In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

"Nay - whoever submits his whole self to Allah and is a doer of good - he will get his reward from his Lord; On such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve."

(From the translation of the meanings of the Qur'an 2:112)

UNDERSTANDING ISLAM and MUSLIMS

ICB

ISLAMIC CENTER OF BLACKSBIURG
for Islamic Information and Education

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The objective of this brochure is to present the truthful image about Islam and the Muslims. This brochure is to provide an insight leading to worthy appreciation of the religion of Islam and proper understanding of its followers.

What is Islam?

The word Islam is an Arabic word, which carries a load of meanings. The main two are submission and peace. Submission: *total submission to and acceptance of God (Allah, the One and Only) and His will*. Peace: *inner peace (peace with oneself), peace with the Creator, as well as peace with all creations*. It is through the total submission to the Will of God that one reaches this form of peace.

With this definition and understanding of Islam, all of God's Prophets, peace be upon them (pbut), received the call to "Islam" since all of them preached the same message, i.e. the acceptance of God and total submission to His Will. In other words, Islam is not a new religion. What we refer to as Islam is nothing but the final revelation of the series. Islam acknowledges all previous Prophets and Messengers from God, starting with Adam (pbuh) and ending with Muhammad (pbuh). Islam acknowledges the messages of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (pbut), to name just a few.

Who is God in Islam?

We know God through His names and attributes related to us in the Qur'an:

"Allah is He, than Whom there is no other god- who Knows (all things) both secret and open; He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Allah is He, than Whom there is no other god- the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Source of Peace (and perfection), the Guardian of Faith, the Preserver of Safety, the Exalted in Might, the Irresistible, the Supreme: Glory to Allah! (High is He) Above the partners, they attribute to Him. He is Allah, the Creator, the Evolver, the Bestower of forms (or color). To Him belong the Most Beautiful names: Whatever is in the heavens and on earth doth declare His Praises and Glory; and He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise." (59:22-24).

Also:

"And He is the Oft-Forgiving, Full of loving-kindness." (85:14).

There are 99 such attributes for Allah that were revealed in the Qur'an.

The Islamic teachings emphasize the Balance in God's Attributes. The Balance between His Magnificent Powers and Might on one hand, and His Compassion, Mercy, Love, and Forgiveness on the other. He starts and He ends. He gives and He takes. He allows and He prevents. He forgives and He punishes. He glorifies and He belittles. He champions and He defeats. He revenges yet He is Patient. He is Just. He is All-Knowing. He Does it all in balance and in wisdom, a balance beyond our understanding and a wisdom beyond our comprehension. He is the only one to be praised whether one be in health or in sickness, in richness or in poverty, in times of ease or in times of hardship.

Relationship between God and Human:

The human, like all of Allah's creations, is in a state of total submission (Islam) to the Will of Allah. The difference between us humans and other creations, however, is that we have been given the will and the ability to choose. When our minds submit to Allah, then we would have completely submitted to Allah, and we would be referred to as "Muslims". At this level of total and complete submission, the relationship between Allah and the human is one of a complete peace. It is an Islamic characteristic to have complete obedience to Allah and acceptance of His will and commands. It is also an Islamic characteristic to acquire a unique feeling of satisfaction, fulfillment, and content as a result of this obedience and acceptance.

The relationship between Allah and us humans in Islam is a direct one, with no mediators. In this direct relationship, we recognizes that there is no other party which can help, give, take, support, provide, or grant forgiveness but Allah. In such a direct relationship, we do not associate any other deities with Allah. Moreover, our faith and submission to Allah become complete and pure.

Salvation in Islam:

Islam teaches that all humans are born sinless. We are only responsible for the sins we commit intentionally. Recognizing our human nature, Allah the Most Merciful, accepts our sincere repentance and forgives our sins.

Islam also teaches that true belief and righteous deeds are two key elements for one to attain Allah's pleasure and satisfaction. It takes both elements to establish healthy individuals and healthy societies. Belief alone is not sufficient; it must be practiced. Practicing the belief by doing righteous deeds maintains that belief and nourishes it.

To enhance and maintain the relationship between Allah and the humans, Islam prescribes various forms of worship for us to perform. Worship in Islam serves the needs of humans both spiritually and physically in a balanced yet integrated manner. Islam teaches that one must work for the life in the hereafter as though he were going to die tomorrow, and for his worldly life as if he were going to live forever.

Worship in Islam:

It is the sincerity of the Muslim's worship that gives it its effectiveness and usefulness. Islam teaches us to worship Allah as if we were able to see Him, since although we do not see Him, He sees us. Worship in Islam takes two main forms: righteous deeds, as well as ritualistic acts of worship.

Righteous deeds include all beneficial actions done with sincere intentions on the part of the Muslim. The righteousness of a deed is determined by its compliance with the Islamic rules and regulations. Examples of such actions include giving charity, helping the weak, removing litter from the street, and even nourishing the body, exercising, and socializing.

All such actions, if performed to please Allah and according to His commands, are acts of worship. They are to benefit two essential aspects of the human being: maintaining and improving his physical being as well as enhancing and nourishing his spiritual needs.

