

# THE ARAB WORLD IN THE CLASSROOM



Center for Contemporary Arab Studies

Teaching Module No. 7

## An Introduction to Islam

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The name for the religion in the Arabic language—Islam—is given in the Qur’an itself. The word “Islam” (pronounced iss-LAHM) is based on the root *s-l-m*, which means “peace” in Arabic. It is the same Semitic language root as the word “shalom” in the Hebrew language. The root word is peace, but the grammatical form of the word used for the name of the religion—Islam—means “to achieve peace through submission to God.”

“Muslim” is the correct term for a person who believes in Islam as a religion. It is another Arabic form of the same root as “Islam.” Its grammatical form is like a participle which means “one who has achieved peace through submission to God.” In reality, however, no person can say they have fully achieved this state of being in this life, except the prophets. One can call oneself a Muslim, but to be Muslim means to live as a person *striving* to achieve a state of peace with God. For this reason, being Muslim is not a fixed identity but a process. Every Muslim hopes that their striving, their attempt, is accepted by God at their life’s end but knows that this judgment rests with God alone. By the same token, anyone who speaks the *shahada* (or Islamic creed) must be accepted by others as a Muslim, and there is no excommunication of anyone who has professed the faith. It is fair and proper, however, to critique another Muslim’s behavior as falling short of Islamic standards, but one may not impugn another’s faith itself.



Worshippers at the Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati.

### Qur’an and Hadith: Sources of Teachings

Islam is the name of a belief system to which over a billion people in today’s world belong. Islamic teachings are based on the teachings Muslims believe were given to Muhammad, a prophet who lived from 570 to 632 C.E., as revelation by the Angel Gabriel. Muhammad is viewed as the transmitter of

### Q & A: Can you answer the following questions about basic beliefs held by over one billion Muslims?

It has often been noted that Islam is a misunderstood religion. Many people think, for example, that Islam has little in common with the two world religions with which it is most closely associated: Judaism and Christianity. Try to answer the following five questions. Page 15 of this booklet has answers and explanations.

- Who was the first prophet of Islam?
- Why is Abraham important to Muslims?
- Do Muslims believe in Jesus?
- Do Muslims believe in Jewish and Christian Scriptures?
- Do Muslims have to follow the Ten Commandments?

these revelations received over a period of 23 years, which form the **Qur'an**, or holy book of Islam.

The Qur'an, which is considered fully authentic only in the original Arabic, has been transmitted both through oral recitation and as a written book. It was memorized during Muhammad's lifetime, the precise order and form of recitation being part of its transmission. It was also put down in writing by those of Muhammad's followers who could read and write, and the written form was compiled and checked against the recitation shortly after Muhammad's death. Transmission of the oral and written Qur'an has been continuous to the present day.

The second source of Islamic teachings is Muhammad's life, which he lived as a model of the Qur'anic message. These teachings are called *hadith* (pl. *ahadith*), compiled reports of what Muhammad said and did. While such reports proliferated after his death and were disseminated throughout the lands into which Islam spread, these reports were collected, compiled, and evaluated during the centuries after his death, according to a system of verification based on the reliability of the *isnad*, or chain of transmission from hearers to reporters. The result of this process was publication from the eighth century C.E. of several authoritative hadith collections upon which scholars and jurists rely today. Together, the Qur'an and the Hadith collections form the foundation of Islamic teachings, providing a guide for individual and communal spiritual and worldly practice

of Islam, a foundation of knowledge, and a model of prophetic behavior and guidance.

### Basic Beliefs in Islam

The most basic article of faith is that God (whose name in the Arabic language is *Allah*) is the only One worthy of worship. He is the Creator of all. Muslims believe, and the Qur'an states, that Allah is the One God of Abraham.

### Shahada: The Islamic Creed

لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله

Muslim Sister—Islam for All, [www.muslimsister.com/1112.html](http://www.muslimsister.com/1112.html)

The Islamic creed, or statement of belief, says in English, “*I affirm that there is no god but God, and Muhammad is a prophet of God.*” This testimony of faith is all that is required for a person to become a Muslim. It is a very simple statement but one laden with meaning beyond its simple words.

Anyone who professes the Islamic creed with sincerity and in Arabic is considered to have joined the community of Muslims. The meaning and significance of the creed is simple and universal. The translation of this creed into its English meaning has been done in a variety of ways, some of which are incorrect, and others of which combine interpretation with the translation. Some have translated

the first part as “There is no god but Allah.” This partial translation makes for a very different meaning, focusing on the Arabic *name* for the One God, as if it referred to a particular, or distinct *god* among many *gods* with different names. In fact, Allah is not a different God, but only the Arabic name for the One God, just as God is the English word, *Dios* the Spanish, *Dieu* the French, and *Gott* the German. In fact, Arabic-speaking Christians

## A universal statement of values in a single verse from the Qur'an (33:35)

Lo! men who *surrender unto God*, and women who surrender,  
and men who *believe* and women who believe,  
and men who *obey* and women who obey,  
and men who *speak the truth* and women who speak the truth,  
and men who *persevere (in righteousness)* and women who persevere,  
and men who *are humble* and women who are humble,  
and men who *give alms* and women who give alms,  
and men who *fast* and women who fast,  
and men who *guard their chastity* and women who guard (their chastity),  
and men who *remember God much* and women who remember—  
God has prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward.

use the name Allah just as Muslims do. To say that Allah is different from God is like saying that Dios, Dieu, Gott, and God are all different deities.

To explain its literal meaning, it helps to discuss the phrase word by word. The first part of the Islamic creed is a negative statement with a positive implication: It begins with the word *la* or “no,” which implies a predicate: “There is no...” The next word *ilaha* means “deity” or “god,” or some translate the word as “that which is worthy of worship.” The same word appears in the creed with the addition of the definite article as *Al-lah*—the Deity, or the God. After this word, the negative phrase is completed with *illa*, meaning “except.” So far, the phrase says, “There is no god except (the One) God.”

