

Islam and Muslims

Islam is a complete way of life. It is the guidance provided by Allâh (God), the Creator of the Universe, for all mankind. It covers all the things people do in their lifetime. Islam tells us the purpose of our creation, our final destiny and our place among other creations. It shows us the best way to conduct our private, social, political, economic, moral and spiritual affairs.

Islam is an Arabic word meaning submission and obedience. Submission is acceptance of Allâh’s commands. Obedience means putting Allâh’s commands into practice. Submission and obedience to Allâh bring peace. That is why the very word Islam is derived from the word for peace. Islam is a religion of peace and harmony. Allâh, another Arabic word, is the proper name of God.

Muslims and Arabs

A person who accepts the Islamic way of life and acts upon it is a Muslim. Muslims are not to be confused with Arabs. Muslims may be Arabs, Turks, Persians, Indians, Pakistanis, Malaysians, Indonesians, Europeans, Africans, Americans, Chinese, or other nationalities.

An Arab could be a Muslim, a Christian, or an atheist. Any person who adopts the Arabic language is called an Arab. However, the language of the Qur’ân (the Holy Book of Islam) is Arabic. Muslims all over the world try to learn Arabic so that they may be able to read the Qur’ân and understand its meaning. They pray in the language of the Qur’ân, namely, Arabic. Supplications to Allâh could be in any language.

While there are one billion Muslims in the world there are about 200 million Arabs. Among them, approximately ten percent are not Muslims. Thus, Arab Muslims constitute only about eighteen percent of the Muslim population of the world.

Allâh: the One and the Only God

Allâh is the name of the One and Only God. Allâh has other names and attributes, such as:

The Gracious, The Merciful, The Beneficent, The Creator, The All-Knowing, The All-Wise, The Lord of the Universe, The First, The Last, and others.

He is the Creator of all human beings. He is the God for the Christians, the Jews, the Muslims, the Buddhists, the Hindus, the atheists, and others. Muslims worship God whose name is Allâh. They put their trust in Him and they seek His help and His guidance.

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)

Muhammad (ﷺ - peace and blessings of Allâh be upon him) was chosen by Allâh to deliver His Message of Submission to Allâh, namely Islam. He was born in 570 C.E. (Common Era) in Makkah, Arabia. He was entrusted with the Message of Islam when he was at the age of forty years. The revelation that he received is called the Qur’ân, while the message is called Islam. Muhammad (ﷺ) is the very last Prophet of Allâh to mankind. He is the final Messenger of Allâh. His message was and is still for the Christians, the Jews and the rest of mankind. He was sent to those religious people to inform them about the true mission of Jesus, Moses, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (peace and blessings be upon them all).

Muhammad (ﷺ) is the summation and the culmination of all the prophets and messengers that came before him and also delivered His Message of Submission, namely Islam. He purified the previous messages from adulteration and completed the Message of Allâh for all humanity. He was entrusted with the power of explaining, interpreting and living the teachings of the Qur’ân.

Sources of Islam

The two main legal sources of Islam are the Qur’ân and the *Hadîth*. The Qur’ân is the exact word of Allâh; its authenticity, originality and totality are intact. The *Hadîth* is the report of the sayings, deeds and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). The Prophet’s sayings and deeds are called *Sunnah*. The *Seerah* is the writings of followers of Muhammad (ﷺ) about

the life of the Prophet. Hence, it is the life history of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) which provides examples of daily living for Muslims.

Some Islamic Principles

Oneness of Allâh: He is One and the Only One. He is not two in one or three in one. This means that Islam rejects the idea of trinity or such a unity of Allâh which implies more than one God in one.

Angels: Muslims believe that there are unseen creatures such as angels created by God in the universe for special missions.

Scriptures: Muslims believe that Allâh sent messages to all people. Five of these messages are mentioned by name in Qur’ân: the *Suhuf Ibrâhîm* (pages of Ibrahim), *Tawrah* of Mûsa (Moses), *Zabûr* (Psalms) of Dâwûd (David), *Injîl* (Gospel) of ‘Îsa (Jesus), and the Qur’ân of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allâh be upon them all).

