

INTRODUCTION TO ISLĀM

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

What is Islām?

Islām is not a new religion, rather it is the continuation of the same Truth that God revealed to all of His prophets starting from Adam and culminating with Muḥammad (peace be upon all of them), to the entire mankind.

For over one-fifth of the world's population, Islām is not merely a religion or a set of devotional practices, instead it is a complete way of life that governs their day to day affairs – everything from social interaction to daily economic transactions.

What does Islām mean?

The 'Arabic word *Islām* simply means 'complete submission (to God)', and is derived from the 'Arabic word meaning *peace*.

In Islāmic culture, the word *peace* plays a central role. Not only is one of the 99 names of God, *as-Salām* meaning *Peace*, moreover Muslims greet one another using this same word by saying *As-Salām* 'Alaikum or *Peace be upon you* and the five daily prayers end with the same sentence.

Most other religions or beliefs are named after their founder or Prophet however the religion of Islām is not named after its 'founder' since Muḥammad, the final Prophet of God was no more than the teacher and propagator of God's message.

Thus, the term ‘Muḥammedanism’ is a misnomer and an insult to Muslims since it suggests that Muslims worship Muḥammad rather than God.

The word ‘Allāh’ is the Arabic and proper name for God, which is used by Arab Muslims and Christians alike.

Who are the Muslims?

A Muslim is one who submits to the Almighty and is in peace with oneself, others, and the environment as a whole. In the religious context, it means complete submission to the will of God.

Over 1.5 billion people from a vast range of races, cultures, and nationalities - from Australia to Africa - are united by their faith in Islām.

The world’s largest Muslim community is in Indonesia, substantial parts of Asia and most of the people of Africa are Muslims, while significant numbers can be found in the former Soviet Union, China, North and South America, and Europe. Surprisingly, only 18% of all the Muslims live in the Arab world.

The Muslims follow a religion of peace, mercy, and compassion towards all human beings regardless of race, creed or religion and the inhumane acts that have come to be associated with the faith perpetrated by certain segments of the Muslim community have nothing to do with the pure Islāmic teachings.

What do Muslims Believe?

One God: Accepting the absolute unity of Allāh (God) is the most important article of faith for a Muslim (one who follows Islām). Monotheism is a theme that is frequently emphasized in the Holy Qurʾān - the scripture that Muslims believe was revealed by the Lord to Prophet Muḥammad - and the famous sentence that states: *There is no creature or deity worthy of worship except Allāh* is the foundation stone of Islām.

Muslims believe in the same God that the previous monotheistic religions believed in: the God of Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

Some of the attributes of God that are mentioned in the Qurʾān which serve to provide a better understanding of our relationship with the Almighty are: *The Merciful, The Generous, The Just, The Forgiving, The Master, The Wise, The All-Knowing, The All-Hearing, The All-Seeing, The All-Powerful, The Peaceful*, among many others.

The Qurʾān introduces Allāh in the following way:

“Say: He, Allāh is One, Allāh the Eternal. He begets not, nor was He begotten, and there is nothing that is equal to Him.” (al-Qurʾān, Chapter 112, Verses 1-4)

In another chapter of the Qurʾān, God describes himself as such:

“He is Allāh besides Whom there is no god; the Knower of the unseen and the seen; He is the Beneficent, the Merciful. He is Allāh, besides Whom there is no god; the King, the Holy, the Giver of Peace, the Granter of Security, Guardian over all, the Mighty, the Supreme, the Possessor of every greatness.” (al-Qurʾān, Chapter 49, Verse 22-23)

Prophethood: Muslims believe that out of His loving care for humanity, Allāh sent Prophets to guide mankind. This golden chain of divinely appointed individuals began with Adam, who was the first Prophet, as well as the first human being; and ended with Muḥammad, the last Messenger.

Out of the 124,000 Prophets sent to mankind, the names of twenty-five have been mentioned in the Qurʾān. Amongst these major Prophets that the Qurʾān mentions are: *Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Joseph, Jonah, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad* (peace be upon all of them) along with many others.

