

DCU Chaplaincy:
An Introduction to World Religions

Islam





Islam


Islam originated in the Arabian Peninsula around 610 AD and is a mono-theistic religion. Muslims live according to the will of Allah which was revealed to Muhammad, who is the last in a line of prophets sent by God to humanity. At the age of 40 Muhammad began his preaching following a message from the angel Gabriel. The first Muslim community lived in Medina. The way one lives is very significant for how things will be when one dies, either everlasting joy in Paradise or eternal suffering in hell. Muslims honour Maryam (Mary) the mother of Jesus (Isa). The essential elements of Islam are:

- Belief in Allah
- Belief in the Holy Books
- Belief in Angels
- Belief in the Prophets
- Belief in Predestination
- Belief in the Day of Judgement

The Five Pillars of Islam

The five pillars of Islam are the basis of Muslim life, faith, prayer, charity, fasting and the pilgrimage to Mecca:

- **Shahadah** is the declaration of the faith, there is no God but Allah. Muhammad is the messenger and servant of Allah.
- **Salah** is prayer. There are five prescribed prayers which act as a direct link between the person and God. Prayers are performed at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, after sunset and before going to bed. Before praying, Muslims go through a routine ritual washing



called 'wudu'. Verses in Arabic are quoted from the Quran. All Muslims turn towards the city of Mecca when they pray.

- **Zakah** is a charity tax. It is a portion of one's wealth that must be given to the poor or to other specified causes. It is obligatory for all those who are financially able.
- **Ramadan** is a time of fasting. It is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. During this time Muslims must abstain from food, drink and sexual relations from dawn to sunset. Ramadan is the month that the first verses of the Quran were revealed, making it the holiest months of the Islamic Year.
- **Hajj** is the Pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca). This is undertaken at least once in a lifetime for those who are physically and financially able to do so.

Different groups within Islam

The three main branches of Islam are


- **Sunni:** mainstream Muslims who rely exclusively on the Quran for guidance
- **Shia:** followers of Ali, a successor of Muhammad
- **Sufi:** an early branch of Islam devoted to ritual practices and often described as 'mystical'

Islamic Practices

Sharia refers to the comprehensive Muslim law covering every aspect of individual and collective living.

Muslims only eat **halal** foods, that is those considered lawful according to the Quran.

Islam requires Muslims to dress in a modest and dignified manner and clothing must not draw attention to oneself.



Depending on the national culture and on the branch of Islam believers practise, women are required to wear a **Hijab** (a headscarf covering the hair, neck and upper chest) or **Burqa** (a type of dress covering the face, head and body) in public.

Sacred Text

The Al-Qur'an (Quran or Koran) is the sacred book of Islam and is a record of the exact words revealed by Allah to the Messenger Muhammad. To recite verses from it brings the grace of Allah.

Two additional texts - the Sunna and Hadith - are both drawn from the life of The Prophet also influence religious faith and practice.

Significant dates

The two major religious observances for Muslims are **Ramadan** and **Hajj**. The ending of these is a time of religious celebration.

Eid al Fitr (Festival of Breaking the Fast) marks the end of the month of Ramadan. It is a time of celebration and exchanging gifts. People dress in either their best clothes or wear new clothes symbolising inner renewal after the fast.

Eid al-Adha (Festival of the Sacrifice) marks the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca. Muslims worldwide celebrate by sacrificing a lamb or other animal, distributing the meat to relatives, friends and the poor. The sacrifice symbolises obedience to Allah and the distribution to others is an expression of generosity.



Place of Worship

The Islamic place of worship is the mosque. Muslims may pray almost anywhere including homes, offices, factories and universities. Midday prayer on Fridays is the most important time for communal prayers, which are usually performed at the mosque. This is known as the **Jummah** prayer.

In every mosque there is a niche in the east wall called the **Mihrab** which points those praying in the direction of Mecca. Prayer is usually of set ritual movements. Ritual ablution (washing) is performed before prayers commence.

Visiting a Mosque

Dress modestly. Before entering the mosque shoes must be removed. Men and women pray separately and in the mosque there is usually a gallery for the women. Women are asked to wear a head covering but it is not compulsory. Sit on the floor.



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