Turning to the second part of the phrase, some have translated it “...and Muhammad is the messenger (or prophet) of God.” This translation might be construed as having an exclusive rather than inclusive meaning, namely, that Muhammad is *the* [only, or primary] messenger of God. The Arabic phrase is inclusive, however, and could mean that Muhammad is *a* messenger (or Prophet) of God. This includes the concept of prophethood in general as part of the creed itself. In other words, included in acceptance of One God is acceptance of the concept of prophethood. Muhammad is a prophet of God, just as those prophets before him were sent by the same God. These prophets include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, among others.

The importance of an accurate, universal translation of the Islamic creed is apparent since an inaccurate translation gives an opposite impression of what Muslims believe. It falsely portrays Islam as if its adherents believe in a different god with a prophet exclusive to belief in that god. Nothing could be further from the truth. Islam teaches that only God, the Creator of all, is worthy of worship, and He has sent prophets to humankind over time, including Muhammad as the last in a line of prophethood.

### What is a Mosque?

A *mosque* is an Islamic house of prayer. The word mosque is actually a corruption of the original Arabic word *masjid* by way of the Spanish word *mesquita*. The name refers to the act of *sajda*, or *sujud*, which is the



Women praying in the women’s section of the mosque at the Islamic Society of Akron and Kent. Younger children usually attend prayers with their mothers.

BohPhoto (from Flickr), www.flickr.com/photos/bethcamphoto/128575026. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic.

posture of kneeling in prayer with the forehead touching the ground. The floor plan of a mosque is a simple, rectangular hall without furnishing except for a niche in the wall that faces toward Makkah, and a *minbar*, or raised platform from which a sermon is given in the Friday congregational prayer. The many cultures where Islam is practiced and each historical period have produced a wide variety of architectural styles, from simple adobe to elaborate stone, glass, wood, and metal buildings. Today, as in the past, mosques are often part of a complex of buildings and functions, including schools, markets, libraries, and places for gathering. Among immigrant Muslim communities in the West, it is common to build Islamic centers, which function as community centers with classrooms, clinics, lecture and meeting halls, and even gymnasiums.

### Five Pillars: Acts of Worship

The Qur’an states in chapter 22, verse 67, “To every people We have appointed rites and ceremonies which they must follow...” All of the world religions require their followers to perform certain acts of worship. They include prayers, celebrations, spiritual journeys, remembrance of past events, and selfless acts. In each tradition, such acts have many facets—individual and social, spiritual and worldly—and they are experiences that influence the cultures that practice these rites. They prepare the foundation for a spiritual life in these faiths and pave the way for carrying out the moral and ethical rules of the faith.

Five major acts of worship are required of Muslims who are of sound mind and able to perform them. Some are performed daily, some annually, and one is performed only once in a lifetime. These obligatory acts are teachings in the Qur'an whose exact time and manner of performance are modeled on the example of Muhammad during his lifetime. They have been called "pillars" because they are important to the establishment of Islam for each individual and for the Muslim community, locally and globally.

Since these five acts are performed by Muslims wherever they may live, their fulfillment forms a strong unifying element among an otherwise very diverse body. Despite geographic, ethnic, and cultural differences among Muslims around the world, the five pillars are carried out wherever Muslims are located. While each of the pillars can be defined in a word or two, they have many dimensions in practice. These dimensions include spiritual and worldly results, individual and communal practice, and cultural influences that take different forms across space and time.

The **first pillar** is the *shahada* or testimony of belief (see page 2). This is a spiritual and public dec-

laration that there is One Creator of all, and that He has sent messengers and revelation to humankind. The creed excludes all other deities, and Islam forbids worship of idols or images. Belief in One God also means that Muslims must avoid bowing to false gods or mere humans—whether they be figures of authority, royalty, or pretenders to intercession with God. The individual should focus on cultivating a direct relationship with God—there is no priesthood or clergy. Authority comes from knowledge through being a scholar or an *'alim*. Belief that Muhammad is a prophet of God includes reverence for the prophets and earlier scriptures like the Bible and Torah.

An important political result of this belief is that the indivisibility of God limits the power of worldly authority. While it is not widely understood, the development of Islamic jurisprudence and the system of law known as *Shari'ah* does not imply or permit a theocracy, or rule by holy men. The scholars who developed the *shari'ah* did so outside the government in order to set a standard of practice and a foundation in law that could hold worldly

## Salat (Daily Prayers)

The following is a description of the movements and recitations that make up one *rak'ah* (unit) of Islamic daily prayer. The five daily prayers consist of 2, 3, or 4 units, each with a different Qur'anic recitation (in step #4).

1. Stand facing the *qiblah*, which is the direction of the Ka'bah in Makkah.
2. Raise the hands to the ears and say aloud: *Allaahu Akbar* (God is Great.)
3. Stand with arms at sides or crossed at the waist right over left. Recite *Al-Fatihah* (the opening *surah* of the Qur'an). *Al-Fatihah* is recited in every *rak'ah* of every prayer. It means:  
*In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.*  
*Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.*  
*The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.*  
*Master of the Day of Judgment.*  
*You (alone) we worship; You alone we ask for help.*  
*Show us the straight path, the path of those whom You have favored, not the path of those who earn Your anger nor of those who stray. Amen.*
4. Recite aloud any *surah*, or at least a few verses, of the Qur'an. For example, this is *Al-Ikhlās* (The Purity):

