



ISLAM 101

FUNDAMENTALS OF THE ISLAMIC FAITH

Within days after 9/11, the words *Islam* and *terrorists* had been forcefully introduced into day-to-day conversations. They were so intertwined that, to many, they became interchangeable, though many Muslim leaders were adamant Islam is a belief system that calls for peace. To many observers, however, 9/11 showed an angry, vengeful side of the religion. That apocalyptic day brought the non-Muslim world to sense this was a religion to be reckoned with.

Consequently, we find ourselves asking many soul-stirring questions, such as: *What exactly is the Islamic religion all about? Who are these people we know as Muslims? How can this "religion of peace" bring some of its faithful to take their own lives, willfully and joyfully, in order to destroy the "infidels," meaning those who do not embrace Islam? Do they worship the same God as Christians? Do they believe in Jesus the same way Christians do?* These questions and many others need to be explored if we are to effectively share our faith with those who embrace Islam.

It is impossible, in this short space, to respond to every issue that might be raised in such a discussion. The purpose of this guide is twofold: **1) to heighten the reader's awareness** to fundamentals of the Islamic faith; and **2) to prepare the reader to engage** in meaningful and productive discussions with Muslims.

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With these objectives before us, we move on to explore this religion that is awakening the fascination of some and the consternation of others.

Islam and Christianity: One and The Same?

The sum and substance of Islam is revealed in an Arabic phrase repeated by millions of people every day: *La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah* or *There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is Allah's Apostle*. The *Quran*, the Muslim holy book, has stated this truth, and for a Muslim that means it is settled.¹ The *Quran* is the final word from Allah and supersedes any and all previous revelation. It was written to all mankind and protected from all error by Allah Himself.

From a different perspective, the essence of Christianity is grounded in the belief there is one true and living God and Jesus Christ, His Son, came to earth to bring salvation to all who trust Him as their personal Savior. These truths are presented in the Bible, which evangelical Christians hold to be the inspired Word of God and without error. It is obvious, then, that Muslims and Christians, although they share a number of beliefs, are not building on the same theological foundation.

I. A Brief History of Islam

Muslims, like Jews and Christians, trace their roots back to Adam as humans and to Abraham as people of faith. Their recorded history takes them to Abraham through Ishmael. Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn son through Hagar, who was herself a servant of Egyptian parentage.

Islam, Christianity, and Judaism all chronicle this story in much the same way up to the point where Sarah, Abraham's wife, sent her servant Hagar away with the son that had become a point of contention between the two women. From this juncture, Islam offers an extended description of miracles of survival and of direction by Allah for the mother and her son. The two followed a course charted by Allah that led them to the city of Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula. This city eventually occupied center stage for the Islamic movement and became one of the most important sites to the Muslim people.²

Islam is a world religion; its theology and ethics were shaped by a man named Muhammad. He was born in Mecca, a city in modern day Saudi Arabia, around A.D. 569. His grandfather gave him the name Muhammad, which means "the praised one."

Tradition states a host of angels were present at his birth, and he was born ceremonially clean, circumcised, and with his umbilical cord already clipped.³ He was orphaned at age six and, in due time, was entrusted to the care of his paternal uncle.

Muhammad grew up in humble surroundings, having to work very hard. In his youth, he served his neighbors as a trustworthy shepherd. He eventually became a merchant and developed a reputation as a man of integrity and honesty.

His business dealings brought him into contact with a woman named Khadija. Although she was 15 years older than Muhammad, he married her, and they had six children—two sons who died at birth and four daughters. Khadija died after 25 years of marriage to the prophet. After her death, he went on to marry 13 women and have two concubines.

He was known to go to the mountains to spend time in solitude and meditation. During one of these times of isolation, he reported the angel Gabriel appeared to him and demanded he read from the book that was offered him. However, Muhammad could not do so, for he was illiterate, and he informed Gabriel of his limitations. At this time, he received his first revelation from Allah, which became the *Quran*. According to Muhammad's account of this event, he miraculously received the ability to read and was able to understand the pronouncements given.

Following this revelation, Muhammad told Khadija what had occurred. She assured him he was a good man, and Allah would not lead him astray. It is also said he went to his cousin Waraqa, who was a Christian, to share the experience. Waraqa reportedly confirmed Muhammad's call from Allah.⁴ He also predicted Muhammad would suffer persecution for preaching this new revelation.

This prophecy had also been given once when Muhammad was a young man traveling with a caravan in Syria. A monk named Buhaira foresaw Muhammad as the "final prophet about whom all the previous Scriptures had prophesied." The man warned Muhammad's uncle to safeguard the young man from the Jews who, if they had known who he was, would have certainly sought to do him harm.⁵

After the first revelation, there was a period of silence of about three years. Muhammad thought God had abandoned him, and this caused him to fall into great depression. Some say he even contemplated suicide.⁶ Then the messages began again and continued for a period of about 23 years.

Muhammad recognized both Christianity and Judaism as religions based on truth. However, he contended they were both guilty of falsifying the revelation they had received. Therefore, Allah in his great wisdom gave the truth to Muhammad by way of the angel Gabriel. This truth is the final revelation of Allah and must be received by all men.

The prophet Muhammad began sharing his message with his family and friends. Growth was very slow but eventually increased and spread beyond Mecca, whose citizens were for the most part animists. They believed in a plurality of gods with one named "Allah" who was considered the supreme spiritual being. Muhammad's monotheism and doctrine of a final judgment presented a message they were not prepared to receive.

As a result of this rejection, a significant persecution broke out against Muslims living in Mecca. This forced Muhammad to take his band of followers about two hundred miles away to the city of Medina. The reception in Medina was different: the people were predisposed towards monotheism because of the influence of Judaism in that area.