Oneness of Messengers and the Message: Muslims believe that Allâh sent many messengers throughout the history of mankind. All came with the same message and the same teachings: Islam. It was the people who misunderstood and misinterpreted them. Muslims believe in Nûh (Noah), Ibrâhîm (Abraham), Is’hâq (Isaac), Ismâ’îl (Ishmael), Yaqûb (Jacob), Mûsa (Moses), Dâwûd (David), ‘Îsa (Jesus), and Muhammad (ﷺ), among others. Muhammad (ﷺ) is the last and final messenger of Allâh.

Last Day: Muslims believe that there is a Last Day when the entire universe and everything in it will be destroyed and following which all people of the world throughout the history of mankind till the last day of life on earth will be brought together for accounting, reward and punishment on the Day of Judgment.

Belief in *Qadr* (Fate): Muslims believe that everything good or bad which happens is decreed by Allâh. Nothing can happen without his knowledge and permission.

Life after Death: Muslims believe in eternal life after death. Those who truly believe Allâh

and were good Muslims will live in Paradise. Those who rejected and denied Allâh will be punished forever in Hell. This world is a world of trials, the next world is the true life.

The Five Pillars of Islam

Every action done with the awareness that it fulfills the Will of Allâh is considered an act of worship in Islam. There are specific acts of worship termed the “Pillars of Islam” that provide the framework of Muslim spiritual life.

***Shahâdah* (Declaration of Faith):** The verbal commitment and pledge that “there is only One God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allâh” is considered to be the Creed of Islam.

***Salâh* (Prayers)** are prescribed five times a day as a duty towards Allâh. Prayer strengthens and invigorates belief in Allâh and inspires man to higher morality. It purifies the heart and helps control temptation, wrongdoing, and evil.

***Saum* (Fasting)** during the month of Ramadân. This is total abstinence from food, liquids and intimate intercourse between married couples from dawn to sunset during the entire month of Ramadân, and curbing evil intentions and desires. It teaches love, sincerity, and devotion. It develops patience, unselfishness, social conscience, and willpower to bear hardships.

***Zakâh* (Fixed charity on yearly savings):** It is spent on the poor and needy in particular and the welfare of the society in general. The payment of *Zakâh* purifies one’s income and wealth and helps to establish economic balance and social justice in the society.

***Hajj* (Pilgrimage)** to the Ka’bah in Makkah, once in a lifetime, provided one has the means to undertake the journey. Hajj is in part in memory of the trials and tribulations of prophet Ibrâhîm (Abraham), his wife Hâjira (Hagar) and his eldest son Ismâ’îl (Ishmael) .

Some Other Beliefs and Related Aspects

Innocence of Man at Birth: Muslims believe that people are born free of sin. It is only after they reach the age of puberty and it is only after they commit sins that they are to be charged for

their mistakes. No one is responsible for, or can take the responsibility for, the sins of others. However, the door of forgiveness through true repentance is always open.

State and Religion: Islam is a total and a complete way of life. It encompasses all aspects of life. As such, the teachings of Islam do not separate religion from politics. As a matter of fact, state and religion are under the obedience of Allâh through the teachings of Islam. Hence, economic and social transactions, as well as educational and political systems are also part of the teachings of Islam.

Human Rights: Freedom of conscience is laid down by the Qur'ân itself: "There is no compulsion in religion." The life and property of all citizens in an Islamic state are considered sacred whether a person is Muslim or not. Racism is incomprehensible to Muslims, for the Qur'ân speaks of human equality in the following terms:

O Mankind! We created you from a single soul, male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Truly, the most honored of you in Allâh's sight is the greatest of you in piety. Allâh is All-Knowing, All-Aware.