Islām instructs its adherents to respect all Prophets in the light of the Qurʾānic verse:

“Surely We have revealed to you (Muḥammad), as We revealed to Noah, and the Prophets after him. And We revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes, and to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon, and We gave the Psalms to David.” (al-Qurʾān Chapter 4, Verse 163)

As a part and parcel of the beliefs of the Muslims, they must believe and accept the Prophethood of all of the Messengers that God had sent to mankind and must not make distinction between any of them. This is best summed up in the below two verses of the Qurʾān which state:

“Say (O’ Muslims): ‘We believe in Allāh and what He has revealed to us and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and their descendants, and what was revealed to Moses, Jesus, and the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction among them and to Allāh we have submitted ourselves.’” (al-Qurʾān Chapter 2, Verse 136)

Also, we are commanded in the Qurʾān as follows:

“The Messengers and the believers have faith in what was revealed to them from their Lord. Every one of them believes in God, His Angels, His Books, and His Messengers, saying, “We find no difference among the Messengers of God.” They say: “We hear Allāh’s commands and obey them. Lord, we need Your forgiveness and to You we shall return.” (al-Qur’ān Chapter 2, Verse 285)

Muslims believe in and accept the previous scriptures that God revealed such as the Psalms, Torah and Bible; however, with the coming of the Qur’ān, all previous scriptures were abrogated.

Day of Judgement: According to the teachings of Islām, every single human being will be resurrected on a day that is only known to Allāh.

On that day, everyone will be called to account for his or her actions in this world. For the good deeds that one performed, he/she will be rewarded and for the evil committed, one will be punished.

The belief in the Day of Judgement forces a Muslim to constantly act in a manner that would be pleasing to his Creator and beneficial to fellow human beings.

Referring to the Day of Judgement, the Holy Qur’ān states:

“On that day, mankind shall come forth so that they may be shown their actions. So whoever has done an atom’s weight of good shall see it, and whoever has done an atom’s weight of evil shall see it.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 99, Verse 6-8)

Justice: A Muslim also believes in the comprehensive justice of Allāh. The Creator and Maintainer of the entire universe does not oppress His creations in the least bit.

A Muslim believes that whatever troubles or pains inflict him are due to his own actions and in no way can the blame be placed on God.

It is mentioned in the Qurʾān that:

“Surely Allāh does not do any injustice to mankind, but mankind are unjust to themselves.” (al-Qurʾān, Chapter 10, Verse 44)

Allāh also mentions:

“Surely Allāh does not do injustice to the weight of an atom, and if it is a good deed, then He multiplies it and gives from Himself a great reward.” (al-Qurʾān, Chapter 4, Verse 40)

Leadership: The fifth and probably most important and eternal principle of Islām is the doctrine of Leadership (*Imāmah*), which is also called Guardianship. In Islām, the leadership of the society is a divine responsibility that is not left to just anyone, rather Allāh makes known to the people those righteous and worthy people that He has chosen to perform this important task.

During the time of Prophet Muḥammad, the leader and guardian of the Islāmic society was of course the Prophet himself. He received the laws and commands from Allāh and communicated them to the people. However, with the passing away of Prophet Muḥammad, this authority could not come to a standstill.

People in all times are in need of a divine vicegerent, thus the Almighty Allāh had commanded Prophet Muḥammad to appoint an infallible successor or *Imām* to lead and guide the Muslim community. This chain of temporal and spiritual guides

started upon the death of the Prophet in the year 633 A.D. with the appointment of Imām ‘Alī, and continues to the present time with al-Mahdi.

The twelfth of these guides, al-Mahdī, although in occultation, continues to serve as the leader of the Muslim community and will one day return along with Prophet Jesus to establish the rule and government of Allāh over the entire Earth.

How does One become a Muslim?