Muhammad called this new faith *Islam*, which means simply "submission." The followers became known as *Muslims*, literally "those who submit" to Allah and follow Muhammad. According to James Garlow, the etymology of the word *Islam* leads us back to an Arabic word that referred to "the strength, courage, and tenacity of a desert warrior willing to fight to the death for the sake of his tribe." Over time, the term came to mean "submission." There is no substantial proof that it means "peace," as some contemporary Muslims claim.⁷

Muhammad set up his first *masjid* (mosque: place for ritual prostration) in the city of Medina. It became a place of worship, meditation, and learning, with social and intellectual significance for those who followed the prophet.⁸ The center room of a mosque was an open space with no chairs or benches. The faithful were called to gather there with small prayer rugs on which they would kneel to say their prayers. The mosque also served as a base camp from which Muhammad would act as judge, ruler, sage, and military strategist.

Even more important, the mosque became the central gathering site for the *umma* (community of believers). The *umma* is an essential element of the Muslim worldview, implying the relationships and responsibilities Muslims have to all those of the faith. This is the community of the brotherhood of Islam, whose morality, manners, and institutions find their legitimacy in the *Quran* and the *Hadith* (a collection of Islamic traditions described below).⁹

In the early years of the movement, the Islamic doctrines were passed on in small groups led by tutors. Over time *madrasas* (schools, educational centers) were established to inculcate the beliefs and practices in the minds of young Muslims. Today, thousands of madrasas are spread throughout the world. In a number of cases, they have become centers promoting terrorism as well as teaching about the Islamic faith.

For a short time, the Jews and Muslims lived in peace. Muhammad even made some concessions, in the early days in Medina, to appease Jewish leaders. He allowed the Muslims to turn in the direction of Jerusalem for daily prayers. He introduced a midday prayer, much like the practice of the Jews, and adopted some of the Jewish holy days. However, these attempts at peaceful coexistence were not strong enough to cover the blatant differences between the *Quran* and the *Torah*. The one aspect the Jews simply would not tolerate was Muhammad's claim to be a prophet.

These blades of contention soon severed the assumed chords of unity between the two religions. Muhammad struck out at the Jews by calling all Muslims to face Mecca for their prayers rather than Jerusalem. Clear lines of disparity were ultimately drawn between Islam and the other two monotheistic religions (Christianity and Judaism) as well as between Islam and all pagans following animism. These changes were backed by the *Quran* and were therefore not debatable.¹⁰

The division was furthered by the instructions given in the *Quran* endorsing armed conflict against those who rejected Islam. Some new followers were reluctant to fight but were drawn into the battles by the promise of special rewards.¹¹ Muhammad felt secure in pressing forward to spread Islam, even if it meant annihilating those who refused to convert. He led his followers in battle against all who rejected his way, and against the Jews in particular. In one battle, the Jewish people surrendered, knowing they were outnumbered. Nevertheless, Muhammad ordered his soldiers to kill all the Jewish men. They obeyed this command thoroughly and systematically beheaded masses of men. The slaughter took almost 24 hours.

A series of battles ensued, culminating in the conquest of Mecca in 630 A.D. by an army of ten thousand men led by Muhammad. The strength of the army was so overwhelming the animistic Meccans did not resist, and not one person was killed or injured. Upon entering Mecca, Muhammad's men marched seven times around the Kaba, a sacred building believed to have been built by Abraham, and then destroyed 360 idols found there. Having conquered Mecca, the Muslims became more and more aggressive and spread to nearby communities, killing entire tribes that resisted worshipping Allah.¹²

In his book *Islam*, George W. Braswell provides a concise and helpful summary of the influence of this new religion and its leader:

*By the end of his life, Muhammad had emerged as a religious and political leader without equal in the Arabian peninsula. He had founded a monotheistic and prophetic religion that included a basic and straight-forward confessional statement, a worldview of God who sent angels to prophets with a message embedded in perfect scripture. Islam provided a specific and orderly lifestyle of prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage in the context of the mosque and under the guidance of religious and political authorities. A Muslim was taught to walk the straight path of Allah and thereby attain heaven and avoid hell.*¹³

On June 8, 632, Muhammad succumbed to a lingering illness resulting from one of his wives attempting to poison him. His tomb became the second most revered holy place in the Islamic tradition, surpassed only by the grand mosque in Mecca. The veneration of the prophet has reached such a point that some have stated, "You can deny Allah, but you cannot deny the prophet."¹⁴

Shortly after the his death, there arose a division among the *khalifia* (trustees of Allah in the world). The question of who would succeed the prophet as leader was the first real issue before them. While they agreed no one could absolutely replace Muhammad, and someone had to be chosen to lead the new religion, they could not agree on the process. As a result, Islam found itself split into two major groups: Shiites and the Sunnis. The *Shiites* (15% of Muslims today), known as the *Shi'at Ali* (Faction of Ali) believed that Ali, the first cousin of Muhammad, was the rightful leader of Islam. They held resolutely to the position that the leadership should be passed along family lines.¹⁵

The *Sunnis* (85% of Muslims today), on the other hand, felt the best man for the job should be selected, and it was not obligatory to follow a kinship-based protocol. They refused to recognize Ali as their leader, and thus began a split that has lived on through the ages and remains a major factor in the tensions found in the Muslim world.

A third segment, the *Sufis*, is a mystical group that seeks a personal relationship with Allah. A Shiite or a Sunni can be a part of this group while maintaining attachment to his own sect.¹⁶ Since Islamic theology does not establish grounds for an intimate relationship between Allah and man, this is not a large group and does not play a major role in Islam.

