



TEACHINGS OF ISLAM

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What is Islam?

Islam means submission to God. The word "Islam" is an Arabic word derived from the root word "salaam", which means peace. Therefore, the word Islam implies submitting to God, living in peace with oneself as well as others and with the environment. The people that practice Islam are called Muslims. Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam is based on strict monotheism. Islam teaches that all people are responsible for their own actions. Each individual will stand before God on the final judgment day and, depending on his/her actions, face either eternal bliss in paradise or eternal punishment in hell. Muslims do not recognize any official priests who mediate between the people and God.

Muslim Population and Countries

Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world including North America. There are about 1.2 Billion Muslims in the world that live in over 55 countries. A Muslim may be an Arab, Turk, Indian, Pakistani, Malaysian, African, European or an American. All Arabs are not Muslims. In Palestine 10 to 20% Arabs are Christians. About 20% Muslims in the world are Arabs who live in the Middle East e.g. Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, United Arab Emirates etc. The remaining 80% Muslims are non-Arabs and they live in Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world.

In U.S., there are about 7.5 million Muslims. African-Americans Muslims are 40% of the Muslim population in U.S. The remaining 60% Muslims are 1st, 2nd generations Muslims from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Middle East and South East Asia. It is interesting to note that up to 70% of Arabs in U.S. are Christians.

The important demographics on American Muslims are as follows:

- 40% of American Muslims are between the ages of 18 to 29 years (U.S. average 14%).
- 67% of American Muslims have a college degree BS or above (U.S. average 44%).
- 66% of American Muslims earn more than \$50,000.00 a year (U.S. average \$42,000).
- By 2027 the Muslim in U.S. population will double

Source: Philadelphia Inquirer 2004

History of Islam

Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) was born in Makkah, Saudi Arabia in year 570 A.D. Since his father died before his birth and his mother died when he was only 6 years old, his Uncle Abu Talib raised him. As Muhammad (may peace be upon him) grew up, he became known to be



truthful, trustworthy, generous, and sincere. In those days, the people of Makkah used to worship idols (pagan practices). Tribal warfare and female infanticide (killing of newborn girls) were common. Idols were also kept inside Kabah that was built about 4000 years ago by Prophet Abraham (may peace be upon him). Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) detested the decadence and idolatry of his society.

At age 40, Muhammad (may peace be upon him) received his first revelation from God through Angel Gabriel. The revelation continued for 23 years, and they are collectively known as Quran. Muslims believe that Quran is the final word of God for the humanity since the message in the previous divine books Gospel and Torah has been altered over time.

As soon as Muhammad (may peace be upon him) began to recite the Quran and to preach the truth that God had revealed to him, he and his small group of followers suffered persecution from non-believers. The persecution became so fierce that in 622 A.D., God commanded them to leave Makkah. The migration of Muslims from Makkah to the city of Medina, some 260 miles to the north, marks the beginning of Muslim (lunar) calendar.

While in Medina the strength of the Muslims grew rapidly and within few years Muhammad (may peace be upon him) and his followers were able to return to Makkah, where they forgave their enemies. Just before Muhammad's (may peace be upon him) death at the age of 63, the greater part of the Arabian Peninsula had become Muslim and within a century of his death, Islam had spread to Spain in the West and as Far East as Indo-China. Among the reasons for this rapid spread was attributed to Islam's doctrine of oneness of God, equality and accountability for every human being, and absence of hierarchy and control of Mosque/Muslim Church.

Achievements of Muslims in Science & Arts

Islam instructs man to use his powers of intelligence and observations. Within a few years of the spread of Islam, great civilizations and universities were flourishing in the world. 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 vital systems such as algebra, Arabic numerals, algorithms, and the concept of zero were transmitted to medieval Europe and rest of the world.

The Muslims also developed sophisticated instruments that later made possible the European voyages of discovery, such as astrolabe, the quadrant, and advanced navigation maps. Muslim scholars translated the works of Greek philosophers that were destroyed by the Romans into Arabic. Muslims ruled Spain for 800 years and worked very closely with Jews and Christians. University of Cordoba became the main center of higher learning in Europe. In Cordoba, Ibn Rushd, known in Europe as Averroes put all knowledge to test of reason. His writings on Aristotle were translated into Latin and influenced Christian scholars in medieval Europe. Ibn Khaldun set standards for the scientific study of history. He stressed the importance of studying the causes of events.