Simply by saying the phrase, *“I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allāh, and I bear witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh”*, one becomes a Muslim.

By this declaration, the believer announces his or her faith in all of Allāh’s Messengers, and their respective scriptures. There are no other ceremonies or rituals involved in becoming a Muslim.

Do Islām, Christianity and Judaism have Different Origins?

All three of these monotheistic faiths trace their roots back to the Patriarch and Prophet Abraham.

The successive chain of Prophets, starting from Abraham, continuing on to Moses, Jesus and culminating with Muḥammad form a part of the blessed tree of Prophethood.

Islām teaches us that out of the 124,000 Prophets that were sent, only 313 of these brought new scriptures to humanity.

As each successive Messenger was sent, the previous Messenger's scripture was negated. For example, that which Moses brought to humanity was superseded by the teachings of Jesus. Similarly, with the coming of Muḥammad, the teachings of Jesus and all those Messengers that came before him were made ineffective and since he is the seal of the Prophets - no other Prophet will come after him - his book, the Qur'ān, is the final word of Allāh until the end of time.

What is the Ka'bah?

The Ka'bah which is located in the city of Mecca in the present-day Saudi Arabia, is a place of worship that Allāh commanded Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael to build over four thousand years ago.

The building was constructed of stone on what Muslims believe was the original site of a sanctuary established by Prophet Ādam - the first house of worship, as we are told in the Holy Qur'ān:

“Verily the first house made for mankind is the one at Mecca, Blessed and a Guidance for all the worlds. In it are clear signs; the station place (of prayer) of Abraham; and whoever enters it is secure.” (al-Qur'ān, Chapter 3, Verse 96)

Abraham established this settlement which today is the city of Makkah and built the Ka'bah towards which all Muslims face when they pray.

Allāh commanded Abraham to summon all of humanity to visit this place, and even when pilgrims go there today they say, *“At Your service, O' Lord!”* which is in response to Abraham's call.

In addition to the fact that all Muslims must face the Ka'bah when they offer their prayers, they must also turn towards this Sacred House during other times as well.

The Qur'ān and Supplications are normally read facing the Ka'bah. As a sign of respect, when Muslims go to the bathroom, they are extra careful not to face or have their back to this sacred place. In order for the meat of an animal to be made permissible for consumption, it must be slaughtered facing this Holy Mosque in Makkah.

When a Muslim is nearing death, it is incumbent upon those around him to position his body such that his feet are pointed in this direction; and finally, when a Muslim dies and is buried, the body is placed in the grave with the deceased facing this holy Sanctuary.

Who was Prophet Muḥammad?

Muḥammad was born in the city of Makkah in the year 570 A.D. Since his father died before his birth and his mother shortly afterwards, his uncle from the respected tribe of Quraysh brought him up.

As he grew older, he became known for his truthfulness, generosity and sincerity such that he was sought after for his ability to arbitrate in disputes. The historians describe him as calm and meditative.

Muḥammad was of a deeply religious nature and since birth had long detested the decadence of Arab society. It became his habit to meditate from time to time in the Cave of Hira near the summit of Jabal al-Nūr, the *'Mountain of Light'* close to Makkah.

At the age of 40, while engaged in a meditative retreat, Muḥammad received his first revelation from Allāh through the Angel Gabriel – the same Angel that brought revelation to Ādam, Noah, Jesus, Abraham and other Prophets.

The first words that were taught to the Prophet by this respected Angel are recorded in the 96th verse of the Qur’ān and are the following:

“Read! In the Name of your Lord who created. Created man from a leech like clot. Read! And your Lord is the Greatest. The One who taught by the pen.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 95, Verse 1-5)

This revelation, which continued for twenty-three years is known as the Qur’ān. In a verse of the Qur’ān, Allāh tells us of one of the reasons why He sent Muḥammad:

“It is He who has sent to the illiterate, a Messenger from among their own people to recite to them His revelations and purify them. He teaches the Book to them, and gives them wisdom. Verily before this, they had been in plain error.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 63, Verse 3)

As soon as he began to spread the words from Gabriel and to preach the Message which God had revealed to him, he and a small group of his followers suffered bitter persecution, which grew so fierce that in the year 622 A.D., God gave them the command to emigrate.

