

BECOMING A MUSLIM

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Introduction:

Islam is a Universal religion based on the undiluted monotheistic concept of God, who has no associates of any kind. God is not begotten nor does He beget. Islam does not believe in any racial, caste or colour distinction and superiority of birth of any individual or nation. All men black, white or yellow are equal before God. No nation is a chosen one of God. God loves most, those who are most righteous. In the words of the Qur'an it says: "O Human kind! We have created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other. Indeed, the most honourable of you in the sight of God is the most righteous."

Life, property and honour of all human beings are sacred in Islam; hence their disregard under any pretext is a blatant violation of God's laws. God is God of all even of those who do not believe in Him. Islam is a simple and rational religion. It is the shortest and broadest road that leads to God.

All children born under any situation are sinless and pure. It is a person's deeds that make him/her good or evil and not his/her birth. No soul can atone for the sins of another. Every soul has to bear the burden of its deeds. No one therefore, can forgive sins of any person except God Himself. No one can grant any favours except with God's permission, hence no person not even a prophet is an associate of God in any form. Divinity belongs to Him solely. Prophets are God's chosen messengers to human kind. They are divinely inspired not divine in themselves.

Islam is not a new religion which started in the seventh century with the advent of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him.) It is rather the same essential message of monotheism and obedience to God preached by all the prophets of God. All the prophets of God taught 'Islam' which means submission and obedience to God. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him.) completed the chain of revelation.

Becoming a Muslim:

Islam is the natural religion of humankind. Its truth is becoming more evident with the passage of time. Islam means peace and it brings peace to the believer. Islam also means submission, and a believer by submitting him/herself to the will of God brings him/herself in harmony with all the creations of God which manifest submission through natural physical laws.

So what does Islam require from a believer? Islam requires two things:-

1. Faith

2. Obedience/action.

Faith requires:

- i) Belief in the oneness of God and avoiding any form of polytheism.
- ii) Belief in Angelic beings as obedient servants of Allah.
- iii) Belief in the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him), as the final prophet along with belief in the prophethood of all earlier prophets.
- iv) Belief in the Qur'an and in the books and revelations given to the earlier prophets.
- v) Belief in the life hereafter and the accountability of human beings including a process of reward and punishment.

Obedience is to follow the commandments of Allah in all matters. It covers prayer and worship, fasting, social duties, law and morality.

Detailed information on these two requirements is available in the sources of Islam especially the Qur'an and the Sunnah (recorded sayings and practices) of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

The result of faith and obedience is an illumination which is a spiritual excellence. If a person is fortunate to understand the message of Islam and is attracted towards it, he/she should not delay their declaration of faith. We are not sure about our life; therefore,

we should not miss the opportunity of achieving eternal bliss and salvation. The only way is to declare faith, obedience and submission to Allah (God). It is this faith and obedience which makes a person a Muslim.

Embracing Islam

To embrace Islam is to revert to the religion with which we were born. However, influences from our environment and our surroundings make us what we are. Referring to our natural disposition, the Qur'an uses the term **Fitrat Allah**: "the nature in which God has made humankind."

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said that every child was born with the innate qualities of Islam. It is the child's parents who make him/her a Jew, Christian or Magian.

A person trying to come to Islam is in fact coming to the fold of his natural religion.

Becoming a Muslim is easy. No ritual ceremony is essential. It is just a declaration of one's belief in the oneness of Allah (*Tawhid*) and the prophethood of the final Messenger of Allah. In Islamic terminology this is called **SHAHADAH** which means witnessing of the truth or declaration of faith. The Shahadah testimony is pronounced in the following way: "*Ash-hadu anna la ilaha illal-lah; Wa ash- hadu anna Muhammadar-rasulallah.*" This means: "**I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.**"

Although this declaration is sufficient for becoming a Muslim, it is nevertheless recommended to observe certain things before pronouncing the *Shahadah*. One should take a *ghusl* (complete bath) before taking the *Shahadah*. It is also good to have friends present on this occasion. If a knowledgeable Muslim is available, his presence will also be useful, for he can say a few words about the

Islamic faith which will add to the knowledge of all those persons present.

Implications of Pronouncing the Shahadah:

By pronouncing the *Shahadah* one accepts to follow the guidance given by Allah and by Allah's final Messenger (Muhammad, peace be upon him) i.e. following the teachings of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him.)

After Embracing Islam

Many people who have come into the folds of Islam have reiterated how they have experienced an inner peace as a result, and how they have felt as though a great weight has been lifted off their chests. It is indeed a feeling and experience that cannot be explained in words, it is the ultimate spiritual bliss.

Changing Name

By pronouncing the *Shahadah* a person acquires a new personality, as if he/she is newly born and has come under the shadow of God's mercy and blessings. Some of those coming to the fold of Islam like to change their names. Changing one's name is not essential if one's current name does not contain any un-Islamic element. There are however, some who would like to have a complete break from their pre-Islamic past and adopt a traditional Islamic name; it is perfectly correct for them to do so. One is allowed only to change one's first name but not one's family/surname.

Faith and Practice:

To uphold faith in God in a practical manner certain rites are instituted. Performing these practices is the expression of one's faith in God. A Muslim must also abide by certain rules and follow a certain moral code. However, the most immediate obligation after pronouncing the *Shahadah* is the five daily prayers. New Muslims must start learning and performing the prayers immediately. Prayer is a practical demonstration of faith, designed to keep man in contact

with his/her creator, and to make him/her aware of his/her basic duties to Him.

All Muslims no matter what language they speak pray in Arabic repeating the verses of the Qur'an in the very language in which they were revealed. This ensures the unity of practice and that the word of God is not altered through translations.

A new Muslim is required to perform Ghusl (complete ablution – bath) preferably before pronouncing the Shahadah. Below is a description of how Ghusl is performed.

GHUSL

(COMPLETE ABLUTION)

Ghusl (bathing) means to wash the entire body with water so as to keep it pure and clean.

A Muslim must be in a state of *Tahara* (purity) when he/she wants to pray.

There are two kinds of impurity:

1- The Minor Impurity: This is caused by passing wind, going to the toilet, deep sleep, fainting etc. *Wudu* (ablution) is necessary for removing the minor impurity.

2- The Major Impurity: This is caused by one of the following reasons:

- a) The monthly period for females.
- b) When one has a wet dream or discharges semen when one is awake.
- c) When a married couple had a marital intercourse.
- d) Childbirth bleeding.

Other actions which requires *Ghusl*:

In addition to the four causes of major impurity mentioned before, *Ghusl* is also a duty in the following two cases:

e- When a non-Muslim accepts Islam: New converts to Islam are required to perform *Ghusl*.

f- Death: When a Muslim dies, the dead body must be washed by some Muslims.

How *Ghusl* is performed:

1- Make the intention to perform *Ghusl* and say the *Bismillah* (i.e. *Bismillahir-rahmanir-rahim.*)

2- Wash the hands up to the wrists three times.

3- Wash the private parts and the area from the navel to the knees.

4- Perform full *Wudu* in the normal way but delay the washing of the feet until the end of *Ghusl*.

5- Pour water over the head three times passing the fingers through the hair to allow water to reach hair roots. (a woman does not need to undo her plaits provided that water can reach the roots of her hair.)

6- Pour water to wash the whole body, rubbing with both hand, starting with the right side before the left and the top of the body before the bottom.

7- Wash your feet up to the ankles.

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