

Understanding Islam

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The Rise of Islam

Muhammad (570-632)

570 born in Mecca into the Banu-Hashim clan of the Quraysh tribe, guardians of the sacred Kabaa in Mecca.

610 in the month of Ramadan, the angel Gabriel started giving him revelations from God.

613 Muhammad began to proclaim these revelations in Mecca, calling people to abandon their idolatry. Wife Khadijah was the first convert, followed soon by his close friend Abu Bakr. But there was much opposition.

620 a miraculous night journey with Gabriel. Two parts:

- *isra*: on the winged horse Buraq from Mecca to *masjid al-aqsa*, “the farthest mosque,” traditionally identified with the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem.
- *mi'raj*: tour of heaven and hell, during which he spoke with earlier prophets.

622 rejected by people of Mecca, he moved to Medina (Yathrib) = the *Hijra*, the start of the Islamic calendar (Hijri Calendar, AH = *anno hegirae*). Medina accepted his leadership and became the first Islamic state.

630 conquered Mecca. Destroyed all the pagan statues of Arabian gods in and around the Kabaa.

632 died.

Muhammad's Successors

Medina: the Four Rightly Guided or Righteous (*rashidun*) Caliphs; *khalifa* caliph = successor.

1. Abu Bakr Siddique (632-634)
2. Umar ibn al-Khattab ([Omar I] 634-644): united the Arab tribes, led rapid expansion; captured Mesopotamia, Damascus (634), Aleppo & Antioch (637), Jerusalem (638), Alexandria (641).
3. Uthman ibn Affan (644-656): conquered Iran, North Africa. Umayyad clan.
4. Ali ibn Abi Talib (656-661).

All 4 associated by marriage with Muhammad: daughters of Abu Bakr, Umar married to Mohammed; Mohammed's daughters married to Uthman, Ali. Non-hereditary; chosen by deliberation.

Sunni Muslims recognize all 4; Shia only the 4th, Ali.

Shia: leadership should have passed directly to Ali then to his sons (Mohammed's grandsons). Shi'ite identity solidified by Battle of Karbala (680), defeat of Muhammad's grandson Husayn ibn Ali by Umayyad Caliph.

Beliefs & Practices of Islam

Islam: submission to Allah

Muslim: one who submits to Allah

Beliefs

Three fundamental beliefs

1. *Tawhid*: oneness of Allah, expressed in the Shahadah.
2. *Risalah*: prophethood. Allah has sent prophets to give guidance to mankind through revealed Scriptures.
3. *Akhirah*: life after death.

Six articles of faith

iman: “I believe in God, his angels, his books, his prophets, in the last day, and in God's predestined will.”

1. God: Allah is one; his nature and qualities are revealed in his 99 names.
2. Angels: 4 archangels (incl. Gabriel), ordinary angels; good and bad *jinn* (between angels and humans)
3. Holy Books: Scriptures were revealed to Adam, Seth, Enoch, Abraham (all now lost); to Moses (*tawrat*,

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Torah), to David (*zabur*, Psalms), both corrupted by Jews; to Jesus (*injl*, the Gospel), corrupted by Christians; and finally to Muhammad (Qur'an).

4. Prophets/apostles: 28. Greatest are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad.
5. Day of Judgment: true Muslims rewarded with place in Paradise; all others sent to hell, a place of punishment and suffering.
6. Predestination: decree of good and evil.

The Qur'an

Muhammad's proclamations (*qara*) of divine revelation were written down as the Qur'an. It is the word of Allah, directly revealed to Muhammad in Arabic. The Qur'an is divided into *sura* (chapters).

Other important literature includes:

- *hadith*: accounts of Muhammad's teachings and practices (*sunna*, the way or path), written generations later.
- *sira*: traditional biographies of Muhammad.