This event, the *Hijra* or migration, in which they left Makkah for the city of Madina (some 130 kilometers to the north), marks the beginning of the Islāmic calendar.

Before the Prophet died at the age of 63, the greater part of Arabia was Muslim, and within a century of his death, Islām had spread to Spain in the West and as far East as China.

What is the Qur'ān?

The Qur'ān is a record of the exact words revealed by Allāh through the Angel Gabriel to Prophet Muḥammad. It was memorized by Muḥammad and then dictated to his close companions and written down by the scribes, who cross-checked it during his lifetime.

Not one word of the 114 chapters (*Surahs*) in it have been changed or tampered with over the past 1400 years since its revelation.

Thus, the Qur'ān in every detailed way, is the unique and miraculous text which was revealed to Prophet Muḥammad over 14 centuries ago.

The Qur'ān - the last revealed word of Allāh - is the prime source for every Muslim's faith and practice. It deals with all the subjects that concern us as human beings such as wisdom, doctrine, worship, etiquette, self-building, law and other subjects, however the basic theme is the relationship between God and His creations.

At the same time, it provides guidelines for a just society, proper human conduct and an equitable economic system.

Topics such as economics, social law and order, adoption, adultery, justice, charity, marriage, family life, divorce, laws of inheritance and other subjects are covered.

For example, regarding charity it has been mentioned:

“O’ you who believe! Do not make your charity worthless by reproach and injury, like him who spends his property to be seen by men and does not believe in Allāh and the last day; so his parable is as the parable of a smooth rock with earth upon it, then a heavy rain falls upon it, so it leaves it bare; they shall not be able to gain anything of what they have earned; and Allāh does not guide the unbelieving people.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 2, Verse 264)

Regarding divorce, which although is permitted in Islām, is also one of the most detested acts is mentioned thus in the Qur’ān:

“O’ Prophet (and believers), if you want to divorce your wives, you should divorce them at a time after which they can start their waiting period...Have fear of Allāh, your Lord ... When their waiting period has ended, keep them or separate from them in goodness. Let two just people witness the divorce and let them bear witness for the sake of Allāh. Thus does Allāh command those who have faith in Him and the Day of Judgement.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 65, Verse 1-2)

Are there any Other Sources of Legislation?

Yes, the *Sunnah* - the practice and example of the Prophet Muḥammad and his twelve immediate successors is the second authority for the Muslims.

A *Ḥadīth* is a reliably transmitted report of something that the Prophet (or his twelve immediate successors) did, said, or approved of.

Some examples of the Prophet's sayings are:

1. *“No one is safe from sins unless he controls his/her tongue.”*
2. *“The listener of backbiting is the same as the backbiter.”*
3. *“Allāh has fixed the livelihood of the destitute in the wealth of the rich. Consequently, whenever a destitute remains hungry it is because some rich people have denied them (their right).”*
4. *“The pleasure of Allāh lies in the pleasure of one's parents and His wrath lies in their wrath.”*
5. *“Over indulgence of food causes various kinds of diseases.”*
6. *“Do not become obstinate since such a person will meet his destruction.”*

What are Some of the Tenants of Islām?

Prayers (Salāt): Five times every day, Muslims from all parts of the world face towards the Ka‘bah located in the city of Makkah and perform their prayers.

The first prayer is in the morning before sunrise, the second at noontime, followed by the afternoon prayer. Just after sunset is the evening prayer, concluded by the night prayer. Thus a Muslim begins the day with prayer, and ends it in the same way.

The prayer consists of standing, kneeling, sitting and prostrating to Allāh while reciting verses from the Divine Book which is deemed as conversation with Allāh. The prayers are preceded with ablutions, in which the face and arms are washed and the head and feet are wiped - which serves as a spiritual purification.