Wahhabism, another sect of Islam and a radical wing of the Sunnis, was developed in the mid-eighteenth century under the influence of an Arab Muslim, Muhammad ibn al Wahhab, an extreme legalist. His ties with an influential clan of Saudi Arabia brought his form of legalism to the forefront, and eventually Wahhabism became the official religion of that kingdom. The oil-rich nation used its power and prestige to make this sect one of the best financed, most aggressively proselytizing, and intolerant religious bodies in the world.

Today, over 1.2 billion Muslims are found on every continent. It is the fastest growing religion in the world. However, it should be noted this growth is not necessarily by conversion but rather biological, since all children born in a Muslim family are automatically considered members of the faith.

The evidence is solid, and we must accept it. Islam has found its place on the world stage.

II. Fundamentals of the Islamic Faith

It is impossible to present every teaching of Islam in this format. However, we can present the fundamentals of the Islamic faith as clearly, concisely, and correctly as possible.

A. Allah—The Divinity / The God

Allah is the name by which Muslims refer to God. It comes from the Arabic words, *al lah*, which essentially mean "the Divinity" or "the God." There is some dispute in the secular realm regarding the etymology of this word, but most Islamic scholars fear even to raise the issue. The cornerstone of any religion is its god-structure, or the hierarchy it has established for beings in the spiritual realm. Islam, like Christianity, is strictly monotheistic. It, too, accepts there are angels and demons who are spirits of a much lower status than God.

The theological backbone of Islam is found in the affirmation that there exists no other god but Allah. The statement “God is He, besides whom there is no other god”¹⁷ is repeated throughout the *Quran*. Islam has many rituals and is heavy on ethical decrees, but these are subject to interpretation and alterations. However, the monotheistic foundation must never be challenged, denied, or destroyed.

For the Muslim, Allah is the creator and sustainer of the universe. Islam teaches Allah created all beings, but the thought man was created in the “image of God” is inconceivable. Muslims firmly believe Allah is self-sustained and unique in every way. The Muslim is rigid in his belief in the “sovereign free will of God.”¹⁸

Many Muslims contend Allah does give man a certain latitude in his daily activities. Even so, he has defined the parameters, and man can finally do only his will within these limitations. The word Islam, as already indicated, calls the followers of Allah to live a life of submission, obedience, and capitulation to his will. Even after the worst of tragedies, one can hear the faithful Muslim affirm, “It is the will of Allah.” Orthodox Islamic theology makes it exceedingly clear every thought, word, and deed, whether good or evil, is absolutely predestined. One Islamic scholar put this succinctly: “Not only can he [Allah] do anything, he actually is the only one who does anything.”¹⁹

Muslim theology presents 99 names for God. These names, though not enumerated in the *Quran*, were gathered and listed by Islamic scholars. They are not meant to describe his essence but rather to reveal his will and law to mankind. A good Muslim will memorize these names and repeat them while holding the prayer necklace (*tasbeeh*) and touching the 99 beads, one by one. This act, within itself, demonstrates one’s total submission to Allah and thereby guarantees a place in Paradise.

According to Islamic theology, Allah is not essentially good but only good because he does good. This leads one to conclude Allah has acted according to his will, but these actions are not a reflection of a divine nature.

Muslims explicitly deny the existence of the Trinity. There are many quranic verses that give grounds for this denial. For example, 112:1-4 states, “Say: God is one, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was he begotten. None is equal to him.”²⁰ The one unpardonable sin is the sin of *shirk*, assigning partners to Allah.²¹

In the world of the Muslim, Allah is not necessarily perceived as a loving god. In the passages that speak of Allah’s love for people, all indications are this love is conditioned upon their obedience to him, and their love for him precedes his love for them.²² It appears the relationship between the creator and man is more master to slave rather than a compassionate god reaching out to His beloved but fallen creatures.

B. The Spirit World

The Muslim world identifies three basic categories of spiritual beings apart from Allah himself. None are like Allah, but those in each category have a unique role in carrying out his will. The three categories are as follows:

1. Angels are beings created from light; they cannot commit sin. They are called upon to execute the will of Allah. Angels are never seen as sons and daughters of Allah but are his messengers and continuously worship and serve him. The *Quran* makes clear it is considered a very serious offense not to believe in angels or to reject their work. “Whoever is an enemy to God and his angels and apostles, to Gabriel and Michael—Lo! God is an enemy to those who reject Faith.”²³

2. *Jiin* are spirit beings²⁴ described in the *Quran*, which teaches Allah created the *jiin* and mankind to worship him.

That is all he really demands of them. The nature of the *jiin* is not fully understood. Most agree they are powerful and intelligent yet capricious beings given the right to make choices. Nearly all Muslims agree the *jiin* stand somewhere between men and angels and plainly have a propensity to commit evil and to make stupid decisions.²⁵ It is believed they will spend eternity in Hell. Amazingly, Muslims think these spirits have the potential to be converted to Islam.

3. *Iblis* is Satan, a created spiritual being who fights against the will of Allah. The *Quran* states, “We created man from dry clay, from black molded loam, and before him, Satan, from smokeless fire.”²⁶

A great deal of controversy exists among Islamic scholars regarding the nature of Satan. Some see him as an angel and others simply as one of the *jiin*. The problem, if he is an angel, is how he could possibly disobey Allah. On the other hand, if he is one of the *jiin*, how could he lead people away from the true religion? Debate over this issue continues today.