*Say: He is God, the One and Only;*

*God, the Eternal, Absolute.*

*He begets not, nor is He begotten;*

*And there is none like unto Him.*

5. Raise the hands to the ears as at the beginning and say aloud: *God is great*. Then bow, placing the hands on the knees with the back straight. This position is called *ruku'*, and in this position say silently three times: *Glory be to my Lord, the Supreme*.
6. Return to the standing position while saying aloud: *May God hear the one who praises Him*. Then say silently: *Our Lord, for You is all praise*.
7. Raise your hands to your ears and say aloud: *God is great*. Then kneel, with the forehead, nose, hands, knees, and bottoms of the toes touching the ground. Keep the forearms and elbows raised off the floor. This position is called *sujud*. While in this position, say silently three times: *Glory be to my Lord, the Most High*.
8. Say aloud: *God is great*. Then sit back on the heels.
9. Again say aloud: *God is great*. Kneel again in the *sujud* position. Repeat while kneeling: *Glory be to my Lord, the Most High*.
10. Say aloud: *God is great*. Then stand up.



leaders, including hereditary leaders, accountable to a rule of law that was known to all and based on Islamic sources. The spread of the Arabic language, the language of the original Qur'an, is a major cultural influence that grew out of the Islamic creed and its foundation in scriptures revealed by God to Muhammad for the instruction of humankind.

The **second pillar** is the *salat*, which means performing the five daily prayers in the manner and form taught by Muhammad. It is a major spiritual commitment to worship God five times a day—at dawn, early and late afternoon, at sunset and after twilight. Together with the required purification with water before performing prayer, the prayers are both a physical and a spiritual act involving healthful exercise, mental renewal and refreshment. Individual self-discipline and the renewal of spiritual links become woven into the fabric of life, along with the habit of seeking guidance and forgiveness. Performed together with others in private or in public, these prayers join Muslims in regular worship and contact. This established pattern of daily and weekly social life is so marked in Muslim societies that it has lent its name to periods of the day. In places where Muslims live, the daily calls to prayer can be heard and mosques (*masajid*; sing. *masjid*) can be seen. The need to determine accurate prayer times and to orient *masajid* toward Makkah led to the study of astronomy, mathematics, and geography.

The **third pillar** is *zakat* or obligatory charity. The amount required is a small percentage of wealth beyond an individual's or family's basic needs. The spiritual concept behind the word *zakat* is that wealth is purified by the act of giving a portion away as a "loan to God." For the individual, *zakat* places limits on greed associated with the accumulation of wealth. For the community, the concept of charity as a mandatory act stimulated charitable giving as a habit and resulted in the development of charitable institutions and foundations. *Zakat* and other charitable donations have provided a source of funds for public works. In Muslim cultures, charitable foundations (*waqf*; pl. *awqaf*) developed as permanent sources of funding for mosques, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, wells and travelers' accom-



Joe Raedle/Getty Images News/Getty Images

Men praying at the Islamic Cultural Center of New York. Note how the men are in different phases of the *rak'ah*.

modations in addition to institutionalized help for the poor.

The **fourth pillar**, *siyam*, is the obligatory fast during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic lunar calendar. The requirement to perform an annual ritual fast is linked in the Qur'an to the tradition followed by all previous prophets. It is at the same time a private act between the individual and God as well as a grand collective celebration of shared effort and sacrifice. From dawn to sunset, Muslims take no food or drink, and husband and wife postpone intimate relations. Spiritually, fasting brings a worshipper closer to God and creates empathy with the hungry. Fasting demonstrates individual self-discipline and a sense of achievement. Physically, fasting contributes to health by interrupting bad habits and ridding the body of toxins. The whole community participates in Ramadan, which is marked by the appearance of the crescent moon at both the beginning and end of the month. There are additional prayers and readings from the Qur'an. Culturally, the annual Ramadan fast is a month of visiting, sharing food and renewing connections, bringing a sense of global linkage with Muslims everywhere. Ramadan ends with a celebration called Eid al-Fitr.

The **fifth pillar**, *haji*, is the ritual journey to Makkah, an ancient city in the Arabian Peninsula,

during the pilgrimage season, which falls in the twelfth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Wherever in the world they live, Muslims set out on this journey and come together in this place to worship God. Leaving their ordinary lives behind, they wear the simplest of garments and perform rituals in remembrance of the command given to Abraham to obey and worship God. Spiritually, the hajj creates a link between the pilgrim and the original bearers of God's message by walking in their footsteps. In a worldly sense, it demonstrates the unity and equality of all believers by placing them on the same footing of hardship, clothing, and mission of performing the rituals, standing before God asking forgiveness and giving thanks. The hajj ends with a celebration, Eid al-Adha, in remembrance of Abraham's sacrifice of his son, which was redeemed by the substitution of a ram (male sheep). The hajj orients the whole community away from themselves and their locality, toward a worldwide community—both for those who go and those who merely wish to go. Historically, the most important effect of the hajj has been to encourage travel, communication, and exchange. Huge pilgrim caravans left annually from cities on established roads as well as on boats through ports and shipping lanes. Throughout the centuries, this global community in motion has renewed its

contacts annually, keeping people, transportation, goods and ideas in circulation, independent of any government or empire.

**Suggested activity:** Research basic rituals from other faiths, and take notes on their spiritual and worldly effects, their individual and communal practices, and their cultural influences. How similar are these dimensions across the world religions?