Calendar: Islamic practices are based on the 12-month lunar calendar. The migration of the Prophet (ﷺ) from Makkah to Madînah marks the beginning of this calendar. However, Muslims also use the solar calendar in their daily lives. The five daily prayers are regulated on the basis of the solar cycle.

Celebrations (Eid): Muslims have two celebrations, namely, *Eid-ul-Fitr* (Fast-Breaking) and *Eid-ul-Adha* (Sacrifice). The Eid of Fast-Breaking comes at the end of the month of fasting, Ramadan (the ninth month of the lunar calendar). The Eid of Sacrifice is in remembrance of the sacrifice performed by Prophet Ibrâ hîm (Abraham) of his son and comes on the 10th of *Dhul-Hijjah*, the twelfth month of the lunar calendar.

The weekly holy day for Muslims is Friday. Muslims gather together shortly after noon on

Friday for the Friday congregational prayer. A *khutbah* (sermon) is given before the congregational prayer. All adult male Muslims must attend this prayer. Women who wish may also attend.

Diet: Islam allows Muslims to eat everything that is lawful, clean, and good for the health. It prohibits certain items such as carrion, blood, pork and its by-products, and any animal that is not slaughtered properly in the name of Allâh. Alcohol and any narcotic or addictive substances are also forbidden.

Places of Worship: The place of worship is called a *Masjid* (Mosque). Most Muslim communities have a masjid for the performance of the daily congregational prayers. However, a Muslim may also pray anywhere in the world: in a masjid, house, office, or outside. The entire Earth is a place of worship. There are three places of worship in the world where the reward of offering prayer is much more than any other place. These are: the Ka'bah, or the masjid in Makkah, the Prophet Mohammed's (ﷺ) masjid in Madînah, and Masjid Aqsa, adjacent to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

Distribution of Muslims in North America: There are approximately eight to twenty million Muslims in North America. They are distributed in all its major cities such as New York, Detroit, Boston, Toledo, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, Cedar Rapids, Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Edmonton, Vancouver, Windsor, Winnipeg, Calgary, and others.

Contributions in North America: Muslims are contributing considerably in all spheres of life in America. Most of these contributions go unnoticed because Muslims generally do not like to "beat their own drums". Muslims have established academic institutions, community centers and organizations, schools, and places of worship. They live in peace and harmony among themselves and among other groups of people in the society. The rate of crime among Muslims is very minimal. Muslims in North America are highly educated and they have added to the success of American scientific and technological fields.

The Muslims of the earlier periods of history were pioneers in medicine, chemistry, physics, geography, navigation, arts, poetry, mathematics, algebra, logarithms, calculus, and so on. They were a critical force in bringing about the Renaissance of Europe and world civilization. This spirit of contributing continues in the present generations.

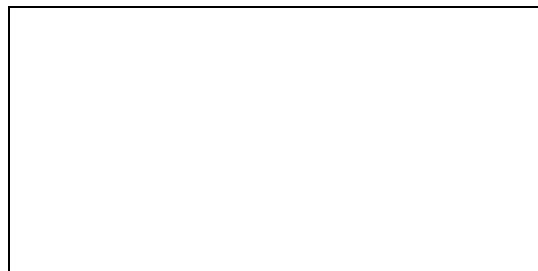
Non-Muslims: Muslims are required to respect all those who are faithful and God-conscious people, namely those who received messages. Christians and Jews are called People of the Book. Muslims are asked to call upon the People of the Book for common terms, namely, to worship One God, and to work together for the solutions of the many problems in society.

Christians and Jews lived peacefully with Muslims for centuries in the Middle East and other Asian and African countries. The second Caliph, Umar (Allâh be pleased with him), did not pray in the church in Jerusalem so as not to give the Muslims an excuse to take it over. Christians entrusted the Muslims, and as such the key of the Church in Jerusalem is still in the hands of the Muslims. Allâh orders Muslims to respect and protect the places of worship of other religions.

**For more information,
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