At any rate, *Iblis* is seen as a fallen creature whose rebellion against Allah was almost simultaneous with the creation of man.²⁷ All of the angels were called to prostrate themselves before Allah, and *Iblis* was the only one who refused to do so. At that moment, Allah stated there would be a reckoning for this action on the Day of Resurrection, or the Day of Judgment. Satan asked Allah to give him a reprieve until the appointed day, and it was granted. This was followed by Satan’s declaration: “I swear by your glory...that I will seduce them all except your faithful servants.”²⁸

Although Allah granted Satan the right to tempt man, He added, “Be gone! A despicable outcast you shall henceforth be. As for those who follow you, I shall fill Hell with you all.”²⁹

The *Quran* tells us Satan tempted man; the story is very similar to the one found in the Old Testament. The exception is the “falling into temptation”—Muslims would not likely use the word sin—of Adam and Eve was not passed on to the human race. Once they were confronted with their error, they repented and were forgiven.³⁰ From that time on, each person must repent of his or her sins. There is no atonement Allah will accept on behalf of someone else.³¹

C. The Sacred Writings of Islam

Islam has seven sources considered sacred:

1. The ***Suhuf-i-Ibrahim*** (The Scrolls), ten holy Scriptures revealed to the prophet Ibrahim (Abraham);
2. The ***Taurat*** (The Torah), the books revealed to the prophet Musa (Moses);
3. The ***Zabur*** (The Psalms), the revelation received by the prophet Daud (David);
4. The ***Injil*** (The Gospels), the words given to the prophet Isa (Jesus);
5. The ***Quran*** (The Koran), the “final message” delivered to the prophet Muhammad;
6. The ***Hadith***, the collection of the traditions of Islam based on all that the prophet Muhammad “did or said, or enjoined, forbade or did not forbid, approved or disapproved.”³² It has been said the *Quran* provides the text, the *Hadith* the context.³³
7. The ***Sharia***, the law governing the daily life of the Muslim.

A closer look at the last three of these sources will help one comprehend better the ideals that influence the Muslim as he formulates his theology, philosophy, and practices.

The *Quran*, the revelation of Allah to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel, is seen by Muslims as the “earliest and by far the finest work of Classical Arabic prose.” For the followers of Muhammad, “it is the infallible Word of God, a transcript of a tablet preserved in heaven, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel.”³⁴

The word *Qur’an* is Arabic, meaning “to read or recite.” The stories and teachings in the *Quran* are clearly shared with the Torah and the New Testament. But the Muslim believes the latter two documents were corrupted; this necessitated a “final revelation” which is found in the *Quran*.

Richard Martin summarizes the essence of the *Quran*: “Whereas the divine presence for the Jew is in the Law and for the Christian is in the person of Christ, it is in the *Qu’ran* for the Muslim as a direct encounter with God.”³⁵ For the Muslim, the *Quran* is an integral part of the nature of Allah himself, a thought developed even further in the belief that just as Allah was not created, neither was the *Quran*. In other words, the text is also preexistent.

The words of the *Quran* are holy and serve as a “roadmap for this life and the life to come. It provides guidance for worship, marriage and family, economics, politics, community affairs, hygiene, and all other affairs of humanity.”³⁶ Faithful Muslims consult the *Quran* on most of life’s difficult questions.

Muslims show their reverence for the *Quran* in various ways. When a Muslim reads the *Quran*, for example, he never allows it to go below his waist. It always occupies the highest shelf in the house. A Muslim soldier will carry it to battle, often suspended from his neck as a means of protection. The holy text, they believe, provides a mystical power and guardianship for the followers of Allah.

The text of the *Quran* is divided into 114 chapters, called *suras*, which do not follow a chronological or subject-related order. It does not contain information, ideas, or arguments about specific themes arranged in a literary or serial order. Yet to those who first received the revelation, there was no incoherence because it was relevant to their particular situation.³⁷

The *Quran* was not compiled until several years after the death of Muhammad. The revelations given to the prophet were preserved on bits of parchment, leaves, shoulder blades of camels, bones, and—most of all—in the memory of his followers. Many Islamic scholars agree the text we see today was completed between A.D. 650 and 656. However, major controversy exists regarding the authenticity of certain scripts because there were so many collections of them. Eventually, all were destroyed except one, and it was taken as the guideline for the final text of the *Quran* used today.

A believer who is able to memorize and repeat the whole *Quran* by heart is called a *hafiz* (protector), and his or her place in paradise is sealed. Interestingly enough, it is not necessary to understand what one is reciting; the value is in the repetition with correct pronunciation and not in the comprehension.³⁸

Muslims are adamant the *Quran* cannot be correctly translated into any other language since it was revealed in Arabic, which is considered the “pure” language of Allah. Some speculate this reluctance by Muslims to translate the sacred writings has perhaps hindered the spread of Islam. On the other hand, many would contend the mystical attachment of the writings to the Arabic language is one of its great strengths.

The *Hadith*, an authenticated collection of the *hadis* (sayings) and *suunah* (actions) of the prophet, are to most Muslims interchangeable with the *Quran*. Some refer to the Hadith as the “unread revelation,” meaning it was not read to the prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. However, this does not imply in any way the Hadith is not inspired.

Throughout Muhammad’s life, when his followers saw him doing something—whether praying, eating, or other daily routines—they would write down how he went about it or simply report it to a fellow Muslim, and thereby seek to emulate the prophet in his actions and perpetuate his truths.

