

# Islam

Islam, a major world religion, is customarily defined in non-Islamic sources as the religion of those who follow the Prophet MUHAMMAD. The prophet, who lived in Arabia in the early 7th century, initiated a religious movement that was carried by the ARABS throughout the Middle East. Today, Islam has adherents not only in the Middle East, where it is the dominant religion in all countries (Arab and non-Arab) except Israel, but also in other parts of Asia, Africa and, to a certain extent, in Europe and in the United States. Adherents of Islam are called Muslims (sometimes spelled Moslems).

## The Name and Its Meaning

The Arabic word al-islam means the act of committing oneself unreservedly to God, and a Muslim is a person who makes this commitment. Widely used translations such as "resignation," "surrender" and "submission" fail to do justice to the positive aspects of the total commitment for which al-islam stands--a commitment in faith, obedience, and trust to the one and only God (ALLAH). All of these elements are implied in the name of this religion, which is characteristically described in the KORAN (Arabic, Qur'an; the sacred book of Islam) as "the religion of Abraham." In the Koran, ABRAHAM is the patriarch who turned away from idolatry, who "came to his Lord with an undivided heart" (37:84), who responded to God in total obedience when challenged to sacrifice his son (37:102-105), and who served God uncompromisingly. For Muslims, therefore, the proper name of their religion expresses the Koranic insistence that no one but God is to be worshiped. Hence, many Muslims, while recognizing the significance of the Prophet Muhammad, have objected to the terms Muhammadanism (or Mohammedanism) and Muhammadans (or Mohammedans)--designations used widely in the West until recently--since they detect in them the suggestion of a worship of Muhammad parallel to the worship of Jesus Christ by Christians.

## Numbers

Estimates of the world population of Muslims range from a low of 750 million to a high of 1.2 billion; 950 million is a widely used medium. Notwithstanding the significant variations in these estimates, many observers agree that the world population of Muslims is increasing by approximately 25 million per year. Thus, a 250-million increase is anticipated for the decade 1990-2000. This significant expansion, due primarily but not entirely to the general population growth in Asia and Africa, is gradually reducing the numerical difference between Christians (the largest religious community) and Muslims, whose combined totals make up almost 50 percent of the world's population.

## Origin

While many Muslims vehemently oppose the language that the Prophet Muhammad is the "founder" of Islam--an expression they interpret as an implicit denial of God's initiative and involvement in the history of Islam's origins--none would challenge that Islam dates back to the lifetime (570-632) of the Prophet and the years in which he received the divine revelations recorded in the Koran. At the same time, however, most of them would stress that it is only in a sense that Islam dates back to the 7th century, since they regard their religion not as a 7th-century innovation, but as the restoration of the original religion of Abraham. They would also stress that Islam is a timeless religion, not just because of the "eternal truth" that it proclaims but also because it is "every person's religion," the natural religion in which every person is born.

## Islam's Comprehensive Character

When applied to Islam, the word religion has a far more comprehensive meaning than it commonly has in the West. Islam encompasses personal faith and piety, the creed and worship of the community of believers, a way of life, a code of ethics, a culture, a system of laws, an understanding of the function of the state--in

short, guidelines and rules for life in all its aspects and dimensions. While many Muslims see the SHARIA (the "way," denoting the sacred law governing the life of individuals as well as the structures of society) as fixed and immutable, others make a clear distinction between the unchangeable message of the Koran and the mutable laws and regulations for Muslim life and conduct. Throughout history, practices and opinions have differed with regard to the exact way in which Islam determines life in all its aspects, but the basic notion of Islam's comprehensive character is so intrinsic to Muslim thought and feeling that neither the past history of the Muslim world nor its present situation can be understood without taking this characteristic into consideration.

According to Muslim jurists, the sharia is derived from four sources--the Koran; the sunna ("customs") of the Prophet, which are embodied in the hadith ("tradition"); qiyas ("analogy"; the application of a decision of the past, or the principles on which it was based, to new questions); and ijma ("consensus"; the consensus of the community of believers, who, according to a saying of the Prophet, would not agree on any error).

