur'ān?

Yes. All the previous prophets of Allāh were great men who submitted themselves to His Will and were therefore *Muslims*. Allāh says,

هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ ۚ مِلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ ۗ هُوَ سَمَّاكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا

He has chosen you and has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty. (It is) the religion of your father Abraham. He (i.e. Allāh) named you 'Muslims' before and in this⁵.

Sūrah al Hajj, 22:78

فَلَمَّا أَحَسَّ عِيسَى مِنْهُمُ الْكُفْرَ قَالَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ ۗ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَأَشْهَدُ بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

But when Jesus felt (persistence in) disbelief from them, he said: "Who are my supporters for (the Cause of) Allāh?" The disciples said: "We are supporters for Allāh. We have believed in Allāh and testify that we are Muslims (submitting to Him)."

Sūrah Āli 'Imrān, 3:52



How can I know what is or is not the Will of Allāh?

From the Qur'ān, which Muslims believe to be the infallible Word of Allāh, and from the example of His final Messenger, Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم. From these two sources, we can get a clear understanding of what Allāh does and does not want from us in terms of our beliefs and actions. The Qur'ān itself is known as *Al Furqān*, the Criterion, because it is the Criterion we can use to judge whether what we are doing is right or wrong.

⁴ *Ṣallallāhu 'alayhe wassallam* - May Allāh send blessings and peace upon him: an honourific used for the Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم.

⁵ i.e. in former scriptures and in this Revelation



So, the Qur'ān is a kind of Guide for us in this matter? A benchmark?

Not 'kind of'. The Qur'ān is our Guide. We would be foolish to ignore its words, because the Guidance comes directly from the One who knows us best, who knows what's good for us, and what's dangerous.

Let's imagine you purchase a machine, and the manufacturer's manual with that machine warned you: "*NEVER raise the left ratchet lever, whilst the dual shank is operating.*" Would you ever do that? If you are wise, no. Even if it seemed unreasonable and illogical to you, you still wouldn't do it. You *know* that the manufacturers *know* their own machine the best, and for sure there is a reason why they have included such a serious warning.

That is a silly example of course next to Allāh and the Qur'ān, but you can see, Allāh is the One who Created us and knows us best. It would be foolish of us to ignore any Guidance that He revealed.



Give me some examples of doing Allāh's Will.

There are many good deeds we can do to show that we have submitted to Allāh's will. For example

- worshipping Allāh alone, without associating any partners to him;
 - believing deeply in Allāh alone;
 - being kind and obedient to our parents;
 - attending to our *salāh* regularly and on time;
 - respecting our elders;
 - being honest and truthful;
 - being kind, generous and forgiving to others;
 - giving *zakāh* and *sadaqah* (voluntary charity) to the poor;
 - always having faith in Allāh and looking for ways to make Him happy;
- and many more.

Similarly, there are acts that we can avoid which are against Allāh's will. For example:

- worshipping others alongside Allāh;
- missing *salāh*;
- speaking and behaving badly towards our parents;
- telling lies;
- talking bad of people behind their backs;
- being jealous or envious;
- being proud or arrogant, and many more.

The meaning of 'Islām' and 'Muslim'

Questions

1. What is the meaning of the word 'Islām'?
2. What is the meaning of the English word, 'will' as in 'Will of Allāh'?
3. What is the meaning of the English word, 'submit'?
4. Where did the name, 'Islām', come from?
5. What does the word 'Muslim' mean?
6. Who named us 'Muslims'?
7. Give five examples of actions in accordance with the Will of Allāh.
8. Give five examples of actions against the Will of Allāh.
9. Translate the phrase 'Pillars of Faith' into Arabic.
10. How many 'Pillars of Faith' are there (name them)?
11. Who came to Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم and confirmed what those 'Pillars of Faith' were?
12. Translate the phrase 'Pillars of Islām' into Arabic.
13. How many 'Pillars of Islām' are there (name them)?



View from the Citadel, Amman, Jordan