Fasting (Sawm): Ramaḍhān is the ninth month of the Islāmic lunar calendar in which Muslims must fast.

From dawn until just after sunset certain things must be abstained from such as eating, drinking, sexual relations, smoking to name just a few in an effort to strengthen the body and soul.

Those who are too young, travelling, ill, nursing, or pregnant are exempt from fasting and are required to fast at another time in the year, unless medically unable to do so.

Throughout the year and particularly in this sacred month, Muslims are expected to share the material blessings that God has showered upon them by remembering and feeding the less fortunate members of society.

At the end of Ramaḍhān, Muslims celebrate the day of ʿEid in which, in addition to giving money or food in charity to the poor, special prayers are attended to, cards and gifts are exchanged, and visits are made to family, friends and the less fortunate ones of the community.

Pilgrimage (Hajj): At least once in a lifetime, every Muslim who is financially able to, must visit the city of Makkah to perform the pilgrimage, known as the Ḥajj.

While in Ḥajj, the sacrifice of Prophet Abraham (the father of Monotheism) as well as of that Hagar and Ishmael are recalled.

This ritual is a unique experience in which over two million people - regardless of their color, status, origin or gender - gather together (from all over the world) in the same place,

wearing the same simple white clothing and perform the exact same duties to the One and only Allāh.

Charitable Tax (Khums & Zakāh): Muslims who earn and save, must allocate a portion of their finances to be spent in the way of God.

The main ‘tax’ in Islām is known as Khums in which a Muslim, after taking out all legitimate expenses for the maintenance of himself and his family, disburses 20% of his savings to the religious authority.

This money is used to build and maintain libraries, schools, hospitals, publish and distribute books, help needy people throughout the world and other projects, where ever they may be.

The Zakāh, which is another form of ‘tax’ in Islām has various subdivisions, however, the primary application is aimed at farmers and those who tend livestock in their prescribed quantities and can be found in the detailed books of Islāmic law.

Islām strives to reduce and eventually eliminate the gap between the rich and poor so that all may live with dignity.

These principles form the framework of a Muslim's life.

How does Islām Tolerate the Beliefs of Others?

The Qur’ān says:

“Say: O’ Followers of the Book (Jews and Christians)! Come to an equitable proposition between us and you that we shall not serve any but Allāh and that we shall not associate anything with Him and that some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allāh; but if they turn back then say, Bear witness that we are Muslims.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 3, Verse 64)

The Qur’ān also tells us:

“Allāh does not forbid you in regards to those who do not fight you nor drive you out of your homes that you deal kindly and justly with them; for Allāh loves those who are just.” (Al-Qur’ān, Chapter 60, Verse 8)

It is one function of Islāmic law to protect the privileged status of minorities, and this is why non-Muslim places of worship have been able to exist all over the Islāmic world.

In addition, Islāmic law also permits non-Muslim minorities to set-up their own courts, which implement family laws drawn up by the minorities themselves from their own scriptures.

In countries such as Egypt and Iran, one also sees the governments of these Muslim nations having members of parliament from the non-Islamic communities representing their own religious beliefs and practices.

What do Muslims Think about Jesus?

Muslims respect and revere the Prophet Jesus and are awaiting his Second Coming.

They consider him to be one of the greatest Messengers of Allāh to mankind along side with *Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Muḥammad* (peace be upon all of them).

The Qur'ān confirms his miraculous birth by his mother - *Virgin Mary*. His mother is also referred to as one of the purest women in all creation and is given the appellation of one of the four women of Paradise.