Only the *sahib*, traditions that had a flawless line directly back to the prophet, were considered authentic. The *hadis* and *sunnahs* were passed on from person to person and recorded in the following form:

Humaid b. Mas’ada has informed us, on the authority of Bishr, from Dawud b. Abid Hind, from Abu’z-Zubair, from Jabir, that the Apostle of Allah—upon whom be Allah’s blessing and peace—said: “It is incumbent on every man who is a Muslim to take a bath one day in seven, and that day is Friday.”³⁹⁰

As time passed, the hero-worshippers of Muhammad added many miracles to the already amazingly interesting life of the prophet. Eventually, a collection was amassed of over 600,000 *hadis* and *sunnah*. Islamic scholars were assigned to scrutinize these writings and to attempt to discern which ones were authentic and which were simply spurious legends. When the work of the more accepted scholars was completed, only 7,190 traditions passed the litmus test of authenticity, collected into 1,243 chapters.⁴⁰ Within 300 years after the death of the prophet, his words and deeds had been recorded in the Hadith, which remains basically unchanged to this day.

It is fascinating to note some of the mundane issues that made the final cut, as in the following examples:

- The Prophet commanded the killing of a “snake having stripes over it, for it affects eyesight and miscarries pregnancy.”⁴¹
- It is forbidden to kill a cat.⁴²
- It is meritorious to supply water to thirsty animals.⁴³
- Playing chess is forbidden: “He who plays chess is like one who dyed his hand with the flesh and blood of a swine.”⁴⁴
- “When any one of you awakes from sleep..he must clean his nose three times, for the devil spends the night in the interior of one’s nose.”⁴⁵
- One of the followers of Muhammad refused to eat watermelon because, although he knew that the Prophet had done so, he had left no instructions on how to eat a watermelon.⁴⁶

The most important traditions addressed in the Hadith are those relating to what have come to be known as the “five pillars” of Islam (some say six pillars), which are as follows:

1. The *shahada* (profession of faith): the Muslim must affirm Allah is the one true god, and Muhammad is his prophet. Simply making this declaration as a true statement of one’s faith in Allah makes him a Muslim.
2. The *salaat* (daily prayers): the faithful pray five times each day. Congregational prayers in the mosque are led by an *imam* (meaning *leader* or *in front of*) who stands before those present and recites the verses and words of their prayers. They repeat after him.

3. The *zakat* (poor tax or alms): each Muslim is required to give a fixed percentage, usually 2.5%, of his or her income to help those truly in need.

4. The *sawn* (fasting): during the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims are to refrain from drinking alcoholic beverages, eating, and certain sensual pleasures during the daylight hours.

5. The *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca): all Muslims who are physically and financially able must make at least one journey to this holy site. Their tradition establishes that Abraham set the pattern for the pilgrimages to Mecca. A person who has completed this journey can bear the title of hajji.

There is a “holy black stone” in the Kaba, the cubical building in the center of the grand Mosque in Mecca (supposedly built by Abraham). Each pilgrim must march counterclockwise around the Kaba and then kiss the black stone. Most would contend there is no power received from doing this; it is done in order to follow the example of Muhammad, who kissed the stone when he conquered Mecca.

6. The *jihad* (holy struggle or war): this is considered by many to be the “sixth pillar” of Islam. Basically, the word *jihad* refers to struggling or surviving against sin as well as in battle. Muslims consider the “greater *jihad*” to be one’s struggle against sin and the “lesser *jihad*” to be the fight against—and the destruction of—the enemies of Allah.

The *Quran* gives very clear instructions relating to physical action that can be taken against those who do not embrace Islam. For example, in sura (chapter) 8:12 Allah states, “I will instill terror into the hearts of the infidels, strike off their heads, and stroke off from them every fingertip.” In 9:5, the Muslim faithful are instructed to “slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them. If they repent and take to prayer and render the alms levy, allow them to go their way. God is forgiving and merciful.” Although there is mercy available to those who repent and become Muslims, one may honorably kill those who do not.

The incentive to go to war is very clear in the promise of paradise and great reward to those who die by the sword.⁴⁷ The call to martyrdom is appealing: rewards are a hundred times greater for those who sacrificially die to destroy infidels or spread Islam.⁴⁸ Muslims believe, of all those who go to paradise, the martyr “will desire to return to this world and be killed ten times for the sake of the great honor that has been bestowed upon him.”⁴⁹

The *Sharia* refers to the entire legal system governing followers of Allah. Although many issues are addressed in the *Quran* and the Hadith, over time it became obvious they did not respond to each and every question men face. After Muhammad’s death, people could no longer go to him for instructions, correction, and illumination. When this reality struck Muslim leadership, they were pressed to develop additional means for controlling the behavior of the people. As a result of their efforts, two more means for settling doctrinal and ethical issues emerged. First, there is the *ijma*, the consensus or agreement of the community. When a problem arose within the community, the *umma* (the community, as defined above) would be called together to discuss it. If they could not come to a unified decision, they would go one step further and consult the *ulama* (religious leaders). The latter sought to determine how the prophet would have acted in a similar situation and thereby establish the *ijma* for that situation. Their decision was proclaimed as *ijma* for the whole community and passed on for the benefit of other Muslims.

