



Islam - A Brief Introduction

What is Islam?

Islam is not a new religion, but the same truth that Allah revealed through all His Prophets to every people. For a fifth of the world's population, Islam is both a religion and a complete way of life. Muslims follow a religion of peace, mercy, and forgiveness, and the majority have nothing to do with the extremely grave events, which have come to be associated with their faith through a biased media.

Who are the Muslims?

Over one billion people from a vast range of races, nationalities and cultures across the globe - from the southern Philippines to Nigeria - are united by their common Islamic faith. About 18% live in the Arab world; the world's largest Muslim community is Indonesia; substantial parts of Asia and most parts of Africa are Muslim, while significant minorities are to be found in Russia, China, North and South America, and Europe.

What do Muslims believe?

Muslims believe in One, Unique, Incomparable God; in the Angels created by Him; in the Prophets through whom His revelations were brought to mankind; in the Day of Judgement and the individual accountability for actions; in God's complete authority over human destiny and in life after death. Muslims believe in a chain of Prophets starting with Adam and including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elias, Jonah, John and Jesus, alayhimus salam. But God's final message to man, a reconfirmation of the eternal message and a summing-up of all that has gone before, was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through Archangel Gabriel.

How does someone become a Muslim?

Simply by saying 'there is no deity apart from Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.'

What does 'Islam' mean?

The Arabic word 'Islam' simply means 'submission,' and derives from a word meaning 'peace.' In a religious context it means complete submission to the will of Allah. 'Muhammadanism' is thus a misnomer, because it suggests that Muslims worship Muhammad rather than Allah. "Allah" is the Arabic name for God, which is used by Arab Muslims and Christians alike.

Why does Islam often seem strange?

Islam may seem exotic or even extreme in the modern world. Perhaps this is because religion does not dominate everyday life in the West today, whereas Muslims have religion always uppermost in their minds, and make no division between the secular and the sacred. They believe that the Divine Law, the Shari'ah, should be taken very seriously, which is why issues related to religion are still so important.

Do Islam and Christianity have different origins?

No. Together with Judaism, they go back to the Prophet and Patriarch Abraham, alayhi salam, and

their three Prophets are directly descended from his sons - Muhammad from the eldest, Ishmael, and Moses and Jesus from Isaac. Abraham established the settlement, which today is the city of Makkah, and built the Ka'bah towards which all Muslims turn when they pray.

What is the Ka'bah?

The Ka'bah is the place of worship which Allah commanded Abraham and Ishmael to build over four thousand years ago. The building was constructed of stone on what was the original site of the sanctuary established by Adam. God commanded Abraham to summon all mankind to visit this place, and when pilgrims go there today, they say 'At Thy service, O Lord,' in response to Abraham's call.

Who is Muhammad?

Muhammad was born in Makkah Al-Mukarramah in the year 570, at a time when Christianity was not yet fully established in Europe. Since his father died before his birth, and his mother shortly afterwards, he was raised by his uncle from the respected tribe of Quraysh. As he grew up, he became known for his truthfulness, generosity and sincerity, so that he was sought after for his ability to arbitrate in disputes. The historians describe him as calm and meditative. Muhammad was of a deeply religious nature, and had long detested the decadence of his society. It became his habit to meditate from time to time in the Cave of Hira near the summit of Jabal Al-Nur, the 'Mountain of Light' near Makkah.

How did he become a Prophet and a Messenger of God?

At the age of 40, while engaged in meditative retreat, Muhammad received his first revelation from Allah through the Angel Gabriel. This revelation, which continued for twenty three years, is known as the Qur'an. As soon as he began to recite the words he heard from Gabriel, and to preach the truth which Allah had revealed to him, he and his small group of followers suffered bitter persecution, which grew so fierce that in the year 622, Allah gave them the command to emigrate. This event, the Hijrah, 'migration,' in which they left Makkah for the city of Madinah some 420 kilometres to the north, marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. After several years, the Prophet died at the age of 63, and within a century of his death, Islam had spread to Spain in the West and as far East as China.

How did the spread of Islam affect the world?

Among the reasons for the rapid and peaceful spread of Islam was the simplicity of its doctrine - Islam calls for faith in only One God worthy of worship. It also repeatedly instructs man to use his powers of intelligence and observation. Within a few years, great civilizations and universities were flourishing, for according to the Prophet, 'Seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim.' The synthesis of Eastern and Western ideas and of new thought with old, brought about great advances in medicine, mathematics, physics, astronomy, geography, architecture, art, literature, and history. Many crucial systems, such as algebra, the Arabic numerals, and also the concept of the zero (vital to the advancement of mathematics), were transmitted to medieval Europe from Islam. Sophisticated instruments, which were to make possible the European voyages of discovery, were developed, including the astrolabe, the quadrant and good navigational maps.

What is the Qur'an?

The Qur'an is a record of the exact words revealed by Allah through the Angel Gabriel, alayhi salam, to the Prophet Muhammad. It was memorized by Muhammad and then dictated to his Companions, and written down by scribes, who crosschecked it during his lifetime. Not one word of its 114 chapters, Surahs, has been changed over the centuries, so that the Qur'an is in every detail the unique and miraculous text, which was revealed to Muhammad fourteen centuries ago.

What is the Qur'an about?

The Qur'an, the last revealed Word of God, is the prime source of every Muslim's faith and practice. It deals with all the subjects which concern us as human beings: wisdom, doctrine, worship and law, but its basic theme is the relationship between God and His creatures. At the same time, it provides guidelines for a just society, proper human conduct and an equitable economic system.

Are there any other sacred sources?

Yes, the Sunnah, the practice and example of the Prophet , is the second authority for Muslims. A Hadith is a reliably transmitted report of what the Prophet said, did, or approved. Belief in the Sunnah is part of the Islamic faith.

Examples of the Prophet's sayings:

The Prophet peace be upon him said:

'Allah has no mercy on one who has no mercy for others.'

'None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.'

'He who eats his fill while his neighbour goes without food, is not a believer.'

'The truthful and honest businessman will be in the company of the Prophets, the truthful people, and the martyrs on the Day of Judgement.'

'Powerful is not he who knocks the other down, indeed powerful is he who controls himself in a fit of anger.'

'Allah does not judge according to your bodies and appearances, but He scans your hearts and looks into your deeds.'

'A man walking along a path felt very thirsty. Reaching a well he descended into it, drinking his fill and came up. Then he saw a dog with its tongue hanging out, trying to lick up mud and quench its thirst. The man saw that the dog was feeling the same thirst as he had felt so he went down into the well again and filled his shoe with water and gave the dog a drink. Allah forgave his sins for this action.'

The Prophet was asked: 'Messenger of Allah, are we rewarded for kindness towards animals?' He said: 'There is a reward for kindness to every living thing.'

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