### Foundations of Islamic Ethics and Values

Islamic teachings are based upon the belief that the revealed Word was given to humankind by God through His Angels and messengers. Beginning with Adam and continuing in the line of prophethood through Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, as well as many others, known and unknown, relayed specific teachings or laws to the people among whom they lived. The Qur'an teaches that their basic message was the same: believe in one God, worship God, do good deeds such as helping and respecting parents, family, and those less fortunate. They taught that following the present life there will be a new creation, God's judgment and justice. They taught that all human beings are equal in spirit before God and differentiate themselves based on their piety. Life on this earth must be lived with reverence, humility and

### How are the dates of Islamic celebrations determined?

Islamic celebrations such as the beginning and end of Ramadan and the timing of the pilgrimage are determined using a lunar calendar. Each month begins when the new crescent moon is sighted after sunset by a trustworthy person or group of people. They need to know astronomical calculations in order to ascertain where in the sky to look and when the moon is likely to be sighted. Global communication has created issues about determining the dates which did not exist in earlier times, resulting in some disagreement among nations and across the world. Long ago, people relied upon local sightings to determine the month, or the message from a nearby capital was communicated by fire signals. Today, satellite television, radio and telephones mean that Muslims around the world learn of the first sightings. The need for local or continental sightings is still present, however, because the moon cannot be sighted everywhere on the same day. This has led to questions of whether people should celebrate according to the first place a reliable sighting occurs, or whether the start of celebrations should be staggered across the world. Determining the date ahead of time by using astronomical calculations alone is considered by some to be the best way of removing uncertainty so as to meet the demands of modern schedules. In North America, for example, a group of jurists, the Fiqh Council of North America ([www.fiqhcouncil.org](http://www.fiqhcouncil.org)), has begun to announce the date the moon can be sighted, and thus fixing the date of the celebrations in advance.

individual responsibility, and no area of life falls outside ethical and moral bounds. Faith and worship are primary goals but to do what is good and to avoid doing what is evil are the responsibilities of all men and women and the fundamental purpose of life. Some basic duties and responsibilities toward oneself and others listed below are among the messages given to human beings in the Qur'an and the teachings of Muhammad.

- Care for yourself as a creature of God
- Respect and do kindness to parents, relatives and neighbors
- Strive to realize justice in all areas of life
- Be honest and trustworthy, and keep your promises
- Treat others as you would like to be treated
- Do things in moderation; do not go to excesses or extremes
- Don't waste or be greedy
- Care for the Earth as a trust from God

These concepts form the basis of each individual's contribution to a good society and are also enjoined as communal efforts.

**Suggested Activity:** Relate the following concepts and practices to the values and ethical principles listed above by having students make a chart showing the concepts in one column and corresponding activities in the other. Students may also make posters or drawings illustrating the practical meaning of these principles. Examples might include: exercising weekly; recycling waste; avoiding drugs and alcohol; honoring contracts and promises; avoiding anger; using good manners; visiting the sick; conserving resources; saving money; and helping at home.

### Islamic Principles and Human Rights

Human rights in Islam are based upon the concept of God as the Creator of life, and the inherent spiritual equality of all human beings, regardless of gender, class, or ethnic origin. No right can be understood in isolation from the duties that accompany it, and rights fall within the ethical system of Islam. Because God gave life, human life is sacred

and is a trust placed on the individual soul toward itself and toward others. Maintaining physical well-being is therefore a duty, and protecting life—both human and non-human—is a trust. Suicide is strictly forbidden and a great sin. Even the killing of animals for food must be carried out under limitations, with acknowledgement of permission



“There is no harming or returning harm for harm [in Islam].” This hadith is one of the most basic foundations of the entire Islamic ethical structure. Calligraphy by American calligrapher Mohamed Zakariya.

to do so under these conditions. Human life may only be taken for serious offenses and through due process—no wanton killing or impulsive justice is accepted. Since God endowed human beings with intelligence and free will, the sanctity of reason, or intellect, and the mind is a God-given right. Other rights are as follows:

- Sanctity of Life
- Sanctity of the Mind (reason and intellect)
- Sanctity of Human Honor and Dignity
- Sanctity of Property (with the limitation that possessions are a trust from God)
- Sanctity of Religious and Other Freedoms (including protection of non-Muslims living under Muslim rule)

From these rights of individuals follow the duties and responsibilities of those in authority to protect religious freedom; to grant freedom of thought, writing, and speech; to provide education; to treat people with dignity; and to protect animals and other living creatures, including the natural environment.





Tor Eigeland/Saudi Aramco World/SAWDIA

Large ceramic dish from the Hegira 5th century/11th century C.E., a part of the collection of the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. Lute players were a common type of musician at the Fatimid court and were popular motifs in ceramic design. Both ceramics and imported lutes were prized trade goods in Renaissance Europe.

### Historical Origins of Islam

Muhammad, prophet of Islam, was born in about 570 C.E. and died in about 632 C.E., some two centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire. At that time, the Persian and Byzantine empires competed for control of the Mediterranean region and its bordering lands. The Arabian Peninsula was somewhat removed from these struggles but was involved in trade routes reaching into Africa, the Indian Ocean, Asia, Europe and North Africa. Camel caravan routes across the Arabian desert linked the ports and overland routes surrounding the peninsula as they had done for centuries, and after the rise of Islam, trade traffic on these routes intensified.

The rise and spread of Islam involved two distinct historical processes—one rapid and the other gradual. In the century after Muhammad's death, Arab conquests rapidly expanded the territory ruled by Muslims, extending from Spain to the borders of China by 750 C.E. Despite this rapid expansion, however, Islam spread very gradually in these territories. During the early centuries, the Arabs ruled as a small Muslim minority. According to historians, it took between two and four centuries before Muslims formed a majority in most of these lands. The gradual spread of Islam was aided by the rise of cities, the prosperity of trade, and the spread of ideas and the Arabic language

in those regions. In the period from the tenth to the fifteenth century, the breakup of empire, the expansion of trade, migration and invasions into Muslim regions introduced additional populations in parts of Asia, Africa and Europe to Islam. Three empires—the Ottoman in western Asia, the Safavid in Iran, and the Mughal in India—also contributed to demographic changes and the entry of new populations into Islam.