The Qur'ān describes this annunciation as follows:

“Behold, the Angel said (to Mary), ‘Allāh has chosen you, and purified you and chosen you above the women of all nations. O’ Mary, Allāh gives you the good news of a Word from Him, whose name shall be the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, honoured in this world and in the Hereafter, and one of those brought near to Allāh. He shall speak to people from the cradle and in maturity, and shall be of the righteous.’ She (Mary) said, ‘O’ my Lord, how shall I have a son when no man has touched me?’ He said, ‘Even so, Allāh creates what He wills. When He decrees a thing, He says to it, ‘Be!’ and it is.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 3, Verses 42-47)

Jesus was born miraculously through the same power that brought Adam into being with neither a father nor a mother:

“Truly the likeness of Jesus with Allāh is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust and then said to him, ‘Be!’ And he was.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 3, Verse 59)

During his Prophetic mission, Jesus performed many miracles by the power of God. The Qur'ān tells us that he said

“I have come to you with a sign from your Lord - I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it and it becomes

a bird by God's permission. And I heal the blind and the lepers, and I raise the dead by God's permission.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 3, Verse 49)

Neither Muḥammad nor Jesus came to change the basic doctrine of the belief in one God brought by the earlier Prophets, rather, they came to confirm and renew it. In the Qur’ān, Jesus is reported as saying that he came:

“...to attest the law which was before me. And to make lawful to you part of what was forbidden to you; I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, so fear Allāh and obey me.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 3, Verse 50)

Some sayings from Prophet Jesus as recorded in the Islamic books:

1. *“My two hands are my servant, and my feet is my horse. The earth is my bed, a stone is my pillow. My winter garment is where the sun rises up, my lantern at night is the moon, my meal is hunger, my covering is fear of Allāh. My garment is of wool, my fruits and vegetables are what grows for the wild animals and beasts out of the earth. I pass the night into the morning while I have nothing; and at the same time, there is no one more rich than I.”*

2. *Jesus was asked, “How do you walk on water?” He replied, “With faith and certainty.” They said, “We have believed the same way you have believed and reached to the certainty as you have.” He said, “Walk on water.” But when they walked on the water, they started to drown. Jesus said, “What happened to you?” They replied, “We feared the waves.” Jesus said, “Fear the Creator of the waves.” Then he rescued them. He then put his hands on the earth, took a handful of soil and when he opened his fist, they saw that he had gold in one hand and pebbles in the other. Jesus asked them, “Which one is*

sweeter to you?” They said, “Gold.” Jesus replied, “But to me, they are both equal.”

3. One day Jesus and his Disciples were passing by the carcass of a dog when one of the companions said, “What a bad smell!” Jesus said, “Why didn't you say how white are its teeth!”

4. Jesus was one asked, “Who taught you ethics?” He replied, “No one. I saw the ugliness of ignorance and stayed away from it.”

5. One day, Jesus took a stone as a pillow to enjoy the pleasure of sleep. At that moment, Satan passed by him and said, “O' Jesus! Was it not you that said you did not like any worldly stuff, but this stone you are using is a worldly article!?” Jesus rose up, took the stone and threw it at Satan saying, “Let this stone and the world be yours.”

Muslim Women and the Islamic Family Structure

Islām sees a woman - whether single or married - as an individual in herself with the right to own and dispose of her property and earnings as she pleases. At the time of marriage, the groom gives a marriage dowry to the bride for her own personal use, and she keeps her family maiden name rather than changing it to her husband's last name.

Both men and women are expected to dress in a way that is modest and dignified. The Muslim woman is required by the Qur'ān to cover her entire body with the exception of her face and hands while in the presence of men whom she is not related to (or permitted to marry). This dress code is often referred to as the *Islamic Hijāb*.

The various styles and types of women's dress found in some Muslim countries are often the expression of their local customs and are permitted as long as the minimum requirements are met.

In the Qur'ān, Allāh addresses both the male and the female believers in regards to their conduct and dress by saying:

“Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts, that is purer for them; surely Allāh is aware of what they do. And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and do not display their beauty except what appears thereof, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their beauty except to their husbands...” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 24, Verse 30-31)

Another aspect that Islām places great importance on is marriage and the family structure.