## **HISTORY AND SPREAD OF ISLAM**

### **The Prophet**

Muhammad was born in 570 in MECCA, a trading center in western Arabia. About 610 he received the first of a series of revelations that convinced him that he had been chosen as God's messenger. He began to preach the message entrusted to him-- that there is but one God, to whom all humankind must commit themselves. The polytheistic Meccans resented Muhammad's attacks on their gods and finally he emigrated with a few followers to MEDINA. This migration, which is called the Hegira (Hijrah), took place in 622; Muslims adopted the beginning of that year as the first year of their lunar calendar (Anno Hegirae, or AH).

At Medina Muhammad won acceptance as a religious and military leader. Within a few years he had established control of the surrounding region, and in 630 he finally conquered Mecca. There, the KAABA, a shrine that had for some time housed the idols of the pagan Meccans, was rededicated to the worship of Allah, and it became the object of pilgrimage for all Muslims. By the time of his death in 632, Muhammad had won the allegiance of most of the Arab tribespeople to Islam. He had laid the foundation for a community (umma) ruled by the laws of God.

The Koran records that Muhammad was the Seal of the Prophets, the last of a line of God's messengers that began with Adam and included Abraham, Noah, Moses, and Jesus. He left for the future guidance of the community the words of God revealed to him and recorded in the Koran, and the sunna, the collective name for his opinions and decisions as recorded in the tradition literature (hadith).

### **A Rapidly Growing Empire, 632-750**

After the death of Muhammad, a successor (khalifa, or caliph; see IMAM) was chosen to rule in his place. The first caliph, the Prophet's father-in-law, ABU BAKR (r. 632-34), initiated an expansionist movement that was carried out most successfully by the next two caliphs, UMAR I (r. 634-44) and Uthman (r. 644- 56). By 656 the CALIPHATE included the whole Arabian peninsula, Palestine and Syria, Egypt and Libya, Mesopotamia, and substantial parts of Armenia and Persia. Following the assassination of Uthman, the disagreements between those upholding the rights of the fourth caliph, ALI (r. 656-61), the Prophet's son-in-law, and their opponents led to a division in the Muslim community between the SHIITES and the SUNNITES that still exists today. When the governor of Syria, MUAWIYA I, came to power after the murder of Ali, the Shiites refused to recognize him and his successors.

Muawiya inaugurated an almost 90-year rule by the Umayyads (661 -750), who made Damascus their capital. A second wave of expansion followed. After they conquered (670) Tunisia, Muslim troops reached the northwestern point of North Africa in 710. In 711 they crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, rapidly overran Spain, and penetrated well into France until they were turned back near Poitiers in 732. On the northern

frontier Constantinople was besieged more than once (though without success), and in the east the Indus River was reached; the Islamic empire now bordered China and India, with some settlements in the Punjab.

### **Rival Dynasties and Competing Capitals (Baghdad, Cordoba, Cairo), 750-1258**

In 750, Umayyad rule in Damascus was ended by the **ABBASIDS**, who moved the caliphate's capital to Baghdad. The succeeding period was marked more by an expansion of horizons of thought than by geographical expansion. In the fields of literature, the sciences, and philosophy, contributions by such Muslim scholars as **al-KINDI**, **al-FARABI**, and **Ibn Sina (AVICENNA)** far surpassed European accomplishments of that time.

Politically, the power of the Abbasids was challenged by a number of rival dynasties. These included an Umayyad dynasty in Cordoba, Spain (756-1031); the **FATIMIDS**, a dynasty connected with the **ISMAILIS** (a Shiite sect), who established (909) themselves in Tunisia and later (969-1171) ruled Egypt; the **ALMORAVIDS** and the **ALMOHADS**, Muslim Berber dynasties that successively ruled North Africa and Spain from the mid-11th to the mid-13th century; the **SELJUKS**, a Muslim Turkish group that seized Baghdad in 1055 and whose defeat of the Byzantines in 1071 led indirectly to the Christian **CRUSADES** (1096-1254) against the Islamic world; and the **AYYUBIDS**, who displaced the Fatimids in Egypt and played an important role in the later years of the Crusades.

