CHAPTER I

**BASIC ISLAMIC BELIEFS**

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The central concept in Islam, as reflected in the Shahadah, is Tawhîd, or Oneness of God. For Muslims, there is but One God who is Lord and Sovereign of Creation, and devotion, allegiance, and obedience must first of all be to Him. This view serves as the foundation from which the basic beliefs of Islam emanate, since God is recognized as the Source for all knowledge and understanding. More specifically, the beliefs of Muslims are delineated and described in the Qur’an and in the sayings and traditions of Prophet Muhammad. The practice of Islam is based upon belief in One God (Allah), creations (humanly perceived and unperceived) of God, prophetic leadership, revealed guidance, and a Day of Judgement, the details of which are provided below.

The full meaning of Faith and Belief in Islam is not, by any means, something nominal or mere formality. Faith in Islam is a state of happiness acquired by virtue of positive action and constructive conceptions as well as dynamic and effective measures.

The Holy Qur’an and the traditions of Muhammad define these required measures and establish the standards which build up a meaningful Faith. Thus, the true believers are:

1) Those who believe in God, His angels, His Books as completed by the Qur’an, His messengers with Muhammad being the Last of them all, the Day of Final Judgement, the absolute knowledge and wisdom of God.

2) Those who trust God always and enjoy unshakable confidence in Him.

3) Those who spend in the way of God of what He has given them in the form of wealth, life, health, knowledge, experience, and so on.

4) Those who observe their daily prayers regularly as well as the weekly and annual congregations.

5) Those who pay their religious taxes (alms or Zakah) to the rightfull beneficiaries (individual or institutions), the minimum of which is two and a half percent of the annual ‘net’ income, or of the total value of stocks if in business-after discounting all expenses.

6) Those who love God and His Messenger most, and love their fellow men sincerely for the sake of God alone.

7) Those who say the truth and engage in good talk, or else abstain.

It is clear that the very meaning of Faith makes Islam penetrate deeply and constructively into every aspect of life. According to Islam, true Faith has a decisive effect on the spiritual and material lot of man, and also on his personal and social behaviour.

**FAITH (IMAN)**

**What is the declaration of Faith?**

A Muslim declares his faith by reciting: “La-ilaha-illal-lah, Muham-madu’r-Rasulullah”

 These Arabic words mean: “There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.” This declaration is called Kalimah at-Tawhîd. It summarizes whole of Islamic belief. The first part (La-ilaha-illal-lah) is about the ONEness of Allah (Tawhîd in Arabic), while the second part (Muhammad-ur-Rasulullah) concerns the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him).

 We already know that we belong to Allah and He is our Master. So, in order to behave like the servants of our Creator we must practise Salah, Zakah, Savm and Hajj faithfully and we must shape our life around Shahadah. If we perform them regularly and correctly we come closer to Allah our Creator and Sustainer.

**What are the basic beliefs of Iman (Faith)?**

 The Basic Beliefs of Iman are to believe in:

 1) Allah

 2) Angles of Allah

 3) Books of Allah

 4) Messengers of Allah

 5) The day of Judgement

 6) Life after death and supremacy of Divine Will (Al-Qadar).

 These beliefs have been declared precisely in the faith in detail:

*“I believe in Allah, in His Angels, in His Books, in His Messengers, in the Last Day (the Day of Judgement) in the life after death and in the fact that everything good or bad operates under a law laid down by Allah the Almighty.”*

 The person who confirms these principles by word of mouth and certifies them with his heart is considered as having entered the religion of Islam.

**ALLAH**

**What does the term “Allah” mean?**

The Arabic word Allah is a contraction of the words “al” and “ilah,” and literally means “The God.” Believers in Islam understand the word ‘Allah’ to be the proper name for the Creator as found in the Qur’an. The name Allah is analogous to Eloh, a Semitic term found in the divine scriptures revealed to Muhammad’s predecessors Moses and Jesus (may peace be upon them all).

The use of the term Allah is not confined to believers in Islam alone -Arabic- speaking Christians and Jews also use Allah in reference to God, demonstrating thereby that followers of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism believe in a common monotheistic Creator.

**How is God viewed in Islam?**

The Qur’an, the divinely-revealed scripture of Islam, contains numerous verses describing the nature of God. The role of human beings as creations of God upon the earth and their relationship with God are also discussed extensively in the sacred text as is shown in the following verses:

“Say: He is God, the One, the Eternal, Absolute. He does not beget, nor is He begotten, and there is none like unto Him.” (Ihlas 112: 1-4)

“It is He who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when you knew nothing, and He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affections that you may give thanks.” (Nahl 16: 78)

“No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision. He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things.” (An’am 6: 103)

Muslims believe that God has no partners or associates who share in His divinity or authority. Muslims also believe that God is transcendent and unlike His creations, and thus has no physical form. Nor is God believed to exist in (or be represented by) any material object. A number of divine attributes or “names,” which serve to describe God, are found in the Qur’an. Some commonly known attributes include the Most Merciful, the Most Forgiving, the Most High, the Unique, and the Everlasting, among others.

