



FACT SHEET - ISLAM

What is Islam?

It is a monotheistic religion practiced by Muslims. The word Islam means, "submission" and in religious context submission to the will of God.

What is Allah?

The word Allah is made up of *Al* meaning 'the', and *lah* meaning 'god'. Together they mean The God, or simply 'God'. It refers to the same God as Moses, Jesus, David, Abraham and Adam. Muslims believe that there is only one God, and he is not born of anyone, and has not given birth to anyone. He has no equals or partners.

Who are the Muslims?

Muslims are those who believe in Islam. The Muslim population of the world is around one billion; which means one out of five persons in the world is a Muslim. Most Muslims live east of Karachi (Pakistan). 30% of Muslims live in the Indian subcontinent, 20% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 17% in Southeast Asia, 18% in the Arab world, 10% in Central Asia and China. Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan comprise 10% of the non-Arab Middle East. Although there are Muslim minorities in almost every country, including Latin America and Australia, they are most numerous in Central Asia, India, and Central Africa. There are 5 million Muslims living in the United States.

What do Muslims believe?

Muslims believe in One God; in the Angels created by Him; in the prophets through whom His revelations were brought to mankind; in the Day of Judgment; in God's complete authority over human destiny and in life after death. Muslims believe in a chain of prophets starting with Adam and including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elias, Jonah, John the Baptist, and Jesus. But God's final message to man, a reconfirmation of the eternal message and a summing up of all that has gone before was revealed to the Prophet Mohammad through Arch Angel Gabriel.

How does someone become a Muslim?

Simply by saying "there is no god, but God, and Mohammad is the Messenger of God." In Arabic: *La Illa-ha Il-Allah, Wa Mohammad-an Rasool-e Allah*

Who is Mohammad?

Mohammad was born in Makkah in the year 570 AD. Since his father died before his birth, and his

mother shortly afterwards, he was raised by his uncle from the respected tribe of Quraysh. As he grew up, he became known for his truthfulness, generosity and sincerity, so that he sought after for his ability to arbitrate in disputes. The historians describe him as calm and meditative. He is not worshiped, but regarded as a man who was chosen to be a prophet.

How did Mohammad become a prophet?

At the age of 40, while engaged in a meditative retreat, Mohammad received his first revelation from God through the Angel Gabriel. This revelation, which continued for 23 years, is known as the *Quran*. As soon as he began to recite the words, he and his small group of followers suffered bitter persecution, which grew so fierce that in the year 622 AD they migrated from the City of Makkah to Madinah, some 260 miles north, thus marking the Muslim calendar. Seven years later, Mohammad returned to Makkah, and converted the city to Islam. Before his death at the age of 63, most of Arabia converted to Islam.

What is the Quran?

The Quran is a record of the exact words revealed by God through the Angel Gabriel to Prophet Mohammad. It was memorized by Mohammad and then dictated to his Companions, and written down by scribes. The Quran is comprised of 114 *Surah* or Chapters. The word Quran means "recital".

Examples from the Quran:

"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 honored of you in God's sight is the greatest of you impiety." (49:13)

"Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him, and be kind to parents. If either or both of them reach old age with you, do not say 'uff' to them or chide them, but speak to them in terms of honor and kindness. Treat them with humility, and say, 'My Lord! Have mercy on them, for they did care for me when I was little.'" (17:23-4)

Are there other sacred sources?

Yes, the *sunna*, or traditions, which are a collection of *hadith* relating what Prophet Mohammad said, did, or approved of. A *hadith* is one story or report about a particular behavior or action. The collection of *hadith* make up the *sunna*. Islamic law or *Sharia* is derived from *Sunna* and the *Quran*.

Examples from Sunna:

"God has no mercy on one who has no mercy for others."

"He who eats his fill while his neighbor goes without food is not a believer."

"A man walking along a path felt very thirsty. Reaching a well he descended into it, drank his fill and came up. Then he saw a dog with its tongue hanging out, trying to lick up mud to quench its thirst. The man saw that the dog was feeling the same thirst as he had felt so he went down into the well again and filled his shoe with water and gave the dog a drink. God forgave his sins for his action."