Ritualistic acts of worship in Islam include Praying, Zakat (a form of alms-giving), Fasting, and Pilgrimage to Makkah once in a lifetime for those who are able physically and financially. These acts

of worship are also to satisfy the spiritual and physical needs of the human being. To better understand this concept, let us use Prayer in Islam as an example.

Prayer in Islam is a means of communication between the human and his Creator. It is like a meeting in which the human soul submits to and communicates with Allah, while at the same time the human body bows and prostrates to Allah's Greatness and Might. There are five prayers performed daily to continually remind the Muslim of Allah and to renew his commitment to Him. Prayer, therefore, provides continual prevention against evil and wrongdoing. It is like the string that ties the human being to the straight path.

Prayer reinforces self-discipline, time awareness, and time management. It strengthens community ties and brotherhood, and for these reasons congregational prayers are encouraged and better rewarded in Islam. Rich and poor stand side by side, shoulder to shoulder, and bow and prostrate together to God. Moreover, Prayer also provides mechanisms for releasing tension and stress. The spirituality of the worship have significant benefits to the human body. The purification performed by Muslims in preparation for the prayer adds to the spirituality of the worship as well as to body cleanliness and personal hygiene.

Islam is a Way of Life:

Islam is a religion for both the individual and the community. Islam recognizes the vitality of prescribing and legislating for the community. In other words, Islam provides humans as individuals and as communities (including that of the whole world) with a total and a comprehensive way of life. The teachings of Islam do not separate religion from human affairs. Politics, economics, law, and all other aspects of human affairs are integrated into one system of worship to Allah. Islam provides both the individual and the state with a comprehensive "constitution". Through this constitution, ethics, righteousness, legitimacy, correctness, and similar fundamentals are well defined and are not left to individuals to experiment with or differ about. Having been legislated by Allah, the Creator of this world, the Islamic way of life is the most suitable one for us to follow.

Examples of such legislation include comprehensive laws for marriage and divorce, for dividing inheritances, for borrowing and lending, for charities and taxes, for human rights, for a state's internal affairs, as well as for its foreign policy.

In today's world of materialistic interests and economic competition, Islam is capable of bringing humanity together. Historically, Islam has provided the uniting force that has brought together people of different races, colors, tongues, civilizations, and cultures into one community. This Islamic community conducted its affairs with equality among all of its people and enjoyed the true meaning of brotherhood and prosperity.

Present Status of Islam and Muslims:

At present, Islam is not applied in its total and proper form in any part of the world. It is a well-established fact among Muslims that, according to Islam, there is no government that qualifies, at this time, to be called an Islamic government, since none of the so-called Islamic governments truly apply Islam in either law or spirit.

Islam is only applied partially in some parts of the world. Unfortunately, in most countries and societies, impurities from local cultures and customs are embedded in the people's practice of Islam. Furthermore, it is most unfortunate that some Muslims have misused many Islamic concepts, including the concept of Jihad, and used them for personal gain. Jihad, for example, (properly translated as struggle) is mistranslated in English as Holy War. Jihad is the struggle by righteous Muslims in the way of Allah for the sake of promoting Allah's word and cause. A Muslim who speaks, writes, acts, or physically fights in defense against oppression and evil is considered to be performing Jihad.

To understand the Islamic spirit in this regard, we should examine the example of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). History teaches us that he withstood hostility beyond imagination for about thirteen years in Makkah, before ever defending the Muslims in a battle. He never declared hostile or assaulting wars, and he treated the prisoners of war with a far more humane treatment than any law stated in his time or what is stated by the Geneva Convention in our times.

True representations and practices of Islam have been documented in the history of Islam and Muslims for many centuries. During this epoch, justice, freedom, prosperity, and peace were some of the characteristics of the Islamic communities.

One can still see hints of the benefits of Islam through some current practices in the Muslim communities. In those countries which partially comply with the Islamic Law (Shari'ah), the crime rate is at its lowest level compared to other countries. Muslim societies still enjoy strong family and social ties, strong enough that an elderly, an orphan, a disabled, or a needy person does not face starvation, homelessness, or similar forms of suffering.

Nowadays, Islam is regaining its worthy understanding and appreciation in the hearts and minds of the new Muslim generation. This Islamic awakening, unlike the media's stereotyping, is not to be feared by those who do not subscribe to Islam, since Islam calls for peaceful and courteous relationships among all humans.

It is a deep rooted belief in Islam that better understanding and practice of Islam can only lead to world peace, prosperity, justice, and freedom for all.

"O mankind, We created you from a single
(pair) of a male and a female,
and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other
(not that you may despise each other).
Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is)
the most righteous of you (with most piety).
And, Allah has full knowledge
and is well-acquainted (with all things)."
(From the translation of the meanings of the Qur'an 49:13)

The Qur'an is the last revelation from God and is the basic source of Islamic teachings and laws. It was revealed in Arabic to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and was written down during his lifetime. Being the word of God, only translations of the meanings as understood by scholars are available in other languages