In Islam, human beings, like other creations, are seen as completely unlike God, though they may aspire to exhibit various attributes manifested by God, such as justice or mercy. Furthermore, even while God is believed to be beyond traditional human perception, the Qur’an states:

 “He is with you wherever you may be” (Hadid 57: 5).

For Muslims, God’s Oneness heightens the awareness that ultimately all life is bound by Divine Law emanating from a singular source and that life has a meaning and purpose which revolves around the consciousness of God’s presence.

Moreover, belief in a singular Creator compels conscientious Muslims to view all humanity as one extended family, and treat others with justice and equity. Respect for the environment and natural resources also follows from the Muslim view of God, of His unity.

**Where is Allah?**

We know by experience that we can not perceive every being. For example, in darkness we can not see far more than a hundred metres, but we do not say that there is nothing beyond this distance. Similarly we are intelligent beings, but we can not see our reasons. Likewise, as we can not see the God, we can not say there is no God. A believer is sure that Allah, knows and sees everything and nobody can escape Allah’s ever-watchful eye for a single moment. In fact, Allah is nearer to us than our own jugular-vein. So, a true Believer does not commit a sin either secretly or in the darkness of night, nor does he feels himself alone wherever he is. Because the believer has the firm conviction that Allah sees everything all the time and He (Allah) is everywhere. This can be seen in the following verses:

“Allah is He who created seven firmaments and of the Earth a similar number. Through the midst of them descends His command that you may know that Allah has power over all things and that Allah comprehends all things in (His) knowledge.” (Talaq 65 :12)

“It was We who created man and We know what dark suggestions his soul, makes to him, for We are nearer to him than (his) jugular-vein.” (Qaf 50: 16)

 We understand from these verses that Allah has created everything on Earth and in the Heavens for the service and comfort of humans.

“Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth the parable of His light is as if there were a Niche and within it a lamp: the lamp enclosed in glass: Glass as it were a brilliant star... Allah sets forth parables for men and Allah knows all things.” (Nûr 24: 35)

God’s being the Light means that He is everywhere and nothing can escape from His existence. The desire to see God like other objects is a primitive way.

Once, a Bedouin was asked what made an unsophisticated man like him believe in Allah.

Bedouin: “Do you see these marks in the sand?”

Man: “Yes.”

Bedouin: “What do they tell you?”

Man: “A camel went by.”

Bedouin: “Did you see the camel?”

Man: “No, but these footprints in the sand suggest that a camel made them.”

Bedouin: “Do you see these mountains?”

Man: “Yes.”

Bedouin: “They are indicative to me that Allah made them.”

Imam Abu Hanifa was asked by an atheist: “What is the evidence pointing to the existence of Allah?” and he replied, “Forget it! At the moment, I am busy thinking about this ship. People tell me there is a big ship, it contains different goods on board. There is no one to steer it, no one maintaining it. Yet, this ship keeps going back and forth; it even traverses big waves on the oceans; it stops at the locations that it is supposed to stop at; it continues in the direction that it is supposed to head. This ship has no captain and no one planning its trips.”

The atheist who posed the question interrupted and exclaimed, “What kind of strange and silly thought is this? How can any intelligent person think that some thing like this can occur?”

Abu Hanifa said, “I feel sorry about your state! You can not imagine one ship running without someone looking after its affairs; yet you think that for this whole world, which runs exactly and precisely, there is no one who looks after it, and no one owns it.”

**Who controls the Universe?**

Allah is the Controller of the Universe. Because, the vast and majestic universe with its flawless system clearly indicates that there is One Creator and One Supreme Controller. As we look around in our environment, we see that every family has a head; every school has a principal; every city or town has a mayor. Moreover, we know beyond doubt that every product is the work of a certain producer, and that every beautiful art is the creation of some great artist. All this is obvious, yet it does not satisfy the hunger for knowledge and the curiosity of man about the great things in the world.

One often wonders at the beauties of nature with its scenic charms and marvels; the almost endless horizons in the sky and their far-reaching expansions; the ceaseless succession of day and night in the most orderly manner; the course of the sun, the moon, and the great stars; the world of animate and inanimate objects, the continuous process and evolution of man generation after generation. One often wonders because one would like to know the maker and maintainer of all these things with which we live and which we immensely enjoy.

Can we find an explaination of the great universe? Is there any convincing interpretation of the secret of existence? We realize that no city can prosperously exist without sound administration. We also realize that nothing comes into being on its own. In addition, we observe that the universe exists and functions in the most orderly manner, and that it has survived for hundreds of thousands of years.

When we think about the unique system of the world we find no conflict in it. The Sun, the Moon and the Galaxy obey the same Supreme Authority. Everything in the universe works in harmony and cooperation like various parts of the human body. The limbs of the human body seem to have different functions, but they all serve the same purpose. Allah Almighty says in the Qur’an:

“If there were in the Heavens and on Earth other Gods besides Allah there would be confusion in both.” (Anbiya 21: 22)

Can we, then, say that all this is accidental and haphazard? Can we attribute the existence of man and the whole world to mere chance?