### Islam Today

There are more than fifty nations with majority Muslim populations. Although statistics are difficult to verify, most demographers estimate that about one fifth of the world's population is Muslim, at least 1.2–1.5 billion people. Between the two main branches within Islam, Sunni Muslims comprise roughly 85% and Shi'i Muslims the remaining 15%. According to *Encarta*, about 206 million people speak Arabic as their mother tongue, and about 246 million speak Arabic as a second language. Among these are the approximately 300 million inhabitants of the 22 predominantly Arab countries of whom several million are Arab Christians and tens of thousands are Arabic-speaking Jews. While the majority of Arabs are Muslim, they make up only 12–15% of all Muslims worldwide. The demographic center of the majority Muslim region of the world is Lahore, Pakistan. In other words, approximately half of the world's Muslims live west of that point and the other half live east of that point. This is significant because many people think that the largest concentration of Muslims is in the Middle East, but in fact large Muslim populations live in Asia. For example, the largest Muslim country is Indonesia, with a population of about 120 million. A large minority population also lives in India, and significant populations are found in the Central Asian republics and in China. About half the population of Africa is Muslim, though they are concentrated in North Africa, West Africa, and parts of East Africa.

### Muslim-European Relations

Far from being two isolated "worlds," Muslim and European regions of the globe have interacted



continuously from the rise of Islam to the present day. Europe, called “the West” because of its location on the northwestern edge of the Eurasian continent, became a dominant world power during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, industrializing, colonizing, and spreading its economic and cultural influence around the globe.

From the seventh century on, Muslim civilization has remained in close contact with Europe and other regional societies in India, China, and parts of Africa. Absorbing influences and knowledge in the arts, sciences, and commerce, Muslims and people of other faiths living in Muslim societies contributed much to the world we know today. Many major products such as textiles, ceramics, glass, and metal wares, common and luxury foods, and theoretical as well as practical sciences were transmitted to and through Muslim civilization.

The political and military threat of territorial expansion was felt on both sides during the past 1400 years and more. Battles and stand-offs have occurred, no doubt, and misunderstandings exist on both sides. In contrast to what is often thought, however, positive exchanges between Islam and the West did not cease after the Crusades, nor in early modern times, but have continued their fruitful exchanges of people-to-people contacts, literary and artistic influences, commercial and scientific exchanges, and common endeavors.

### Sunni, Shi‘i and Sufi Muslims

The split into the Sunni and Shi‘i branches of Islam was a political difference over who should be the successor to Muhammad. Those who came to be called Sunni believed his successor should be chosen from among all qualified Muslims. Those who came to be called Shi‘i believed that the successor to Muhammad’s leadership should have been Ali, cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, following through the line of his descendants. This split has been a source of political division and has resulted in differences in the use of sources and schools of law, but most basic Islamic beliefs are common to both branches. Today, some scholars are working to bridge the historical differences between the two branches.

Sufism is a form of mystical expression and a spiritual path. Sufism is not a sect or a branch of Islam, but a tendency that includes both Sunni and Shi‘i Muslims. Among its famous adherents are Rabia al-‘Adawiyya (717–801 C.E.) and Jalal-ud-Din Muhammad Rumi (1207–1273 C.E.). Al-Ghazali (d. 1111 C.E.) is one of the best known scholars of Islam and is often credited with establishing the orthodoxy of Sufism. Sufi orders, or groups clustered around a specific teacher, played an important role in the spread of Islam, especially in Central Asia, West Africa, North America and the Indian Ocean region.

### Contemporary Issues: Women’s Rights and Place in Society

Of the many current misperceptions about Islam, perhaps the most widespread is that women in Islamic law and Muslim society are oppressed and lack rights. To the contrary, the Qur’an specifically grants women a highly significant set of rights. The first of these is spiritual equality, meaning that the woman is viewed as having a soul that is obligated to worship and carry out the rites of Islam in daily life, including attend-



Muslim women in Cairo.

ing the mosque. Secondly, women are granted “legal personhood,” meaning that they are fully responsible as adults before a court of law in civil and criminal matters. The Qur’an grants a woman the right to own, inherit, buy and sell property; to enter into contracts; to spend or invest her income from work or inheritance as she sees fit; and, to decide upon her marriage.



rubberball/Rubberball Productions/Getty Images

Muslim girls in different styles of hijab.

She may also petition for divorce. A woman's rights include the obligation of male family members (or husbands) to support her financially.

Granted, there are and have been cultural barriers to the exercise of women's rights, and in some societies or segments of societies, male prerogatives have eroded women's rights, especially in marriage and ownership. Customs such as honor killing are not part of Islam; they are punishable offenses. Seclusion of women is a practice that predated Islam in some societies around the Mediterranean and was often based on class rather than gender. Rural women were generally indispensable to the economic life of their families and communities, as were lower class, urban women, and thus could not be secluded as were women of the upper classes. Women's dress in Islam should not be viewed as oppressive or compulsory. Many of the women who have kept the practice of covering the body (all but the hands and face) in modern societies do so by individual choice. In modern Muslim societies, a staggering variety of dress can be observed, from highly Westernized to stylish coverage to traditional costumes. Those types of public dress that hamper and restrict movement have been exchanged for more practical costumes by modern women who retain the *hijab*, or modest public dress. It is also important to note that the hijab has become a political touchstone. Some governments in Muslim countries, and now in some European countries, have legal sanctions for women who wear the hijab, while other governments have legal sanctions for

women who do not wear it. Most countries leave the matter to individual choice.