The greatest Muslim mathematician was al-Khwarizmi. His work pioneered the study of algebra. In the 800s, he wrote a book that was later translated into Latin and became a standard mathematics textbook in Europe. Muslim astronomers studied eclipses, observed the Earth's rotation, and calculated the circumference of the Earth to within a few thousand feet. The work of Muslim astronomers and navigators help pave the way for later explorers like Christopher Columbus.

Building on the knowledge of Greeks, Muslims made remarkable advances in medicine and public health. Under the caliphs, physicians and pharmacists had to pass a test before they could practice.



Hospitals were set up for the sick. Injured people could get quick treatment at a department similar to today's emergency room. In Baghdad, al-Razi who was a senior physician in the main hospital wrote many books on medicine, including a pioneering study of measles and small pox. Equally famous was the Persian physician Ibn Sina, known in Europe as Avicenna. His great work was the Canon on Medicine, a huge encyclopedia of what the Greeks, the Arabs, and he himself had learned about the diagnosis and treatment of disease. The book included more than 4000 prescriptions.

Europeans learned Arabic and advanced sciences in Spain from Muslims and translated them into German, French, English and other languages. These valuable manuscripts and knowledge later helped them enormously during the European renaissance.

Pillars of Islam

There are 5 pillars/tenets of Islam. The first pillar "Shahada" is a belief and the remaining pillars are actions that a Muslim must perform to fulfill his/her obligations to God and the community.

First pillar is called "Shahada". It is the belief that there is only one God and Muhammad (may peace be upon him) is His messenger. Without this belief a person cannot be a Muslim. Muslims believe that no one has the right to be invoked, supplicated, prayed to, or shown any act of worship, but God alone. Muslims do not worship Muhammad (may peace be upon him) but consider him as God's last messenger. In Quran, God describes Himself:

Say: "He is God, the One. God, to Whom all creatures turn for their needs. He begets not, nor was He begotten, and there is non-like Him" (Quran, 112:1-4).

The same concept is also addressed in Bible:

"I am the first and I am the last and besides me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6). "Bear O Israel, the first of all commandments is; the Lord our God is one Lord" (Mark 12:29)

Second pillar is "Prayer". Muslims pray 5 times a day from sunrise to sunset. Muslims can pray at home, work or a mosque. Each prayer takes about 5-10 minutes to perform. During prayer, Muslims worship God and ask for His forgiveness. They also send their blessings to Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him), Prophet Abraham (may peace be upon him) and all their descendants.

Third pillar is "Fasting". During the month of Ramadan (Islamic lunar calendar), Muslims fast every day from morning to dusk for 29 or 30 days depending on the sighting of the moon. They get up very early in the morning before sunrise and eat breakfast. Then during the day they do not eat or drink. The fast is broken at sunset called "iftar". Muslims believe that Ramadan is the month of blessings during which Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him). During this month, God opens the gate of heaven and would forgive believers if they fast, pray, give charity and do good deeds. According to Quran:

"The month of Ramadan is one in which the Quran was revealed, as a guidance for humanity, and demonstrations in the way of guidance and discrimination. So whoever among you is present should fast. If anyone is ill or on a journey, then the prescribed term is to be from other days". (Quran 2:185)

Fourth pillar is "Zakat or charity". Each adult Muslims who is gainfully employed must give two and a half percent or more of his savings to the needy on an annual basis. In addition to zakat that is



for poor people, Muslims give “sadaqa” (donations) to mosques, teaching institutions and various charity organizations. The best charity is Sadaqa jariya (continous charity) e.g. teaching a skill to a person so he/she can make a living, educating people about Islam, building a school/mosque or simply planting a fruit or shade tree so that other people can benefit from it. The messenger (peace be upon him said “When a person dies his/her actions come to a end except three that he/she leaves behind: (i) Sadaqa jariya (ii) knowledge (e.g book) from which other people derive benefit and (iii) a righteous offspring who prays for his/her forgiveness.

Fifth pillar is "Hajj". This is pilgrimage to Makkah once in a lifetime. This obligation is waived if the person is in debt and cannot afford it. For Hajj Muslims go to Saudi Arabia and visit Makkah and Medina. In Makkah, every Muslim makes a trip to Kabah, which is a large cubical building inside Masjid/Mosque Al-Haram. After spending few days in Makkah, the pilgrims go to Medina and pray at the Masjid/Mosque Nabwi that was built by the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him). Pilgrims visit his gravesite that is inside this mosque.