Five Pillars of Islam

All Muslims are called to perform five basic duties:

1. *Shahadah*: confession of faith. "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah."
2. *Salat*: prayer.
 - a. 5× daily: dawn, noon, afternoon, evening, night.
 - b. Facing Mecca (the Kabaa) = *qiblah* (direction).
 - c. Summoned by the call to prayer (*adhan*) by the *muezzin* from the minaret of the mosque (*masjid*): God is most great (*allahu akbar*)... There is no god except God.
 - d. Ritual ablutions (*wudu*) before prayer: wash hands, mouth, nose, arms, face, hair, ears, and feet in order.
 - e. Can perform prayer anywhere, though mosque is preferable. People make a special effort to get to the mosque for Friday noon prayers, when the *imam* preaches a sermon from the *minbar* (pulpit).
 - f. Ritual positions for prayer.
3. *Zakat*: almsgiving. Give at least 2.5 % of total wealth to poor and needy.
4. *Sawm*: fasting. Refrain from food, water, smoking, sex from sunrise to sunset in month of Ramadan (2017.05.26–06.24). *Iftar* meal after sunset each day; *Eid al-Fitr* festival at end of Ramadan.
5. *Hajj*: Pilgrimage. If possible, at least once to Mecca to engage in rituals, including walk 7 circuits of the Kabaa, the black cube at the center of the Grand Mosque; per tradition built by Abraham & Ishmael.

Many Islamic practices look strange to Western eyes, but are more familiar to Middle Eastern Christians and would have been very familiar to Jews and Christians of the 7th century from whom many of these practices were derived: daily prayers, posture of prayer, fasting.

Shari'a Law

Shari'a = Islamic law, governing all aspects of life. The morality of all human actions is categorized: compulsory, recommended, allowed (*halal*), disliked, forbidden (*haram*).

qadi: Islamic judge.

mufti: scholar who is an interpreter or expounder of Islamic law.

fatwa: legal opinion issued by a qualified jurist (*mufti*).

Notable aspects of Shar'ia include diet and dress.

- Diet: food is divided between *halal* (permitted) and *haram* (forbidden). *Haram*: pork, carrion, blood, alcohol, food offered to one other than Allah. Food preparation must be according to *halal* rules. Meat must be slaughtered in a prescribed way, invoking the name of Allah.
- Dress: both men and women are required to dress modestly. Men covered from navel to knees. Women: cover whole body except face and hands.
- Penal code

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Jihad

jihad (Arab. struggle, resisting).

mujahid, pl. *mujahideen*: person engaged in *jihad*.

Two aspects: internal and external.

World divided into two:

- *dar al-islam*: territory occupied by Islam.
- *dar al-harb*: territory outside control of Islam.

Extremists

Islamist: seek to establish Sharia-based Islamic state.

Islamic extremist: use violence to do so.

Sunni extremists:

- *Salafi*: ultra-conservative Sunni movement advocating a return to the traditions of the “devout ancestors” (*salaf*). Started by Muhammed bin Abd al-Wahhab in Najd (central Arabia), 18th cent. Salafi jihadism arose in 1990s.
- *Wahhabi*: strict Saudi form of Salafism. al-Wahhab formed pact with local leader Muhammad bin Saud. 1920s house of Saud conquered most of the rest of the Arabian peninsula, including the Hejaz (Mecca, Medina). In 1970s Saudi Arabia began exporting Wahhabism around the world, building mosques, schools.
- Muslim Brotherhood: founded in Egypt 1928. Sunni, Islamist.
- *Hamas*: founded 1987 during First Intifada as offshoot of Muslim Brotherhood.
- *Al-Qaeda*: founded 1988 by Osama bin Laden and others.
- *Taliban* (Pasto “students”): Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Started c. 1994 by Mullah Omar in Kandahar; reinforced by students from madrassas in Pakistan.
- *Islamic State*: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Daesh (Arabic acronym). Sunni Salafi Wahhabi jihadist. Began 1999; in 2014 Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed worldwide caliphate.

Shia extremists:

- *Hezbollah* (Party of Allah): founded 1985 after Israel’s invasion of Lebanon (1982).

Stumbling blocks

- Trinity
- Jesus as the Son of God
- Crucifixion

Observations

- Islamic terrorists are mostly Sunni Salafi jihadist. These are a tiny percentage of Muslims worldwide.
- Sunni Salafist extremists are a bigger problem than Shiite extremists. Saudi Arabia is a bigger problem than Iran.
- Most Muslims want to live in peace; many have fled from the extremists.
- Most Muslims are very family-oriented and hospitable.
- Befriend your Muslim neighbors, co-workers.
- Talk with them about Jesus; they already acknowledge him as one of the 6 great prophets, and the holiest.

Recommended reading:

Carl Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus* (Bethany House, 2008).

Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity* (Zondervan, 2014).