### Self-Determination, Governance, and Democracy

Muhammad's role as political leader of the Muslim community was not that of a monarch or a dictator. The central principle by which he ruled—and the precedent he set for legitimate authority for his followers—was rule by consultation and consensus. In this verse from the Qur'an Muhammad addresses the subject of governance:

*It is part of the Mercy of Allah that you deal gently with them. Were you severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from you: so pass over [their faults], and ask for forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs [of importance]. Then, when you have taken a decision put your trust in Allah. For Allah loves those who put their trust [in Him]. (3:159)*

When Muhammad was invited to accept leadership in the city of Madinah (then called Yathrib) by its major tribes, he established rule by forging an agreement known as the *Dustur-al-Madinah* (Constitution of Madinah), setting down a system of mutual rights and obligations. In accord with the verse cited above, Muhammad consulted people before making decisions. Even though his word was authoritative, because he was acknowledged by his followers to be receiving revelation, he made it a habit to listen and to accept advice, especially in worldly matters.

After Muhammad's death, the community set the precedent of selecting the successor from among the prominent companions and chose Abu Bakr, close associate of Muhammad, as caliph or *khalifah*, meaning "successor." Some believed that Ali ibn Abi Talib, who was Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, was actually Muhammad's designated successor. This view represents the Shi'i position, according to which Muhammad's successors should have been hereditary rulers. This view did not prevail, although Ali was later selected as the fourth caliph. He came to power in the wake of a rebellion and the assassination

of Uthman, the third caliph. This event touched off a period of strife (called the *Fitna*) which ultimately resulted in civil war and ended with the assassination of Ali and the usurpation of the caliphate by Mu'awiya, an appointed governor who established the Umayyad dynasty. After about a century, the Abbasid dynasty replaced the Umayyad. The Abbasid dynasty was very wealthy and powerful for a time, and its leaders behaved much like absolute monarchs. The unitary Muslim state broke up into rival caliphates and sultanates, and hereditary succession or appointment became the rule under dynasties such as the Seljuk, Fatimid, Mamluk, Ottoman, Mughal and Safavid. In the modern era, a variety of systems, including monarchies, military dictatorships, and constitutional, republican governments have ruled post-colonial, independent nation-states in Muslim regions. Many of these governments have enjoyed direct support or sponsorship by Western or former colonial powers, but not all of these enjoy popular support at home.

Apart from these historical questions, the teachings of Islam certainly do not favor dictatorship or absolute monarchy since Islam calls people to be humble and leaders to rule by consultation. Theocracy, or rule by priests based on an understanding of the divine, is not part of Islamic teachings, since Muslims after Muhammad's death were called upon to live by the Qur'an and Muhammad's example. Islamic law developed as a way to interpret these two sources in changing circumstances of time and place. The development of Islamic law was not a project of any ruling group, but a set of methods and standards for applying knowledge of Islamic sources and circumstances, as well as human reason, to the solution of practical, ethical and religious problems. Islamic law was a standard whose authority was based on the consensus of opinion of jurists. Following the Shari'ah, or Islamic law, was a means sought after by rulers to ensure their legitimacy. Many modern scholars have written about the compatibility of Islam and democracy (see bibliography).

### What is Jihad?

Contrary to popular opinion, the concept of *jihad* in Islam does not translate as "holy war." The term

*jihad* is related to the Arabic word *jahada*, which means, "to make an effort, to struggle." There are different types of *jihad*, such as the "greater" and "lesser" jihads, meaning the struggle within oneself and the outward struggle against evil. *Jihad* can act as a principle and as an institution.

*Jihad* as a principle means struggle, a commitment to sacrifice one's personal gain and interests in order to seek God-given aims of justice. This can include the struggle to protect the weak or to strive against oppression and injustice. Carrying out the principle of *jihad* can mean speaking out against tyranny, using one's wealth and time in the service of the poor, or writing and learning. The "greater *jihad*" means struggling to live a just life, overcoming desires, appetites and personal weaknesses in order to become a better person. Struggle to "do the right thing" can involve sacrifice, standing up against tyranny or power, and speaking the truth in the face of ignorance. It might mean loss of job or freedom.

*Jihad* as an institution is the organization and implementation by legitimate authorities of armed struggle in self-defense. It is not an open-ended principle but an institution of the state which may be carried out only when necessary. Its use is conditional not persistent or unlimited. It is *not* directed against people of other faiths because of religious differences. *Jihad* may not be conducted either to force people to convert or to annihilate or subdue people of other faiths. *Jihad* as an institution of the state falls in the context of the need to fight for the physical preservation of the community, not for conquest or glory.

*Make ready for them all you can of (armed) force and of horses tethered, that thereby you may dismay the enemy of God and your enemy...And if they incline to peace, incline also to it, and trust in God. Assuredly, He is the Hearer, the Knower. (Qur'an 8:60-61)*

*It may be that God will grant love (and friendship) between you and those whom you (now) hold as enemies: for God has power (over all things); and God is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful. God only for-*



*bids you with regard to those who fight you for (your) Faith and drive you out of your homes and support (others) in driving you out from turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in these circumstances) that do wrong. (60:8-9)*

These verses show that although the Muslims were to defend themselves strongly, they were only to fight until their opponent asked for peace, and then they must turn to peace negotiations with their former enemies. The last verse is a caution against the type of short-sighted behavior by which “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

The conduct of war was limited by principles that would only become part of international law during the twentieth century in such documents as the Geneva Conventions. In the seventh century, Muhammad taught these limitations on warfare and enforced them in his conduct of war. This hadith is an example:

*I advise you ten things: Do not kill women or children or an aged, infirm person. Do not cut down fruit-bearing trees. Do not destroy an inhabited place. Do not slaughter sheep or camels except for food. Do not burn bees and do not scatter them. Do not steal from the spoils of war, and do not be cowardly.*

Finally, it was not the state of war but the state of peace that allowed Islam to grow and society to flourish. Although fighting was a necessity of the time to overcome persecution and defend the community, it is not a virtue in itself, nor can it become a way of conducting policy over peaceful means.