A collection of all *ijma* makes up this third source of authority, the *Sharia*. These laws govern the day-to-day activities and lives of Muslims. According to Fazlur Rahman, former director of the Islamic Research Institute in Karachi, Pakistan,

“the word ‘shari’ or ‘shar’ originally means the path or the road leading to water, i.e., a way to the very source of life.’ In its religious usage, from the earliest period, it has meant, ‘the highway of good life,’ i.e., religious values, expressed functionally and in concrete terms to direct man’s life.”⁵⁰

The strict application of the Sharia brings about a harsh, legalistic governing style much like that of the Taliban, who dominated Afghanistan before the United States’ invasion. Many Islamic leaders desire to see the Sharia set up in every nation on the earth. This kind of rule calls for a rigid application of every ijma, with clearly defined, and often public, punishment for each violation. The following examples give us a glimpse of the means for correcting the wrongdoer:

- “Let there be the curse of Allah upon the thief who steals an egg and his hand is cut off, and steals a rope and his hand is cut off.”⁵¹
- “In case of a married male committing adultery with a married female, they shall receive one hundred lashes and be stoned to death.”⁵²
- A woman who committed fornication was “put in a ditch up to her chest and he [Muhammad] commanded people and they stoned her.”⁵³
- The punishment for drinking alcohol is “forty stripes with two lashes.”⁵⁴

All systems of law have loopholes and crimes that go uncovered. It appears this is true, even with the Sharia. Muslims can commit certain crimes without suffering the extreme punishment of the law, simply because they are not covered in the Sharia. These include the theft of articles such as books, birds, and bread. This leads people to conclude that many articles can be stolen with impunity, including such intriguing articles as fresh vegetables, fruit, firewood, meat, musical instruments, bricks, cement, marble, glass, mats, carpets from mosques, and loaded camels.⁵⁵

There exists also considerable regional variation in the “forbidden behaviors” of the Sharia. We should not neglect to point out the obvious here: the same challenge of diversity in interpretation and application is found in Islam as in most religions.

Despite the apparent inconsistencies, these sources of guidance are accepted by all Muslims to be holy and perfect. They understand it from the perspective that morality did not determine the prophet’s actions, but rather his actions determine and define morality. They are confident in their belief the acts of Muhammad were the acts of Allah.⁵⁶

With these sources serving as a moral compass, the Muslim enters each day knowing his one and only obligation is to be submissive to the will of Allah. Through this submission, he hopes to gain his place in paradise.

D. Salvation

The very mention of the word *salvation* in relation to man implies he is lost or in a fallen state as it relates to his spiritual condition. This idea is foreign to Muslims. Their theology does not acknowledge man has a depraved fallen nature. Rather than acknowledging man is rebellious, Muslims believe humanity is simply weak and not always able to discern right or wrong. Kateregga states the Islamic position: “Sin is not original, hereditary or inevitable. It is not from God. It is acquirable through choice, but also avoidable through knowledge and true guidance from God. Muslims believe that man is fundamentally a good and dignified creature.”⁵⁷

One realizes immediately, then, the Christian and Muslim views of salvation are radically different. The Islamic doctrine of salvation does not include an act of regeneration.

Salvation, from the perspective of a follower of Allah, is not based on faith in a savior. For the Muslim, salvation is achieved by *amal* (actions) and *iman* (faith). The Muslim's amal consists of practicing the five (or six) pillars (listed above), and his iman is embracing six foundational beliefs. He must wholeheartedly believe in:

1. Allah and His attributes.
2. The prophets and their virtues.
3. The angels.
4. The sacred books.
5. The Day of Resurrection.
6. *Qadar* (predestination): namely, that God decrees everything that happens in this world.

Failure to perform the proper acts will result in failure to enter paradise. Geisler and Saleeb sum it up well: "In a very real sense, Islam teaches that heaven can be earned by the good works of the believer as long as he is careful to fulfill his religious obligations and makes up for his shortcomings by performing other favorable duties."⁵⁸

One of the troubling factors in Islam is it offers no assurance of salvation. Islamic belief is explicit on this matter and leaves one certain that faith is not the basis for "salvation" (reaching paradise). For Muslims, it is sufficiently clear that works and deeds constitute justification in God's eyes.⁵⁹ Many Muslims do not see this as a matter for concern; they simply take the lack of assurance as a clarion call to strict obedience to the laws of Allah.

A person will not know until the judgment day if he merits paradise or not. The *Quran* uses balances or scales to illustrate the process of judgment. At the time of judgment, one's good works will be weighed against the evil he has done. If the good outweighs the bad, then he will be more or less assured of paradise. We must say "more or less assured" since it is possible—although not probable—that Allah will, by his own volition, decide to send a person to Hell even if his good deeds outweigh his bad. But Hell is certain for those whose balance is light, and Hell is a place of scorching fire.⁶⁰

E. Judgment Day

Judgment Day is coming. Islamic tradition indicates at least four signs that alert us the "final day" is near:

1. Religious knowledge will decrease, directly affected by the death of religious learned men.
2. Religious ignorance will prevail.
3. There will be open and illegal sexual activity.
4. Women will increase in number, and men will decrease so much so that there will be 50 women to look after one man.

The final destiny of man rests firmly in the hands of Allah; he and he alone determine one's eternal dwelling. There are two possible destinations, paradise and Hell.

Paradise is a place where all the desires of the heart will be fulfilled. Those who go there will “drink from a clear-flowing fountain, crystal-white, of taste delicious to those who drink...beside them will be chaste women, restraining their glances...they will recline on thrones arranged in ranks.”⁶¹ The bottom line is Allah will determine who can enjoy these “Gardens of Felicity,” where everything is perfect.

Hell, on the other hand, is described as a horrible place with boiling water, pus, screaming, fire, and other forms of suffering. The Hadith portrays images of boiling brains, molten lead being poured into the ears of the wicked, and hypocrites walking around with their intestines protruding outward as they tell others of their duplicity.⁶² This is a destiny to be avoided at all costs.

Some debate exists regarding whether hell is eternal in Islamic doctrine, though paradise assuredly is. What is clear is there are seven regions in Hell, each reserved for a certain class of sinners: infidels, unbelievers, polytheists, hypocrites, and “People of the Book” (Jews and Christians). Islamic doctrine guarantees the latter will not be permitted into paradise, and the hottest fires of hell are reserved for them.