In addition to the "Shahada" (to believe in one God and Muhammad His messenger), the other fundamental beliefs (iman) of all Muslims are:

Belief in Angels

Like Christians and Jews, Muslims believe that angels are a part of God’s creation. Angels serve God by relaying His messages, or performing a variety of other functions. For example, the angel Gabriel brought the messages from God to Muhammad (may peace be upon him); the angel Michael provides sustenance for human bodies and knowledge to human minds; the angel Israfil will sound the trumpet on the Day of Judgment. Many Muslims also believe that two angels attend each human being and record all of his or her deeds until the moment of death. These angels present this account to God on the Day of Judgment.

Belief in God's revealed Books

Other than Quran, Muslims believe that God gave Psalms to David (may peace be upon him), Torah to Moses (may peace be upon him), and Gospel to Jesus (may peace be upon him).

Belief in the Prophets and Messengers of God

Muslims believe in all the prophets and messengers of God, starting with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Jesus (may peace be upon all of them). But God's final message to man, a reconfirmation of eternal message, was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him). According to Quran:

“Muhammad is not the father of anyone of your men, but he is the messenger of God and the last of the prophets” (Quran, 33:40).

Belief in the Day of Judgment

Muslims believe in the Day of Judgment (the Day of resurrection) when all people will be resurrected for God's judgment according to their beliefs and deeds. On this day, God will reward the believers by sending them to heaven (Jannah) and the non-believers and evildoers will go to hell. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:



“A space in paradise equivalent to the size of a foot would be better than the world and what is in it”.

According to Quran:

“Those who believe and do good deeds, We will admit them to gardens (paradise) in which rivers flow, lasting in them forever” (Quran, 4:57)

Belief in Divine Predestination (Al-Qadar)

Muslims believe in "Divine Predestination" but this belief does not mean that human beings do not have any freewill. Rather, Muslims believe that God has given human beings power to make their own decisions. Human beings can choose right or wrong and they are responsible for their actions. The belief in "Divine predestination" includes the following:

- God knows everything. He knows what has happened and what will happen.
- Whatever God wills to happen happens, and whatever He wills not to happen does not happen.
- God is the Creator of everything

Teachings of Quran

Muslims consider Quran as the last revealed word of God. It is the primary source of every Muslim’s faith and practice. Quran not only teaches about God, but also provides a complete guide to life. Its basic theme is relationship between God and His creation and it deals with all the subjects, which concern human beings: wisdom, doctrine, worship, transactions and laws. Quran provides guidelines and detailed teachings for a just society, proper human conduct, and an equitable economic system. It emphasizes honesty, generosity, forgiveness and sets harsh penalties for crimes such as stealing and murder. Quran speaks of human equality in the following terms:

“O mankind, We have created you from a male and female and have made you into nations and tribes for you to know one another. Truly, the noblest of you with God is the most pious.

Truly, God is all-knowing and all-aware” (Quran 49:13).

Based on the teachings of Quran, Muslims believe in the same God as Jews and Christians, recognize many of the same prophets, and accept the idea of heaven and hell.

Islamic Shari'ah and Fiqh

Islamic Shari'ah and Fiqh refers to Divine laws (Shari’ah) and rules and regulations (fiqh/Islamic jurisprudence) to live in this world. It regulates oral conduct, family life, business practices, government, and other aspects of a Muslim community. Shari’ah is based on the teachings of Quran and Sunnah (actions and sayings of the messenger). Muslims believe that Quran is the last revealed word of God. It provides guidelines and detailed teachings for a just society, proper human conduct, and an equitable economic system. Sunnah refers to what Muhammad (may peace be upon him) said and approved for the Muslims.

It will be interesting to note that orthodox and conservative Jews just like Muslims also follow the Divine laws (Halha) that were revealed to Moses (may peace be upon him) in Torah.



Sunnah is the second source in Islam after Quran. The Sunnah is comprised of hadiths that have been reported by companions of Muhammad (may peace be upon him) after his death. Sahih Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmizi and Abu-Dawood are books that have the collection of various hadiths (Prophet Muhammad's sayings). According to Sahih Muslim the Prophet Muhammad said:

“God does not judge you according to your appearance and your wealth, but looks into your deeds”.

Unlike the law codes that evolved in the west, Shari’ah does not separate religious matters from criminal or civil law. It applies Quran and Sunnah to all legal situations. Thus Islam is both a religion and way of life.