The Abbasids were finally overthrown (1258) in Baghdad by the **MONGOLS**, although a family member escaped to Egypt, where he was recognized as caliph. While the brotherhood of faith remained a reality, the political unity of the Muslim world was definitely broken.

### **Two Great Islamic Powers: The Ottomans and the Moguls, 15th-18th Century**

The Ottoman Turkish dynasty, founded by **OSMAN I** (c.1300), became a major world power in the 15th century, and continued to play a very significant role throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. The **BYZANTINE EMPIRE**, with which Muslim armies had been at war since the early days of Islam, came to an end in 1453 when Ottoman sultan **MEHMED II** conquered Constantinople. That city then became the capital of the **OTTOMAN EMPIRE**.

In the first half of the 16th century, Ottoman power, already firmly established over all Anatolia and in most of the Balkans, gained control over Syria, Egypt (the sultans assumed the title caliph after deposing the last Abbasid in Cairo), and the rest of North Africa. It also expanded significantly northwestward into Europe, besieging Vienna in 1529. The defeat of the Ottoman navy in the Battle of **LEPANTO** in 1571 was not, as many in Europe hoped, the beginning of a rapid disintegration of the Ottoman Empire; more than one hundred years later, in 1683, Ottoman troops once again besieged Vienna. The decline of the empire becomes more visible from the late 17th century onward, but it survived through World War I. Turkey became a republic under **Kemal ATATURK** in 1923, and the caliphate was abolished in 1924.

The **MOGULS** were a Muslim dynasty of Turko-Mongol origin who conquered northern India in 1526. The Mogul Empire reached the climax of its power in the period from the late 16th century until the beginning of the 18th century. Under the emperors **AKBAR**, **JAHANGIR**, **SHAH JAHAN**, and **AURANGZEB**, Mogul rule was extended over most of the subcontinent, and Islamic culture (with a strong Persian flavor) was firmly implanted in certain areas. The splendor of the Moguls is reflected in a special way in their architecture. In the 18th century Mogul power began to decline. It survived, at least in name, however, until 1858, when the last sultan was dethroned by the British.

### **Two Examples of the Coming of Islam in Frontier Areas: Indonesia and West Africa**

While there may have been sporadic contacts from the 10th century onward with Muslim merchants, it was only in the 13th century that Islam clearly established itself in Sumatra, where small Muslim states formed

on the northeast coast. Islam spread to Java in the 16th century, and then expanded, generally in a peaceful manner, from the coastal areas inward to all parts of the Indonesian archipelago. By the 19th century it had reached to the northeast and extended into the Philippines. Today there are 140 million Muslims in Indonesia, constituting about 85 percent of the population.

Islam penetrated West Africa in three main phases. The first was that of contacts with Arab and Berber caravan traders, from the 10th century onward. Then followed a period of gradual Islamization of some rulers' courts, among them that of the famous MANSÁ MUSA (r. 1312-27) in Mali. Finally, in the 16th century the Sufi orders (brotherhoods of mystics; see SUFISM), especially the Qadiriyya, Tijaniyya, and Muridiyya, as well as individual saints and scholars, began to play an important role. The 19th century witnessed more than one JIHAD (holy war) for the purification of Islam from pagan influences, while later in the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century, Muslims formed a significant element in the growing resistance to colonial powers. In the post-colonial period Islam plays an important role in Nigeria, Senegal, Guinea, Mali, and Niger, while there are smaller Muslim communities in the other states in West Africa.

### Islam in Modern History

Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, followed three years later by the expulsion of the French troops by the combined British-Ottoman forces, is often seen as the beginning of the modern period in the history of Islam. The coming to power of MUHAMMAD ALI (r. 1805-49) and the modernization of Egypt under his leadership was the beginning of a long struggle throughout the Muslim world to reestablish independence from the colonial powers and for Muslim countries to assume their place as autonomous states in the modern world. Resistance to foreign domination and an awareness of the need to restore the Muslim community to its proper place in world history are integral parts of the pan-Islamic efforts of JAMAL AL-DIN AL-AFGHANI as well as the nationalist movements of the 20th century.