The final Messenger of Allāh, Prophet Muḥammad said:

“He who takes a woman (as a wife) should certainly respect her, because the wife of anyone of you is a means of your pleasure, so the one who marries a woman should not spoil or disgrace her (by disregarding her rights).”

In Islām, the bond of marriage which takes place only between a man and a woman, is counted as one of the phenomenon of Allāh, as the Qur'ān states:

“And amongst His signs is that He has created for you spouses from amongst yourselves so that you may live in tranquility with them; and He has created love and mercy between you. Verily, in this are signs for people who reflect.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 30, Verse 21)

Thus, the Muslim family is based on the concept of love and mercy – both between the husband and wife and the children.

In Islām, it is the responsibility of the husband to work and earn so as to take care of his wife and children. All of the needs and necessities of the family must be provided by the man of the house.

Although the woman is permitted to work outside of the house, Islām sees her primary role as the nurturer and first teacher of her children. It is through the mother that the children are brought up and taught the morals and values of righteous living. However, if a woman decides to work, then whatever money she earns is entirely hers and she is not required to contribute any of it to the maintenance of the family.

How should Muslims Treat their Parents?

In the Islāmic world, there are no old people's homes. The duty of caring for one's parents in this most difficult time of their lives is considered as an honour, a blessing, an opportunity to earn a great reward, and a way to increase one's spiritual growth. Allāh asks that we not only pray for our parents, but that we act with limitless compassion towards them and remember that when we were helpless children, they preferred us to themselves.

Mothers are particularly honoured. The prophet taught that: *“Paradise lies at the feet of mothers”* and when they reach old age, parents are treated mercifully, with kindness and selflessness.

This code of conduct towards one's parents, whether they be Muslim or non-Muslim, can be summed up in the following verse of the Qur'ān:

“Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him and that you be kind to your parents. If either or both of them reach old age with you, do not (even) say ‘ugh’ (do not even so much as make a face or sigh) to them or rebuke them, but speak to them in terms of honour and kindness. Treat them with humility and say: My Lord! Have mercy on them, for they did care for me when I was little.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 17, Verse 23-24)

How do Muslims view Death?

Like the other divinely revealed religions, Muslims believe that the present life is only a trial and preparation for the next realm of existence. Islam does not see death as an annihilation, rather, it is a journey from this temporary world into the next world that has no end.

In many narrations, the death and journey into the next world is compared to a child in the womb of his or her mother.

When a Muslim dies, he or she is physically washed, usually by a close family member, wrapped in three pieces of clean white cloth, and buried with a simple prayer performed; preferably the same day.

Muslims consider this as one of the final services that can be offered for their relatives, and an opportunity to remember their own brief existence on this earth.

What does Islām say about War?

Like other faiths, Islām permits fighting as a means of self-defense or in defense of religion, or on the part of those who have been forcibly expelled from their homes.

Treatises and dissertation have been written detailing the rules of engagement in war in which scholars have laid down strict rules of combat, which include prohibitions against harming civilians including women and children, and against destroying crops, trees, livestock and polluting of drinking water.

As Muslims see it, injustice would be triumphant in the world if righteous individuals were not willing to risk their lives for a valid cause. The Qur'ān says:

“Fight in the cause of God against those who fight you, but do not transgress the limits. Without doubt, Allāh does not love the transgressors.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 2, Verse 190)

We also read:

“Allāh does not forbid you in regards to those who do not fight you nor drive you out of your homes that you deal kindly and justly with them; for Allāh loves those who are just. Allāh only forbids you respecting those who made war upon you on account of your religion and drove you forth from your homes and backed up others in your expulsion, that you make friends with them, and whoever makes friends with them, these are the unjust.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 60, Verse 8-9)

War therefore, is the last resort and is subject to the rigorous conditions laid down by the sacred law.

The term *jihād* - which is commonly used in the western media, although always misunderstood and mistranslated as ‘holy war’ - literally means to ‘struggle’.