Terrorism, in contrast, is a crime in Islamic law. Jurists have named this crime *hirabah*, a term in the Qur’an that refers to offenses such as highway robbery and brigandage, which disrupted peaceful commerce and travel, targeted people unjustly, destroyed property and sowed mistrust. Terrorism is an act of destruction that targets innocent victims in any time and place, a surprise attack that prevents seeking safety for persons or property. For this reason, mainstream Muslim jurists have

classified such attacks by one segment of the public (members of an extremist group, for example) against another segment of the civilian public as a criminal act.

Terror groups have tried to justify these acts as necessary to oppose systematic oppression, but Islamic legal reasoning does not allow positive ends to be justified by illegal means. Terrorist acts violate numerous Islamic principles that cannot be cast aside for political motivations, even in response to injustice. Among the principles violated by terrorist acts are the following: (1) committing suicide as a part of a terrorist attack since killing oneself is a grave sin in Islam, an act against the Creator; (2) murdering and the incidental killing of non-combatant civilians (women, children, foreigners, and anyone who happens to be in the targeted area) is forbidden in legitimate warfare and is certainly not excused in irregular warfare; (3) targeting non-combatants, civilians, elderly, children and women, even in times of declared war; and, (4) targeting and killing these persons without warning or with insufficient warning to allow them to seek safety.

Modern warfare also kills civilians more or less indiscriminately as “collateral damage,” for which reason many Muslim jurists have written that modern warfare with weapons of mass destruction cannot be legitimized in any case. Islam forbids both suicide and murder, saying that killing one human being without due process is equivalent to exterminating all mankind, and saving one life is equivalent to saving all humanity (Qur’an, 5:32). In Islamic law, sowing terror, mayhem, and destruction in the land is a capital crime of the worst kind, punishable by the death penalty. Islamic teachings do not condone facile solutions to difficult situations, even those involving severe oppression such as Muslims experience in many countries today. Islam does allow organized resistance against invasion when it targets actual combatants. The overwhelming force of the modern military deployed against unarmed or lightly armed civilians may make some jurists or unqualified persons give opinions in favor of such acts. Islam does not have a centralized religious authority, but relies upon a model of qualification based on recognized schol-

arship in giving legal opinions and on individual accountability in accepting these opinions. The combination of extremist groups' access to videos and websites through which they communicate with the public that may or may not possess a sound foundation in Islamic teachings, added to economic, social and political injustice on a global scale is a recipe that explains the spread of terrorism. The fact that there are Muslims who commit terrorist acts under these circumstances, or Muslim spokespersons who incite such acts, does not mean that Islam condones or justifies terrorism. In fact, Islam condemns it unequivocally. ♦

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*Prince Among Slaves*, Unity Productions Foundation, 2007. (Auxiliary website at [www.upf.tv/upfo6/Films/PrinceAmongSlaves/tabid/77/Default.aspx](http://www.upf.tv/upfo6/Films/PrinceAmongSlaves/tabid/77/Default.aspx))

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### Web Links

Archnet: [www.archnet.org/library](http://www.archnet.org/library) Contains images of mosque architecture.

Council on Islamic Education: [www.cie.org](http://www.cie.org) (now called the Institute on Religious and Civic Values at [www.ircv.org](http://www.ircv.org)) Contains the work of a major educational organization of scholars and educators concerned with teaching about Islam, world religions, world history, geography, and social studies. The site features essays, downloadable lessons, a glossary of terms, and segments of the well-known resource, *Teaching About Islam and Muslims in the Public School Classroom*.

Discover Islamic Art, the Museum with No Frontiers: [www.discoverislamicart.org/home.php](http://www.discoverislamicart.org/home.php) Presents a set of virtual exhibitions on a variety of subject areas and time periods.

Islam and Islamic Studies: [www.uga.edu/islam/](http://www.uga.edu/islam/) University of Georgia website with links to many resources on Islam.

Islamic Spain: [www.islamicspain.tv](http://www.islamicspain.tv) Covers the history and geography of Islamic Spain, timelines, support materials for viewing and discussing the film *Cities of Light*, and extensive enrichment material on Abrahamic religions, sciences and technology, the arts and letters in Spain, and much more.

The Islam Project (under "Education," "Lesson Plans"): [www.theislamproject.org](http://www.theislamproject.org) Contains lessons and historical background on the rise and spread of Islam, basic beliefs and practices, demographics and contemporary geography of Muslim regions, and issues of ethics and morals as well as extended discussion and primary sources on human rights, women, terrorism, and many other interactive topics. The lessons can be downloaded.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, Timeline of Art History: [www.metmuseum.org/TOAH/hm/o6/hmo6.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/TOAH/hm/o6/hmo6.htm) A comprehensive resource on the arts of the world, organized around regional cultures and time periods. By selecting a region and a period, a virtual exhibit of arts from that time, place, and culture can be viewed, along with explanatory texts and essays.

Muslim-West Facts Project: [www.muslimwestfacts.com](http://www.muslimwestfacts.com) Produced by the Gallup World Poll and The Coexist Foundation to disseminate the findings of a Gallup survey of people in a number of Muslim countries. The website reports the survey's results and analyzes how contemporary Muslim attitudes are to be interpreted in the larger framework of Western-Islamic relations.

Prince Among Slaves: [www.upf.tv/upfo6/Films/PrinceAmongSlaves/tabid/77/Default.aspx](http://www.upf.tv/upfo6/Films/PrinceAmongSlaves/tabid/77/Default.aspx) Lessons, historical background, and viewing guides on the documentary drama *Prince Among Slaves*, which chronicles the capture, enslavement and liberation of a West African prince in the nineteenth century United States.