The political, social, and economic developments in the various countries with Muslim majorities show significant differences. For example, Turkey and many of the Arab countries have become secular republics, whereas Saudi Arabia is virtually an absolute monarchy, ruled under Muslim law. Iran was ruled from 1925 to 1979 by the Pahlavi dynasty, which stressed secularization and westernization. Growing resistance from the Muslim community, which is overwhelmingly Shiite, culminated in the forced departure of the shah and the establishment of an Islamic republic under the leadership of the Ayatollah KHOMEINI. Pakistan too is an Islamic republic in which the constitution provides for the enforcement of Muslim law by the state. However, despite differences, the great majority of Muslims hold fast to the idea of the comprehensive character of Islam as well as to its basic theological doctrines.

### ISLAMIC DOCTRINES

Islamic doctrines are commonly discussed and taught widely-- often by means of a catechism, with questions and answers-- under six headings: God, angels, Scriptures, messengers, the Last Day, and predestination. The Muslims' notion of God (Allah) is, in a sense, interrelated with all of the following points and will be referred to below. Some of the angels (all of whom are servants of God and subject to him) play a particularly important role in the daily life of many Muslims: the guardian angels; the recording angels (those who write down a person's deeds, for which he or she will have to account on Judgment Day); the angel of death; and the angels who question a person in the tomb. One of those mentioned by name in the Koran is Jibril (see GABRIEL, angel), who functioned in a special way as a transmitter of God's revelation to the Prophet. The importance of the Muslim recognition of Scriptures other than the Koran and of messengers other than Muhammad will be referred to below.

The promise and threat of the Last Day, which occupy an important place in the Koran, continue to play a major role in Muslim thought and piety. On the Last Day, of which only God knows the hour, every soul will stand alone and will have to account for its deeds. In the theological discussions of the Last Day and, in

general, of the concept of God, a significant issue has been whether the descriptions in the Koran (of HEAVEN and HELL, the vision of God, God being seated on the throne, the hands of God, and so on) should be interpreted literally or allegorically. The majority view accepts the principle of literal interpretation (God is seated on the throne, he has hands), but adds the warning and qualification that humans cannot state and should not ask how this is the case, since God is incomparable (bila kayf, "without how"; bila tashbih, "beyond comparison").

The last of the six articles, PREDESTINATION, is also a theocentric issue. Because the divine initiative is all- decisive in bringing humans to faith ("had God not guided us, we had surely never been guided," 7:43), many concluded that God is not only responsible for guiding some, but also for not guiding others and allowing them to go astray or even leading them astray. In the debate of later theologians on these questions, the antipredestinarians were concerned less with upholding the notion of human freedom and, therefore, of human dignity, than with defending the honor of God. According to these thinkers--the Qadarites and the Mutazilites, of the 8th to 10th centuries--the Koranic message of the justice of God "who does not wrong people" ("they wrong themselves," 43:76) excluded the notion of a God who would punish human beings for evil deeds and unbelief for which they themselves were not really responsible. The major concern of their opponents was to maintain, against any such reasoning, the doctrine of the sovereign freedom of God, upon whom no limits can be placed, not even the limit of "being bound to do what is best for his creatures." Two important theologians of the 10th century, al- Ashari (d. 935) and al-Maturidi (d. 944), formulated answers that would mark for the centuries to come the traditional (Sunni) position on these points. Although one's acts are willed and created by God, one has to appropriate them to make them one's own. A recognition of a degree of human responsibility is combined with the notion of God as the sole creator, the One and Only.

Around this concept of the unity of God another debate arose on the essence and attributes of God; it focused on the question whether the Koran--God's speech--was created or uncreated. Those who held that the Koran was created believed that the notion of an uncreated Koran implied another eternal reality alongside God, who alone is eternal and does not share his eternity with anyone or anything else. Their opponents felt that the notion of a created Koran detracted from its character as God's own speech. The Sunni position that emerged from these discussions was that the Koran as written down or recited is created, but that it is a manifestation of the eternal "inner speech" of God, which precedes any articulation in sounds and letters.