Prophet Mohammad was asked: "are we rewarded for kindness toward animals?" He replied, "there is a reward for kindness to every living thing."

When asked about charity, he said "even meeting your others with a cheerful face is charity".

Asked about treatment of women, he said "The most perfect in faith amongst Muslims is he who is best in manner and kindest to his wife."

Branches of Islam

Although there are different branches, sects and schools of thought in Islam, basically they fall mostly under *Sunni* & *Shia* branches of Islam. The difference mostly is over the issue of succession of Prophet Mohammad, who died in 632 AD. Sunnis believe that after Prophet Mohammad, his successor, or Khalifa (Caliph), was Abu Bakr, followed by Omar, Uthman and Ali.

Shias claim that Prophet Mohammad, before his death, already designated Ali as his successor. Therefore, Shias believe that after the Prophet, Ali was the Muslim leader or *Imam*, followed by his two sons Hassan and Hussain and the rest of their family, the line ending at the 12th Imam (known as *al-Mehdi*) who is believed to be in hiding until the day of judgment when he will reveal himself.

Schools of thought or sects

In Sunni branch of Islam there are four schools of thought, created by the interpretation of Quran by four *Ulama* or Islamic scholars. They schools of thought or sects are, *Hannafi*, *Hanbali*, *Maleki*, and *Shaafi*, where Hannafi is the most liberal and Hanbali is the most conservative school of thought. *Wahabism* is derived from Hanbali school of thought, but is even more fundamentalist and to the letter. It is a new thought that came out of Arabia in the last century, while other schools have been around for over 1200 years.

Shia branch of Islam is a little different. The two main sects are the *Ismaelies* and Twelvers or *Athna Ashari*, which is the majority of Shias.

Shiasm instructs its followers to consult religious scholars for questions to their daily lives. While interpretation of Quran for new laws is severely restricted in Sunnism, Shias religious scholars can interpret the Quran for life's new questions. The major difference between Ismaelies and Athna Ashari is over succession. While majority of Shias, who are Athna Ashari, believe in the occultation of the 12th Imam, Ismaelies still have Imams, in the person of Agha Khan, who guides the Ismaeli community.

Sufism

Basically it is the mystic Islam. While mainstream Islam follows the text of Islam, Sufis follow the spirit of Islam. Sufi is derived from the word *suf* or cotton and refers to Sufis who wore a long cotton garb to clothe themselves. Sufis renounced material possessions, save for a garb, a stick for walking or warding off wild animals, a sack of water and a bowl to eat in. They walk the deserts and meditated. When Sufi brotherhoods or *Tariqa* was formed, a tradition of meditating, chanting and recitation know as *zekker* came about. The most well-known Sufi is Mawlana Jalaludin Rumi or simply Rumi of the whirling dervishes brotherhood. In Islam being a hermit is forbidden, as Muslims are encouraged to join and positive contribute to society.

Sciences

Muslims made great strides in the sciences, such as philosophy, mathematics, geography, astronomy, medicine, architecture, arts, etc. During the European Dark Ages, Muslims world was making great technological, ideological and theoretical advancements such as introducing the concept of zero, inventing algebra, modifying navigation system, creating the first hospitals, saving, translating and greatly expanding on Greek knowledge and philosophy. Words like algebra, alcohol, Gibraltar, harem, paradise, etc. entered the English language. The Roman numerals of I, V, X with no sign representing zero was replaced Arabic numerals such as 1, 2, 0, which greatly aided in algebra, and later in calculus.

Literature

The Muslim world has a very rich tradition in literature. The oral traditions passed on history and myth in verses from generation to generation until they were written down. Poetry is a popular entertainment. Some works such as *Thousand and One Nights*, which is a collection of stories (much like Greek Tragedies) contains stories of Sinbad the Sailor, and Alladin & the Magic Lamp, told by Queen Shaharзад to her husband King Shaharyar.