Goals of Islamic Law (Shari’ah)

The goals (maqasids) of the Shari’ah are to protect and preserve the following:

1. Deen (faith)
 - Build places of worship, schools, Islamic centers
2. Life
 - Suicide, abortion and killing of innocent people are unlawful.
3. Family
 - Laws that protect the family, parents, women and children.
4. Intellect
 - Alcohol and other drugs are unlawful since they all impair intellect.
5. Wealth
 - Preservation of property and inheritance
 - Laws against stealing, gambling, corruption and interest (usury).

Islamic Schools of thought (Fiqh)

Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence/legal opinion) refers to rules and regulations of Islam based on teachings of Quran and Hadith (Sunnah).

About 85% of Muslims are Sunni’s and the remaining 15% are Shi’ah. Most of Shi’ah Muslims live in Iran, Lebanon and Iraq.

In Sunni Islam, there are 4 schools of thoughts that were developed in the first few centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him). These are Hanifi, Maliki, Shafi and Hanbali. Imams Abu Hanifa, Malik, Shafi and Hanbal studied both Quran and Hadith (Sunnah) and gave legal opinions on various issues. They used both analogy (kiyas) and consensus of companions (ijmah) for these rulings. Imam Shafi and Hanbali were literalist (Ahlai-Hadith) and



believed that the ruling should be restricted in scope and focus on the text (Quran and Hadith). Whereas, Imam Hanifa and Maliki were rationalist (Ahlai-Rai) and brought their own reasoning to issues. Most of the Sunni Muslims in the world follow the fiqh of Imam Abu Hanifa.

In Shi'ah Islam's fiqh is based on Quran, Hadith and the teachings of Shi'ah Imams. Most of the Shi'ah believe in 12 Imams (Ahlai Bait) who were related to Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) and follow the fiqh of Imam Sadiq Jaffar.

Ijtihad means to struggle with legal issues by going to the sources (Quran and Hadith) and render a new or correct legal opinion. Ijtihad helps Muslims to deal with new issues and situations that are not mentioned in the Quran and Hadith.

Islam, Judaism and Christianity

Muslims share the same roots as Jews and Christians. Followers of all three faiths are descendants of Prophet Abraham (may peace be upon him); the Israelite prophets descended from the second son of Abraham, Isaac and Prophet Muhammad came from the descendants of the first son, Ishmael. Muslims also believe that neither Jesus nor Muhammad (may peace be upon them) came to change the basic doctrine of belief in one God, brought by earlier prophets including Abraham and Moses (may peace be upon them), but rather to confirm and renew it.

Muslims respect and honor Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Moses, Jesus and all the other messengers that have been mentioned in Torah and Gospel. All Muslims remember and send their blessings to both Muhammad and Abraham and their descendants in every prayer (five times a day). "O God, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad as you blessed Abraham and his family. You are the most praised, the most glorious".

Among the great prophets in history, there are no two prophets who are so much alike in their history and struggle as Moses and Muhammad (peace be upon them). Both of them were messengers who received a comprehensive code of law (five books of Moses and Quran respectively), unlike, for example, Jesus (peace be upon him), who said he came not to destroy the law of the prophets but to fulfill it. Both Moses and Muhammad, had to counter the tyranny of rulers at the time and had to flee their homelands in pursuit of a new base for the establishment of their faith. In addition both prophets emerged victorious, morally and militarily.

Muslims respect and revere Jesus (peace be upon him). They consider him as one of the greatest of God's messengers to mankind. The Quran confirms his virgin birth, and a chapter of the Quran is entitled "Maryam" (Mary). The Quran describes the birth of Jesus as follows:

Remember when the angels said: "O Mary, God gives you good news from Him (God), whose name is the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, revered in this world and Hereafter, and one of those brought near (to God). He will speak to the people from his cradle and as a man, he is of the righteous". She (Mary) said;

"My Lord, how can I have a child when no mortal has touched me?" He said:"So (it will be). God creates what He wills. If He decrees a thing, He says to it only, 'Be!' and it is".

"And God will teach him scripture and wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel. (Quran 3:45-48).

Jesus (peace be upon him) was born miraculously by the command of God, which had brought Adam (peace be upon him) into being without a father. God has said:



“The case of Jesus with God is like the case of Adam. He created him from dust, and then He said to him, 'Be!' and he came into being.” (Quran, 3:59)

Muslims believe that Jesus (peace be upon him) was not crucified. It was the plan of Jesus' (peace be upon him) enemies to crucify him, but God saved him and raised him up to Him. And the likeness of Jesus (may peace be upon him) was put over another man. Jesus' (peace be upon him) enemies took this man and crucified him, thinking that he was Jesus (peace be upon him). According to Quran (4:157):

They said: "We killed the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of God." They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but the likeness of him was put on another man (and they killed that man).