None of the theological issues referred to above can be understood fully unless the sociopolitical context of these doctrinal debates is taken into consideration. The interrelation between theological positions and political events is particularly clear in the first issues that arose in the history of Islam. Reference has already been made to the division between the Shiites and the Sunnites. The Shiites were those who maintained that only "members of the family" (Hashimites, or, in the more restricted sense, descendants of the Prophet via his daughter, FATIMA and her husband Ali) had a right to the caliphate. Another group, the Kharijites (literally "those who seceded"), broke away from Ali (who was murdered by one of their members) and from the Umayyads. They developed the doctrine that confession, or faith, alone did not make a person a believer and that anyone committing grave sins was an unbeliever destined to hell. They applied this argument to the leaders of the community, holding that caliphs who were grave sinners could not claim the allegiance of the faithful. While the mainstream of Muslims accepted the principle that faith and works must go together, they rejected the Kharijite ideal of establishing here on Earth a pure community of believers, insisting that the ultimate decision on whether a person is a believer or an unbeliever must be left to God. Suspension of the answer until Judgment Day enabled them to recognize anyone accepting the "five pillars" (see below) as a member of the community of believers, and to recognize those Muslims who had political authority over them, even if they objected to some of their practices.

## **ISLAMIC WORSHIP, PRACTICES, AND DUTIES**

The extent to which faith and works go together is evident from the traditional listing of the basic duties of any Muslim, the "five pillars" of Islam: shahada, the profession of faith in God and the apostleship of

Muhammad; salat, the ritual prayer, performed five times a day facing Mecca; zakat, almsgiving; sawm (fasting), abstaining from food and drink during the daylight hours of the month of RAMADAN; and hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, incumbent on every believer who is financially and physically able to undertake it. The witness to God stands here side by side with the concern for the poor, reflected in almsgiving. The personal involvement of the individual believer, expressed most clearly in the formulation of the shahada, "I witness there is no God but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God," is combined with a deep awareness of the strength that lies in the fellowship of faith and the community of all believers, significant dimensions of both the ritual prayer and the pilgrimage.

Muslim worship and devotion are not limited to the precisely prescribed words and gestures of the salat, but find expression also in a wealth of personal prayers, in the gathering of the congregation in the central mosque on Fridays, and in the celebration of the two main festivals: Id al-Fitr, the festival of the breaking of the fast at the end of Ramadan; and Id al- Adha, the festival of the sacrifice (in memory of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son). The latter, observed on the 10th day of the month of pilgrimage, is celebrated not only by the participants in the pilgrimage, but also simultaneously by those who stay in their own locations. The interpretations of jihad (literally, "striving" in the way of God), sometimes added as an additional duty, vary from sacred war to striving to fulfill the ethical norms and principles expounded in the Koran.

## ISLAMIC VIEWS OF OTHER RELIGIONS

Islam is definitely an inclusivistic religion in the sense that it recognizes God's sending of messengers to all peoples and his granting of "Scripture and Prophethood" to Abraham and his descendants, the latter resulting in the awareness of a very special link between Muslims, Jews, and Christians as all Abraham's children. Throughout history there have been believers who discerned the Truth of God and responded to him in the right manner, committing themselves to him alone. Of these "Muslims before Muhammad," the Koran mentions, among others, Abraham and his sons, Solomon and the queen of Sheba, and the disciples of Jesus. This inclusiveness is also expressed in the Muslim recognition of earlier Scriptures, namely, the Taurat (Torah) given to Moses, the Zabur (Psalms) of David, and the Injil (Gospel) of Jesus.

This recognition of other prophets besides Muhammad and other Scriptures besides the Koran is coupled with the firm conviction that the perfection of religion and the completion of God's favor to humanity have been realized in the sending down of the Koran, the sending of Muhammad as "the Seal of the Prophets," and the establishing of Islam. People's reactions and response to this final criterion of truth became, therefore, the evidence of their faith or unbelief. Those who, on the basis of what they had previously received from God, recognize the message of the Koran as the ultimate Truth show themselves thereby as true believers, while those who reject it prove themselves to be unbelievers, no matter by what name they call themselves.

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