In the world, then, there must be a Great Force in action to keep everything in order. In the beautiful nature there must be a Great Artist who creates the most charming pieces of art and produces everything for a special purpose in life. This force is the strongest of all forces, and this Artist is the greatest of all artists.The true believers and deeply enlightened people recognize this Artist and call Him Allah or God. They call Him God because He is the Creator and the Chief Architect of the world, the Originator of life and the Provider of all things in existence. God signifies his creation and providence over universe in the following verses:

“And We have made, above you, seven tracts (paths of motion in the visible heavens) and we are never unmindful of (our) creation.” (Mu’minûn 23: 17)

“It is Allah who sustains the Heavens and the Earth, lest they cease (to function) and if they should fail, there is none can sustain them thereafter: verily He is most forbearing and forgiving.” (Fâtðr 35: 41)

**What does Tawhîd mean?**

 One word in Arabic for saying or affirming that “God is One” is the word Tawhîd. Tawhîd is the affirmation that there is only One Creator who deserves our praise and gratitude and whose guidance needs to be followed for our own good and benefit. Tawhîdhas two main parts:

 1) To believe in and affirm that there is only One Creator and Sustainer of the universe;

 2) To affirm that only the One Creator deserves to be worshipped and obeyed.

 The first duty of a conscious Muslim is to declare his faith that “there is no god but Allah, Muhammad is Allah’s Messenger.”

 Tawhîd is clearly stated in the surah of Ihlas as follows:

“Say: He is God, the One, the Eternal, Absolute. He does not beget, nor is He begotten, and there is none like unto Him.” (Ihlas 112: 1-4)

 Tawhîd, i.e. *monotheism* or unity of God has its counterpart in natural world as *monism*. That means that there is a unifying principle / telos or aim in nature. For example, to make it possible for a tree to grow; soil, water, sun, etc. come together and serve the one aim: to grow the tree. This unifying principle in nature is set by God, and this is reflection of tawhîd in nature.

***“***Do they not observe the birds above them spreading their wings and folding them in? None can uphold them except (Allah) most Gracious: Truly It is He that watches over all things.” (Mulk 67: 19)

“There is not any Animal (that lives) on the Earth nor a Being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communicates like you. Nothing have we omitted from the Book, and they (all) shall be gathered to their Lord in the End.” (An’am 6: 38)

Worshipping to the lifeless objects or to men is the primitive way of acting. So, a faithful can not adore but God.

God Exalted says in our Holy Book:

“Or have they taken for worship (other) Gods, besides Him? Say, bring your convincing proof...” (Anbiya 21: 22)

The objects which are worshipped by people are, essentially, parts of the universe and they are also created by a Supreme Creator. They can not create or sustain anything including themselves. So they can not deserve to be adored.

**ANGELS**

**How do Muslims view Angels?**

Angels are believed to be among God’s many creations, and belief in angels is symbolic of a Muslim’s belief in al-Ghayb, the world of the unseen (a world of which only God has knowledge). Angels are considered heavenly beings created by God to perform various duties. Angels by nature do not deviate from righteousness, as they do not possess an inherent free will as do human beings. They are special creatures of Allah, and they have been created from divine-light (Nûr) to perform specific functions.

Some angels are considered more prominent than others. Jibreel (Gabriel), for example, is known as the “Angel of Revelation,” since he communicated God’s revelations and scriptures to various human prophets, and also announced (much to her surprise and incredulity) to Mary, mother of Jesus, that she would bear the messiah awaited by the Children of Israel. Indeed, Jibreel is uniquely described in the Qur’an as a Spirit (Ruh) from God due to his role in bridging the divine and human spheres.

Muslims also believe that each human being is assigned two angels by God: one to keep track of good deeds, and the other to record bad deeds or sins. Tradition holds that these “personal” angels will present the records of one’s deeds to each individual as he or she stands before God on the Day of Judgement.

**Can we see Angels?**

 We can not see them, unless they appear in human form. Angel Jibrail once appeared before a gathering of the companions of the prophet in order to teach them about Islam.

**How do Angels differ from men?**

 They always obey Allah and can never disobey Him. They do not have free will but men, on the other hand, have been given free will and can choose either right or wrong. This is why men will have to face the test on the Day of Judgement. The angels never get tired, they do not need sleep and they are always ready to obey Allah.

**What are the duties of the Angels?**

We are informed by the Qur’an that angels do what Allah commands them. They are the innocent servants of Allah’s will. They can not act against the will of God. The angels provide strength to the worshippers, intercede and invoke to God on behalf of human beings. The specific duties of angels are as follow:

Jibreel: Brought the revelation from Allah to the prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and to all other prophets.

Izrail: Also called “the Angel of Death” (Malak al-Mawt) is responsible for ending our life.

Israfil: Will blow the trumpet at the time of the End of the world and on the Day of Judgement.

 Mikail (Michael): Puts the events of nature in order and maintains them.

 Some angels are busy recording all that we do. They are called the Respected Recorders / Kiraman Katibin.