Real Virtual: [www.learn.columbia.edu/ha/html/islamic.html](http://www.learn.columbia.edu/ha/html/islamic.html) Features an introduction to Islamic architecture.

Religious Perspectives Database: [berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/databases/religious\\_perspectives](http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/databases/religious_perspectives) This database, through the Berkeley Center for



Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University, offers brief essays and sacred texts on important issues related to beliefs, practices and teachings of the five major world religions, such as war and peace, insiders and outsiders, poverty and wealth, and others.

World History for Us All: [worldhistoryforusall.sdsu.edu](http://worldhistoryforusall.sdsu.edu) Teaching materials on world history, world religions, cultural interactions, and online curriculum. Lessons for Era 5 include the rise and spread of Islam and the role of Islam in Afro-Eurasia.

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## Answers to Q & A (from page 1)

### Q: Who was the first prophet of Islam?

A: Muslims believe that Adam, the first human being, was the first prophet. The story of the creation in the Qur'an makes it clear:

*And We said: "O Adam, dwell thou and your wife in this garden, and eat freely thereof, both of you, whatever you may wish; but do not approach this one tree, lest you become wrongdoers." (2:35)*

*Thereupon Adam received words [of guidance] from God, and He accepted Adam's repentance: for, verily, God alone is the Acceptor of Repentance, the Dispenser of Grace. (2:37)*

### Q: Why is Abraham important to Muslims?

A: Muslims believe Abraham was called by God to be an example to all believers. He left his home to migrate to the Holy Land. His children formed a line of prophets that includes Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (through his son, Ishmael). Muslims remember Abraham's obedience to God in every prayer, in their annual fast, and during the pilgrimage to Makkah. Most of the rites of the hajj commemorate events in the family of Abraham.

### Q: Do Muslims believe in Jesus?

A: Muslims believe that Mary conceived Jesus by the Word of God given to her through the Angel Gabriel.

- Muslims believe in the virgin birth of Jesus.
- Muslims believe in the miracles given to Jesus.
- Muslims believe Jesus will come again at the end of time.
- The Qur'an teaches that Jesus was one of the highest prophets but states that God does not have mates or sons like human beings do.

### Q: Do Muslims believe in Jewish and Christian Scriptures?

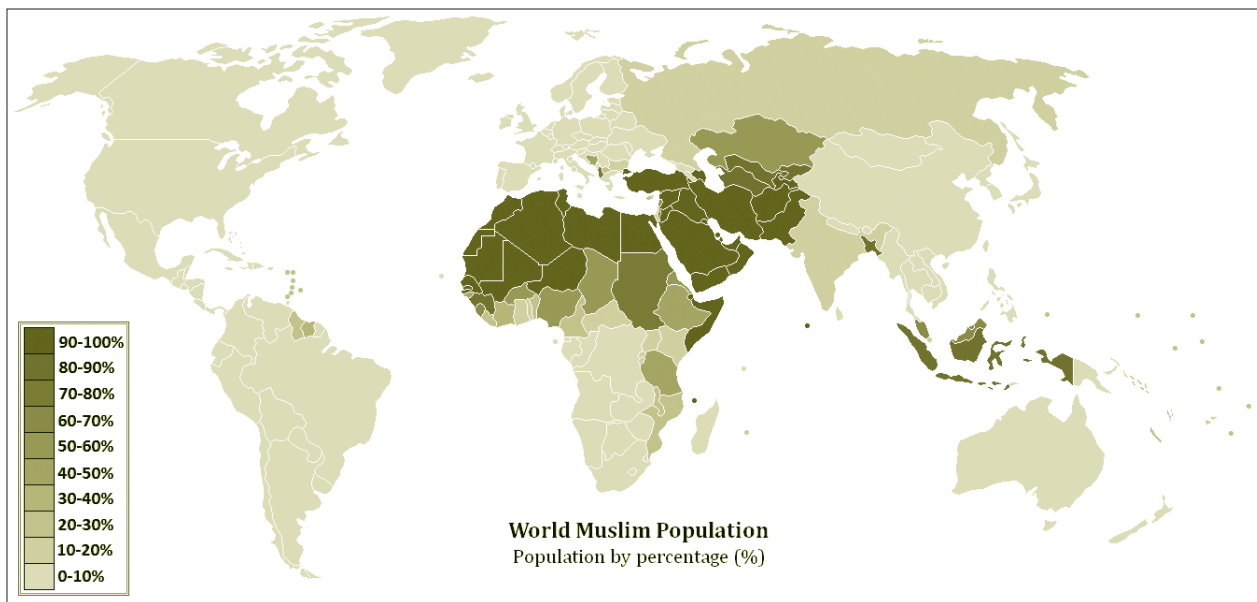
A: Muslims believe that God sent the revelation of the Torah to Moses and the Evangelium to Jesus. Muslims believe in the authenticity of the message given to all the prophets in the Old and New Testaments by God in their time.

*Say: 'We believe in God and the revelation given to us and to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and it is unto Him that we surrender ourselves.' (2:136)*

### Q: Do Muslims have to follow the Ten Commandments?

A: Muslims must keep all Ten Commandments except the commandment to keep the Sabbath:

1. To have no other gods before God (17:22-23)
2. Not to make any graven images to God (6:14)
3. Not to swear a false oath in God's name (16:91-94)
4. To honor parents (17:23)
5. Muslims are not commanded to keep a day of rest, but they do observe Friday as a day of congregational prayer (62:9-10)
6. Not to kill (17:33)
7. Not to commit adultery (17:32)
8. Not to steal (5:38-39)
9. Not to bear false witness (2:283-284)
10. Not to covet what belongs to others (4:32)



Mohsin (from Wikimedia Commons). Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License.

The Muslim population throughout the world expressed as a percentage of the entire population of each country.

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