Hadith 6668 tells that on the “Day of Judgment” many Muslims will be worthy of eternal fire because their sins are as “heavy as the mountains.” Nonetheless, in response to the prophet’s plea, Allah will grant many of these condemned Muslims paradise for eternity because Christians and Jews will be chosen to take their places in Hell.

Despite all the previous information given concerning the value of good works, it is essential to realize Allah is not bound by the obedience or disobedience of His creatures. The *Quran* very clearly states, “He forgives whom he pleases, and punishes whom he pleases.”⁶³

E. A Mediator

Islam teaches Muslims will seek for a mediator when they pass before Allah to be judged. They will first turn to the prophets of the Old Testament, but these holy men will refuse on the grounds of their inadequacy. The people will then turn toward Jesus, who will say that He is unworthy to do this and will point the people toward Muhammad. He alone is worthy to be the mediator because Allah has already forgiven his sins. It is Muhammad’s role to plead on behalf of all Muslims, even those who have already died and were cast into Hell.⁶⁴

Muslims do not deny the existence of Isa (Jesus) the Messiah. They are taught to love and respect Him as one of the great Prophets, like Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David. However, He is not on the same level as Muhammad who was the “Seal of the Prophets,” or the final prophet, and therefore, the most important.

Islamic teaching holds firm the thought man must pay for his own sins or have them forgiven by Allah. But in no case can one person take on the sins of another. This doctrine, along with others, confirms in Muslims’ minds it is inconceivable Christ could be the Son of God or the Savior of the world.

Conclusion

The preceding information has presented some of the foundational beliefs and practices of the Islamic faith. It is not presented as, nor intended to be perceived as, a definitive statement on these matters. Many areas were not covered in light of the limitations of a single article and the fact that many matters are still up for debate.

However, the facts and observations in this document should give the reader a better understanding of the fundamentals of the Islamic faith. As a result, readers should be better prepared to engage in meaningful and productive discussion with Muslims. We must always remember our objective is to win souls, not to win arguments for arguments' sake.

We can, with confidence, declare not all Muslims are terrorists. But, based on this study and the truths revealed in God's Word, we can also state they are not true believers in God or in His Son Jesus Christ. This makes clear, then, there are 1.2 billion souls calling out for us to share the Good News a Savior has come and He is for *all* people!

About the writer: Missionary Clint Morgan has been director of IM, Inc. (www.fwbgo.com) since 2011. He adapted this material from a presentation first delivered at the Free Will Baptist National Convnetnion in Kansas City, Missouri. (Be sure to read his suggestions for ministering and witnessing to Muslims on the following pages.)

¹The Holy Book of Islam may alternately be spelled *Koran*, *Qur'an*, or *Quran*.

²John L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.

³Tor Andrae, *Mohammad, the Man and His Faith*, trans. Theophil Minzil (NY: Harper and Row, 1955), 35.

⁴Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah (The Life of Muhammad)*, trans. A. Guillaume (NY: Oxford University Press, 1980), 106.

⁵Ibid., 81.

⁶Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 73.

⁷James Garlow, *A Christian's Response to Islam* (Tulsa: River Oak Publishing, 1984), 50.

⁸Esposito, 36.

⁹George W. Braswell, Jr., *Islam, Its Prophets, Peoples, Politics and Power* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 113.

¹⁰*The Koran*, trans. N. J. Dawood (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 2:142; 4:125; 9:29; 98:6.

¹¹Ibid., 3:157-58; 3:194-95; 4:95-96; 9:5.

¹²Garlow, 35.

¹³Braswell, 19.

¹⁴Anne-Marie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 239.

¹⁵See Esposito, 39.

¹⁶Paul Marshall, Roberta Green, and Lela Gilbert, *Islam at the Crossroads: Understanding its Beliefs, History, and Conflicts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 28.

¹⁷*The Koran*, 59:22-24; 64:3; 95:4.

¹⁸Geisler and Saleeb, 33.

¹⁹Ibid., 32.

²⁰The Koran, 112:1-2.

²¹Ibid., 4:116.

²²Chawkat Moucarray, *The Prophet & The Messiah, An Arab Christian's Perspective on Islam & Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 90.

²³*The Koran*, 2:97-98.

²⁴Some sources treat *jiin* as singular (plural *jiins*), some as plural; this paper treats the word as plural.

²⁵Geisler and Saleeb, 38, citing Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 122.

²⁶*The Koran*, 18:50.

²⁷Geisler and Saleeb, 39.

²⁸*The Koran*, 38:71-77.

²⁹Ibid., 7:18.

³⁰Ibid., 7:18-38.

³¹Ibid., 17:15.