Muslim Dietary Laws

Muslims are forbidden to eat pork, drink alcohol or use other intoxicating agents.

“You are forbidden to eat carrion, blood, and flesh of swine, as well as whatever is slaughtered in the name of any one other than God” (Quran 6:145).

Quran prohibits drinking and gambling (Quran 5:90-91) and reaffirms commandments that have been given in Bible:

- i. Do not drink wine (Roman 14:21).
- ii. Blessed are those who do not drink (Ecclesiastic 10: 17).
- iii. Murderers and drunk will not enter paradise (Galatians 5).

Prohibition of pork in Islam is also a reconfirmation of God’s commandment to prophet Moses and Aaron (may peace be upon them).

“And the swine is unclean to you- of their flesh you shall not eat” (Leviticus 11:7).

Status of Women in Islam

Islam sees a woman, whether single or married, as an individual in her own right, with the right to own and dispose off her property and earnings without any guardianship over her. She has the right to buy and sell, give gifts and charity, and may spend her money as she pleases. The groom gives a dowry to the bride for her own personal use, and she keeps her own family name rather than taking her husband's name. It is interesting that these rights were given to women in Islam in the 7th century whereas in Europe, these rights were not awarded to them until 19th century.

Muslims believe that men and women have been created equal, not identical. The rights and responsibilities of a woman are equal to those of a man but those are not necessarily the same. Since men and women are physically different from each other, their roles in the society are also different. Dissimilarities in their functions do not imply that one is inferior to the other.

In Islam, the husband is responsible for taking care of his wife and children. He is commanded to provide his family with food, clothing and shelter. The wife is not obligated to share her earnings with her husband. However, from the goodness of her heart she may spend her money to help the family.



Islam encourages the husband to treat his wife well, as the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) said:

“the best among you are those who are best to their wives” (Al-Tirmizi).

Mothers in Islam are highly honored. A man came to the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) and said: "O Messenger of God! Who among the people should be most worthy of my kindness and good treatment? The Prophet said: "Your mother". The man said: "Then who?". The Prophet said: "Your mother". The man asked again: "Then who?" The Prophet said: "Your mother". The man asked one more time: "Then who?" The Prophet said: "Your father" (Muslim).

Quran commands both women and men to wear a modest dress. Women are commanded to cover their heads and bosoms when they are outside their homes. It is interesting to note that Bible also commands women to veil themselves (Corinthians 11:5-6).

Islam and Terrorism

Islam is a religion of mercy. It does not permit terrorism. The messenger of God has listed murder as the second of the major sins and warned that: "On the day of Judgment the first cases to be adjudicated between people will be those of bloodshed. Quran says:

God commands you to show kindness and deal justly with those who have not fought you about religion and have not driven you out of your homes. God loves just dealers (Quran 60:80).

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) prohibited soldiers from killing women and children (Muslim). He also said:

“Whoever has killed a person having a treaty with the Muslims shall not smell the fragrance of paradise” (Al-Bukhari).

Jihad means to strive or struggle against the weaknesses in oneself, to be virtuous and moral, and make serious efforts to do good deeds and help to reform the society. Depending upon the circumstances in which one lives, it can also mean fighting injustice and oppression, defending Islam and creating a just society through preaching, teaching, and, if necessary, armed struggle. In Islam, committing suicide and killing innocent people is not jihad. In fact, it is a grave sin. There is no question that terrorists like Osama Bin Laden have rejected Islamic laws regarding jihad and have killed both innocent non-Muslims and Muslims all over the world.

From the earliest times, it was forbidden in Islam to kill noncombatants as well as women and children and monks and rabbis, clearly, all of them were given the promise of immunity. Islamic law sets clear guidelines for the conduct of war and rejects the acts of terrorism, The Quran provides detailed guidelines and regulations regarding war: who should fight (48:17, 9:91), when fighting should end (2:192), how to treat prisoners (47:4). It also emphasizes proportionality in warfare:

“whoever transgresses against you, respond in kind” (2:194).

Other verses provide a strong mandate for making peace:



“If your enemy inclines toward peace, then you too should seek peace and put your trust in God” (8:61) and “Had God wished, He would have made them dominate you, and so if they leave you alone and do not fight you and offer you peace, then God allows you no way against them” (4:90)

Additional Readings

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