

Muslim Worldview Traditions Core Knowledge Essay



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Introduction

Islam is a world religion followed by over a billion people worldwide. A follower of Islam is called a Muslim, meaning someone who submits to the will of Allah (God). The word Islam itself means submission and peace. The final prophet of Islam is Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), who Muslims believe received the last revelation from Allah. This revelation was collected in the holy book, the Qur'an.

Islam is not just a set of beliefs but a whole way of life, shaping daily practices, community life, and global identity through the concept of the ummah, the worldwide Muslim community.

History and origins

Islam began in 7th century Arabia, when Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) received revelations from Allah through the Angel Jibril. The first revelation took place in a cave on Mount Hira near Makkah. Over 23 years, these revelations formed the Qur'an. Muhammad's leadership (pbuh) created the first Muslim community in Medina, known as the first madrassah (learning community). After his death, questions of succession led to divisions: Sunni Muslims followed elected leaders (Caliphs), while Shi'a Muslims believed leadership should remain within the Prophet's family, through the Imams.

Core beliefs

Muslims believe in Tawhid (the oneness of Allah). Allah is unique, without partners or equals. Allah cannot be represented pictorially as it would not encompass all that he is. Muslims are helped to understand Allah by the 99 names of Allah found in the Qur'an. These describe attributes, such as Al-Rahim (the merciful) and Al-Gafur (the most forgiving).

For Sunni Muslims, the six articles of faith include belief in angels, holy books (especially the Qur'an), prophets, the Day of Judgement (Akhirah), and Allah's divine plan (Al-Qadr). Shi'a Muslims highlight the five roots of Usul ad-Din, which include Tawhid, prophecy, the Day of Judgement, resurrection, and the authority of the twelve Imams.

The Shahadah, or declaration of faith, states: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger." This is the first of the five pillars of Islam—the core practices that shape a Muslim's life:

- Shahadah (faith)
- Salah (prayer)
- Zakah (charity)
- Sawm (fasting during Ramadan)
- Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah)

The Qur'an, Sunnah and Hadith

The word Qur'an means 'reading' or 'recitation' in Arabic. It is divided into chapters called Surahs which are divided into verses called ayat. The first revelation came on Laylat-ul-Qadr, the night of Power, one of the last ten days of Ramadan in the year 610 CE. It gives guidance on everyday life, social and moral issues, and ethical and spiritual issues. Many Muslims read it on a daily basis, and many children learn Arabic so they can recite the Qur'an. For Muslims, the Qur'an is considered to be the word of Allah.

Sunnah, or way of the prophet, shows how Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) lived his life. They are considered a model of human behaviour. Also significant are Hadith, which are sayings of the Prophet that were remembered by family and friends.

Practices and rituals

Daily life for Muslims includes acts of ibadah (worship), which can be formal or everyday actions done with the intention of pleasing Allah. Salah (prayer) is performed five times a day for Sunni Muslims, with movements such as rukhu, sajdah, and takbir symbolising humility before Allah. Shi'a Muslims perform the same prayers but sometimes over three prayer times rather than five. Before prayer, Muslims perform wudu, a ritual washing. Worship often happens in a mosque, led by an imam, with features such as the mihrab (niche showing the direction of Makkah) found within the qiblah wall, minbar (pulpit), and sometimes a minaret (tower for the call to prayer, the adhan). The muezzin recites the call to prayer, the Adhan, so it is heard by worshippers.

During Ramadan, adult Muslims fast (sawm) from dawn to sunset, breaking the fast with iftar meals. There are other times of fasting for some Muslims, but fasting in the month of Ramadan has particular spiritual significance. It is seen positively as a time for spiritual growth and to understand the hardship of others.

Once a year, Muslims are obligated to give Zakah, 2.5% of their wealth. It is donated to local communities who are in need, to support the mosque, and to those in need in other countries.

Every Muslim who is able to is expected to perform the Hajj once in their lifetime, which takes place in the final month of the Islamic year, Dhul Hijjah. It takes place over ten days and includes rituals such as tawaf (circling the Ka'bah), drinking Zam-Zam water, and stoning the Jamarats. Simple clothes called ihram are worn by pilgrims; for men this is two white pieces of cloth, women can wear normal loose modest clothing. Once they have completed the Hajj, they are known as Hajji (men) or Hajjah (women).

Diversity within the tradition

The two largest groups in Islam are known as Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. Sunni Muslims emphasise the Qur'an, Hadith, and elected leadership after the Prophet. Shi'a Muslims focus on the spiritual authority of the Imams, who they believe were chosen by Allah. A third tradition, Sufism, is a mystical path seeking closeness to Allah through practices like meditation, poetry, and music. Despite differences, Muslims worldwide share a deep sense of belonging to the ummah.

Key figures and places

- Prophet Muhammad (pbuh): The last prophet, known as the “seal of the prophets.” His life, known as the Sunnah, is a model for Muslims.
- Other prophets: For example, Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus), and others are respected in Islam.
- Imam: A leader in prayer for Sunnis; for Shi'a, Imams are divinely appointed leaders.
- Makkah: Home of the Ka'bah and focus of daily prayer.
- Medina: The city of the Prophet, home to his mosque and tomb.

Festivals and special days

The two most significant Islamic festivals are:

- Eid-ul-Fitr: Celebrated at the end of Ramadan with communal prayers, gifts, and meals. A time to ask for forgiveness and to thank Allah for his blessings.
- Eid-ul-Adha: Commemorates Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son for Allah, marked by prayers and sharing food with the poor.

Fridays are also special, with communal (Jummah) prayers at the mosque.

For Shi'a Muslims Ashura, a day of mourning for the death Husayn Ibn Ali is a significant day of commemoration. Imam Hussein was the grandson of the Prophet and the third Shi'a Imam.

Contemporary expressions

Islam today is lived in diverse ways around the world. Muslims may express their faith through wearing a hijab, eating halal food, or attending a local madrassah, where they learn Arabic to recite the Qur'an. In Britain, there are over 1,600 mosques, not only for prayer, but as centres for education and community support. The 2021 census of England and Wales found that Muslims made up 6.5% of the population (approximately 3.5 million people). The 2022 census of Scotland found Muslims made up 2.2% of the population.

Muslims strive to follow Shariah law, which means 'straight path', guiding everyday life. In modern contexts, Muslims also engage with ethical issues such as the environment, justice, and peace, drawing on their role as khalifah (stewards of the earth).

Key takeaways

- Islam is centred on submission to Allah and peace.
- The Qur'an and Sunnah guide Muslim life.
- The Five Pillars are central practices for Muslims.
- Islam is diverse, with Sunni, Shi'a, and Sufi traditions.
- Festivals like Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha celebrate community, gratitude, and faith.
- Muslims today live their faith in diverse ways, while holding to the unity of the ummah.