- ³²Ram Swarup, *Understanding the Hadith, the Sacred Traditions of Islam* (NY: Prometheus, 2001), 3.
- ³³*Ibid.*, 7.
- ³⁴*The Koran*, 1.
- ³⁵Richard C. Martin, ed., *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press), 29.
- ³⁶Braswell, 52.
- ³⁷Badru D. Kateregga and David W. Shenk, *A Muslim and a Christian Dialogue* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald, 1997), 57.
- ³⁸Anis A. Shorosh, *Islam Revealed: A Christian Arab's View of Islam* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 21-22.
- ³⁹James P. Dretke, *A Christian Approach to Muslims: Reflections From West Africa* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), 47.
- ⁴⁰Swarup, 10.
- ⁴¹The Hadith, 5542, cited in Swarup, 155.
- ⁴²The Hadith, 5570-5576, cited in Swarup, 155.
- ⁴³The Hadith, 5577-5579, cited in Swarup, 155.
- ⁴⁴The Hadith, 5612, cited in Swarup, 157.
- ⁴⁵The Hadith, 462, cited in Swarup, 26.
- ⁴⁶Swarup, 4.
- ⁴⁷The Hadith, 4314, 4651, cited in Swarup, 131.
- ⁴⁸The Hadith, 4645, cited in Swarup, 132.
- ⁴⁹The Hadith, 4635, cited in Swarup, 132.
- ⁵⁰Dretke, 48.
- ⁵¹The Hadith, 4185, cited in Swarup, 98.
- ⁵²The Hadith, 4191, cited in Swarup, 99.
- ⁵³The Hadith, 4206, cited in Swarup, 100.
- ⁵⁴The Hadith, 4226, cited in Swarup, 102.
- ⁵⁵Swarup, 104.
- ⁵⁶Swarup, 11.
- ⁵⁷Kateregga and Schenk, 141.
- ⁵⁸Geisler and Saleeb, 127.
- ⁵⁹Isma'il R. Al Faruqi, *Islam* (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1984), 5, cited in Geisler and Saleeb, 128.
- ⁶⁰*The Koran*, 23:102-103; 7:8,9; 101:6-8.
- ⁶¹*Ibid.*, 37:48; 44:54; 52:20; 55:72; 56:22.
- ⁶²Braswell, 57.
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- ⁶⁴Moucarry, 103.



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SUGGESTIONS FOR MINISTERING AND WITNESSING **AMONG MUSLIMS**

In Acts 26:16, the Apostle Paul described his calling to the ministry on the road to Damascus. He heard a voice speaking to him and giving the following instructions: “Rise and stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a **minister** and a **witness** both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee.”

The two words I have emphasized formulate a good summary of the Christian’s role in the world. We are called to **minister** to the needs of others and to **bear witness** to the Gospel as something we have experienced. These two objectives should guide us as we seek effective means to take the Gospel to the five billion lost souls in our world, among whom are 1.2 billion following the Islamic faith.

There are 41 countries in the world where much of the population follows Islam. The needs are enormous in many of these areas, and believers should diligently seek to minister to those needs in order to earn the privilege of witnessing to the unbelievers.

A. Ministering to the Muslim Community

- 1. Discover the needs.** Sometimes Christians’ good deeds go unnoticed and do not produce desired results because they are directed more toward the needs of the doer than the needs of the receiver. It is crucial we discover precisely what the people in a given Muslim community really need.
- 2. Prepare a strategy to meet the needs.** Be brave and brazen in exploring avenues of service for meeting the identified needs. Get as many members of your church as possible involved in the tasks. Be sure to “count the cost” of involvement and be prepared to meet that cost before launching out.
- 3. Develop relationships that demonstrate ministering is motivated by compassion** for the person and not just the desire to get someone to change religions.

- 4. Introduce them to members of your umma (community).** Within the Muslim context, the concept of umma is of utmost significance. If we ever reach Muslims for Christ, it will be because they know we really care about them and, after conversion, they will be an part of a umma—in this case a Christian umma.
- 5. Reach out to the whole family.** Because Muslims are generally very family-oriented, we should seek to minister to all members of the family.
- 6. Carry out the plan.** It is seriously detrimental to the credibility of Christianity and the cause of Christ to make commitments and not fulfill them.

B. Witnessing in the Muslim Context

As in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9, ministering is like planting and witnessing is the watering, but irrefutably God is the one who gives the increase. What are some of principles that should guide us as we witness within the Muslim context?

- 1. Pray—before, during, and after!**
- 2. Be led by the Holy Spirit.** This is indispensable if you are going to be effective.
- 3. You must be convinced to be convincing.** If you are going to witness to a Muslim, you must be thoroughly convinced: 1) you are saved; 2) the Bible is God's Word; 3) salvation is only through faith in Christ; and 4) the Holy Spirit is giving you the opportunity and leading you to witness to a particular person or persons.
- 4. Be prepared but avoid programmed approaches to witnessing.** No formulas guarantee success in sharing the Gospel with a Muslim friend. However, you should have a functional grasp of the fundamentals of the faith and practices of both Christianity and Islam to present your faith in a clear, concise, and convincing manner.
- 5. Be real.** In light of 1 Peter 2:12, do not let your life be the primary cause for a Muslim to reject Christ. It is absolutely essential to live in such a manner that observers—Muslims in this case—have their spiritual curiosity stirred and ask about “the faith that is within you.”
- 6. Be confrontational but avoid conflict.** In all honesty, confrontation cannot be avoided because we have opposing views on key issues. If confrontation is conducted with compassion, it will generally calm the spirit and keep one focused on the ultimate goal of effectively communicating the Good News. You will certainly have to be as “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matthew. 10:16). In the opening stages of ministering and witnessing, it is highly advisable to avoid bringing up controversial subjects such as the deity of Christ, jihad (especially against infidels, hypocrites, Christians, etc.), Muhammad as the final prophet, and Islam's treatment of women.
- 7. Learn to contextualize but avoid compromise.** Be willing and equipped to conform your methods to the Muslim context without ever compromising the message. Sometimes, this means being willing to sit patiently and sip tea for hours, and talking about a great variety of subjects without making references to issues of a spiritual nature.
- 8. Call for a decision.** A time will come when you sense the leadership of the Holy Spirit to ask your new friend if he or she is prepared to embrace the truths you have shared. Do so without fear.
- 9. Be willing to pay the ultimate price.** You may not be called upon to lay down your life for Christ, but **witnessing will cost you something.** However, with the increased dangers arising from radical Islamic militants, the ultimate threat becomes more and more a possibility. We must deal honestly with this issue if we are to actively engage in taking the Gospel to Muslims, even if they live just across the street!