In the Arabic and Islamic terminology, there is actually no word that means ‘holy war’ as this concept is alien to Islām – a religion founded on peace and justice.

The term ‘holy war’ was actually coined by Christian forces over eight hundred years ago as the *Webster’s Revised Dictionary* of 1998 tells us that a **holy war** is *a crusade; an expedition carried on by Christians against the Saracens in the Holy Land, in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries for the possession of the holy places.*

As for the meaning of *jihād*, Muslims believe that there are two kinds of *jihād* or struggle - the inner struggle against one’s own soul to combat his or her lust and desires for the sake of attaining the inner peace (usually referred to as the *greater jihād*) and the *jihād* on the battle front which is constantly referred to as the *minor jihād* in the Islāmic sources.

In a famous narration from the Prophet Muḥammad (blessings of Allāh be upon him and his family), after the Muslims returned from a battle, the Prophet welcomed them home and said to them: “*Welcome back home from the minor struggle (jihād) to face the major struggle (jihād).*” The companions who were surprised asked him what he meant by this statement. The Prophet replied that their defensive battle against those on the war front was the minor struggle, while their struggle to keep away from sin and vice is the major struggle that remains to be fought.

Regarding Food

Although much simpler than the dietary laws followed by the Jews and the early Christians, the code which Muslims observe forbids the consumption of any part of the pig (flesh, fat, etc..), and any kind of intoxicant - whether it be solid such as drugs, or liquid such wine and beer.

The Prophet of Islam said that “*Your body has rights over you*”, and the consumption of wholesome food and the leading of a healthy lifestyle are seen as religious obligations.

Muslims are only permitted to eat meat that is termed ḥalāl which means that it has been slaughtered according to the Islāmic law.

Regarding food, Allāh instructs the following to the Prophet:

“Say: I do not find in that which has been revealed to me anything forbidden for an eater to eat, except that it be what has died of its’ self, or blood poured forth, or the flesh of swine - for that surely is unclean...” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 6, Verse 145)

With the exception of intoxicants, swine, some wild animals, products from animals not slaughtered in the Islmic manner, certain marine animals such as crab and lobster and fish that without scales, most other foods are permitted in Islām.

How does Islām Guarantee Human Rights?

Freedom of conscience is laid down by the Qur’an itself:

“There is no compulsion in religion.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 2, Verse 256)

The life and property of all citizens in an Islāmīc state are considered sacred, whether or not they are Muslims.

Human rights are extended to human beings of all colours and races. Racism is not tolerated in Islām and the Qur’ān speaks of human equality in the following terms:

“O’ Mankind! We created you from a single soul, male and female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may come to know one another. Truly, the most honoured of you in Allāh’s sight is the greatest of you in piety. Allāh is All-Knowing, All-Aware.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 49, Verse 13)

Allāh also tells us that:

“And of His signs is the creation of the Heavens and the Earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours; most surely there are signs in this for the learned.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 30, Verse 22)

Not only is race and colour not a criterion for superiority, gender too does not play any role in judging human beings.

In Islām, both the man and woman are considered equal in the sight of God and both are given the same rewards and punishment for their good deeds or sins committed.

Allāh tells us in the Qur’ān that:

“Whoever, be it a male or a female, does good deeds and he or she is a believer, then they will enter into paradise.” (al-Qur’ān, Chapter 4, Verse 124)

Therefore, no difference exists in the degree or level of a woman's humanity or honour in Islām.

Islām in North America

Islām and Muslims are fairly new to the North American Continent. History shows that Muslims first came to this part of the world during the slave trade from Africa some 450 years ago while the first 'communities' of Muslims immigrated from the Middle East and other parts of world during the mid to late 1800s.

Recent estimates place the number of Muslims in Canada at approximately 650,000 followers and close to 10,000,000 in the United States of America.

Statistics also show that Islām is currently the fastest growing religion in the West, particularly amongst women. ●

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and Muslims, feel free to contact:*



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