

# ISLAM

## Description:

The Prophet Muhammed, born in Mecca, in what we now know as Saudi Arabia in about 570 CE, received the Book of Allah, the Qur'an, through divine revelation beginning in 610 CE. Over a period of 23 years, the Qur'an was completed and defined the faith of Islam, which is today one of the major religions of the world. Muhammed died in 632 CE.

Islam is a monotheistic religion, proclaiming that there is but one God, Allah. The name Islam means peace, purity and obedience or submission to Allah. A Muslim is a person who has submitted to Allah. The core articles of the Islamic faith define the Islamic way of life: There is one God, Allah, who created the Earth and all life on it. He is the God of all humanity and a Being having no equal. Muslims believe in the Angels, who are spiritual beings with distinct assignments such as the Arch Angel Gabriel who carries the messages of Allah to the Prophets. The word of Allah was revealed through the divine scriptures given to the Prophets. Muslims believe in the prophethood of all Prophets, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammed who is the final Prophet. The Prophets were chosen by Allah to give His divine revelations to humanity. There will be a final Day of Judgment, when all humanity will be resurrected and judged on the basis of their good and evil deeds. Allah will reward the just with afterlife in Paradise and punish the evil with the eternal fires of Hell. Only Allah knows when the day of Judgment will arrive. While humanity is blessed with free will, having the power to choose good or evil, salvation is found only through submission to the will of Allah.

Muslims demonstrate their faith by worshipping Allah, by following His laws and by living a life of work and prayer. There is a call to prayer five times daily, and Muslims will frequently speak the name of Allah when expressing gratitude or asking for guidance.

Muslims believe that humans are born free of sin but must observe Allah's guidance to be a good Muslims and live a life free of sin. Islam teaches that in the hierarchy of all the beings created by Allah, humans hold an especially high place because of the ability to reason and express spirituality. Muslims are subject to Islamic law, which is given by Allah and defines what is Halal (acceptable), Haram (prohibited), *Makruh* (bad/doubtful), Mubah (optional or without restriction) and Mustahab (encouraged but not imposed). These laws guide the way of Islamic life.

## Religious Elements:

### Scriptural and Doctrinal Sources

- Qur'an: The Book of Allah, given to the Prophet Muhammed.
- Hadith (or Sunnah): the revelation of the message of Allah through the Prophets' words, actions and confirmation. Hadith was transmitted orally by early generations and documented in books later. Scholars classify Hadith in different levels based on its authenticity, depending on the chain of reports from the early oral version to its publication in books:
  - Sahih (attested)
  - Daeef (weak)
  - Hasan (good)
  - Maudoo (fabricated)

### Rituals

A Muslim's duties are described in the Five Pillars of Islam:

- Declaration of Faith: A Muslim must declare faith in Allah, worship only Allah as God, and agree that Muhammad is his Messenger and Prophet.
- Prayers: A Muslim must fulfill his or her duty to Allah by praying to Allah five times daily, as this strengthens faith and brings a person closer to Allah. This should be done while facing toward Mecca.
- Fasting: A Muslim must fast during the Holy Month of Ramadan from dawn to dusk. Between sunrise and sunset, all food, drink, sexual activity and improper actions are prohibited.
- *Zakaah* (or *Zakat*): A Muslim must contribute 2.5% of his or her annual savings to charity. This money is then used to alleviate poverty. A more stringent view of this obligation sees Muslims who hold a Nisab (minimum savings) giving the value of 2.5% of all holdings minus what they require for personal use each year.
- *Hajj*, or Pilgrimage to Mecca: A Muslim must make a mandatory pilgrimage to the Holy City of Mecca once in his or her lifetime, except in cases where the individual's physical, mental or financial health prevents the journey.
- Before praying, a Muslim must perform the *wudu* (washing the generally exposed parts of the body — face, hands, arms up to the elbows, and feet up to the ankles). The hair is rinsed with wet fingers. If the worshipper is in a state of "grave impurity," he or she must first perform the *Ghusl*, a ritual bath intended to wash away all impurity.

### Moral Code

- Islamic Law defines what is *Halal*, or permitted by God, and *Haram*, which is prohibited by God, as well as defining what is *Makruh*, which is detestable but not as bad as *Haram*, *Mubah*, which is optional and, finally *Mustahab*, which is encouraged but not imposed.
- The Islamic moral code is defined by what is *Halal* and *Haram*.
- Killing, stealing, adultery or sex outside marriage, gambling, wasteful consumption, bribery, spreading gossip, pornography, prostitution, and consuming intoxicants are all considered *Haram*.
- Muslims do not endorse or participate in forms of entertainment that promote what is considered *Haram*.

### Houses of Worship

- The Mosque (or Masjid) is the Islamic house of worship. The Mosque is distinguished by its large, open space in the interior, by a minaret or tower from which the faithful are called to worship, and often by a dome-shaped roof. Inside the Mosque, the imam conducts the service from the *Mihrab*, a semi-circular structure or alcove that looks in the direction of Mecca. There is a mimbar, a seat or pulpit, from which sermons are delivered at the right of the *Mihrab* atop of a set of step. The mimbar is mostly used for Friday noon prayer sermons, or at special events such as Eid prayers, twice a year. The floor of the Mosque, where the congregation gathers to worship, is covered in carpets. There are no seats or pews.
- The mosque is more than a house of worship. It is also a social, educational, and political institution. It is controlled and managed by the congregation.
- Muslim workers who cannot get to a mosque for prayer may want the use of a clean, carpeted room for prayer at appropriate times. It is helpful to the faithful at prayer if the direction of Mecca is indicated and a copy of the Qur'an is available.

• Although other mosques preceded it, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is the oldest surviving one. It was built in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century, and is the location from which Muhammed is believed to have ascended to Heaven.

#### Devotional Practices and Services

- Muslims must practice individual worship as well as congregational worship.
- Prayers must be made to Allah five times daily: at dawn, at noon, in the mid-afternoon, at sunset, and in the evening. Prayer times are specific and can be determined by contacting the local Islamic community.
- Called to prayer by a muezzin, Muslims gather at the mosque at noon on Friday, which is the holy day, to pray as a congregation.
- Muslims may work on Friday, providing they are able to attend the congregational prayer at the mosque.
- The sermon, given by an imam, who is also called *Khatteeb*, precedes the congregational prayer.

#### Clergy, Organization, and Government

- There are two main denominations of Islam, Sunni and Shi'a.
- The Shi'a School of Islam places a greater emphasis on the need for a spiritual leader and authoritative powers. Shiites follow a line of religious leadership, the Imams, descended from Ali, cousin of Muhammed. They believe that Ali's succession itself resulted from specific appointment by Muhammed who acted under divine guidance, and that twelve successive Imams came to the appointment through divine intervention.
- The Sunni school of Islam does not require as rigid a structure in its religious leadership. Sunnis, the majority of Muslims in the world (possibly 90 % of Islam's adherents), consider themselves the "orthodox" faithful of Islam. Here, leadership is a temporal matter, not a divine ordinance.
- Mosques are nondenominational and all Muslims, whether Sunni, Shiite, or other denomination, are welcome to worship at any mosque.
- Imams lead congregations in prayer. Traditionally, imams are community leaders, as well as religious leaders and spiritual counselors.
- A mosque may have one or several imams, depending on its size.

#### Propagation of the Faith

- Muslims believe that all humans are born Muslim, so anyone can convert to Islam.

#### Major Celebrations and Observances:

Muslims follow a lunar calendar to determine the dates of holy days. The calendar begins in the year 622 CE, the year Muhammed fled persecution in Mecca for the city of Yathrib, which is now Medina.

#### Days of Regular Observance

- Ramadan: During the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, Muslims fast from before sunrise until after sunset.
- Id-al-Fitr: The first day of Shawal, the 10<sup>th</sup> month of the Islamic calendar, celebrates the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting. On this day, Muslims do not work; instead, they visit the mosque to pray and visit their families.
- Id-al-Adha, the Day of Sacrifice: This celebration takes place on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Zul-Hijja, which is the 12<sup>th</sup> month on the Islamic calendar. Commemorates the intention of the Prophet Abraham to sacrifice his son Ishmael to God, who prevented the sacrifice.

#### Special Observances

- Al-Hijra Muharran: Celebration of the first day of the Hijra calendar's first month - Muharram.
- Ashura: Means 10<sup>th</sup> of Muharram in memory of Husain, grandson of Muhammed. It marks the martyrdom in 680 CE of 70 of the faithful led by Imam Husain.
- Mawlid-al-Nabi: celebrates the birthday of the Prophet Muhammed in 570 CE. (Some conservative sects of Islam consider the event idolatrous.)

#### Dress Requirements:

- Men and women must dress modestly.
- Men must avoid any clothing that is more appropriate for women. For example, they should not wear silk.
- Women's clothing must be modest and cover the entire body, except the face and hands.
- At present, the Islamic concept of *hijab* is a loose-fitting, modest dress worn by Muslim women that covers all but the hands, neck, and face. The concept is readily adaptable to Western dress, a style worn by many Muslim women in Western countries as well as in some nations where the majority of the population are Muslim.
- For both men and women, the Muslim style of dress not only fulfills a religious obligation, but also makes a statement of identity and may be a source of personal pride (confirming one's religious devotion and sense of modesty).
- It is strongly recommended that Muslim men wear a beard with or without a moustache. They must keep the hair neat, clean and cropped.

#### Dietary Requirements:

- Any meat must be *halal* meat, meaning slaughtered following religious guidelines.
- Pork and swine meat and by-products are strictly prohibited.
- Fish and eggs are allowed, but not if they were cooked near non-*halal* food.
- *Halal* birds do not eat meat and are acceptable; all others are *haram* (forbidden by Islamic law).
- Alcohol and drugs are not tolerated.
- Muslims may not have food that is offered in the name of any god but Allah.
- If hospitalized during Ramadan, the patient may wish to fast between sunrise and sunset.

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All information is extracted from the following sources:

*Religions in Canada*. (2003). Retrieved from <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/pub/rc/index-eng.asp>

*Islam*. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.religionfacts.com/islam/index.htm>