

5 minute guide

to

ISLAM

Des McCabe

Contents

Introduction	3
History	3
Growth	3
Traditions / Beliefs	4
Qur'anic teachings	4
The Five Obligations	4
Worship	5
Rituals	5
Holy Days and Festivals	6
Timeline	7

Introduction

There are over a thousand million Muslims (people who follow Islam) in the world today. The word “Islam” literally means “submission” (to God). This monotheistic religion was founded by the Prophet Muhammad over 1300 years ago.

There are roughly 2.5-3 million Muslims living in Britain today, which makes it the 2nd most popular religion in the UK.

History

In 610 C.E., on a night now referred to by Muslims as the “Night of Power and Excellence”, an Arabian called Muhammad (a Meccan business man) heard a voice commanding him to “recite”. This voice was the Angel Gabriel who communicated the word of God (Allah) to the Prophet Muhammad over a period of 22 years. This recital from Allah was recorded and is the Muslim Holy Scripture called the Qur’an. Muhammad is considered by Muslims to be God’s human instrument (in receiving and reporting his revelations) and the model or ideal for all believers (some refer to it as the “living Qur’an”). Muhammad’s wife Khadija is the first Muslim convert.

Muhammad’s new religious message proved threatening to the existing polytheistic, Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian religions present in Arabia at the time. Muhammad preached social justice for the poor and most vulnerable of society (women, children, and orphans). He summoned the people of Arabia to strive and struggle (jihad) to improve and change their communities – to live a life based on religious belief and not on tribal loyalties.

He stayed in Mecca until 622 C.E. when, faced with more and more pressure and threats, Muhammad and 200 of his followers moved to the town of Medina. This move is referred to by Muslims as the **hijra**. This move or **hijra** is seen as significant and marks the first year of the Muslim calendar and the creation of the first Islamic community. The move to Medina marked a time when the Muslim community’s fortunes improved.

Growth

As the Muslim society grew and developed, the conflict with Mecca continued with several battles. The conclusive battle proved to be the “Battle of the Ditch” (627 C.E.) which resulted in a power shift in favour of Muhammad. In 628 C.E., a truce was made between the warring factions, resulting in the right to make pilgrimages being upheld. Ultimately, this led to Muhammad establishing a very strong leadership in Medina and his followers conquered Mecca and consolidated Muslim rule over the rest of Arabia through both diplomatic and military means.

The Prophet Muhammad died in Medina in 632 C.E., not long after the Arab Islamic state was established. After his death, a series of Caliphs (designated successors to Muhammad) emerged as political leaders and defenders of the faith.

Much later in its development, Islam split into two major movements – Sunni (orthodox) and Shiite.

Sunni Muslims placed emphasis on fundamentals. Sunni Muslims did not attempt to achieve unanimity of questions of doctrine; they opted for a broadly accepted set of theological principles.

Due to this acceptance of broad theological principles, the Sunni Muslims of today are culturally and religiously diverse. Sunni Muslims account for 90% of Muslims in the world today.

Shiite Muslim is the only distinct major sect other than Sunni to have survived until today. Shiite Muslims place a large emphasis on the role of religious leaders. This sect developed as a political faction rather than a religious movement during bitter internal disputes in the seventh century. The Shiite view of early Islamic history varies greatly from the Sunni version. Sunnis accept the first four caliphs as legitimate successors to Muhammad; Shiites do not. For Shiite Muslims, how human leadership is carried out in the faith is fundamental; they accept a doctrine relayed by a figure called the Imam (a figure also recognised by the Sunni). An Imam is a learned scholar of the Qur'an (not a clergyman). Shiite Islam is the Official religion of Iran, and is the form of worship practised by communities of believers in India, Pakistan, Iraq and other areas. It accounts for roughly 10% of the Muslim Community today.

Traditions/Beliefs

The Qur'an (literally translated, it means the "recital"), the book of Islamic scriptures, is one of the most important books in human history. It was written in Arabic and it is thought to be authoritative only in that language. All Muslims memorize and recite the Qur'an in Arabic. It is made up of 114 sutras (chapters) and 6,000 verses. The first chapter begins with the words "Praise be to Allah" and this is universally used in the daily prayers of Muslims around the world. According to the Qur'an, God (Allah, the Arabic word for "The God and Creator") is transcendent, all-powerful, all-knowing and the creator, sustainer, ordainer and judge of the universe. The Qur'an also emphasizes that Allah is also merciful and compassionate.

Qur'anic teachings

A few of the major Qur'anic teachings are:

- The Qur'an teaches that Muslims are obliged to be God's servants and to spread God's message – this obligation is to the individual as well as to the community at large.
- The Holy Scripture also stresses that all individuals are equal before Allah and places a large obligation for the rich to help the poor and dispossessed in society.
- Quranic revelation also raised the status of women in marriage, divorce and inheritance. "Men and women are equal in the eyes of God; man and woman were created to be equal parts of a pair" (51:49).
- The Scripture stresses pluralism and tolerance – that God has created many nations and peoples. It clearly and strongly states that "there is to be no compulsion in religion" (2:256).

The Five Obligations

The Five Obligations (often referred to as Pillars) of Islam which are outlined in the Qur'an are:

- **Shahadah** - *Confession of one's faith in God and in his Prophet Muhammad.* "There is no God but God; Muhammad is the Prophet of God."
- **Salat** - *Ritual Worship.* Prayer five times daily (before sunrise, after midday, at mid-afternoon, shortly after sunset and in the fullness of night).
- **Zakat** - *Almsgiving.* A Zakat (purification tax) on property is paid by all Muslims for the benefit of the poor).
- **Sawm** - *Fasting.* Fasting is observed during the holy month of Ramadan.
- **Hajj** - *Pilgrimage.* Every Muslim who is of sound body, sane and able to afford the journey is expected to make a **Hajj** (pilgrimage) to the holy city of Mecca.

These Pillars are central to Muslim observance and practice.

Worship

A mosque is a building used by Muslims for worship and prayer.

Muslims remove their shoes and perform ritual washing before entering a Mosque to pray.

Internally, a Mosque is sparse, having little or no furniture. There will be no artwork or statues in the chamber. Islam does not condone any form of representation of Allah – to attempt to create an image of Allah is regarded as profane.

A niche is made on the wall which denotes the direction of Mecca – the direction in which people are to pray – this is called the **qibla wall**. Everyone is considered equal and all in attendance sit on the floor. Women may attend the mosque, but they sit separately from the men.

As one of the five pillars of faith, a Muslim is duty-bound to pray five times a day. These prayers do not have to be made within the walls of a Mosque. **Wudu** (ritual washing) must be performed prior to prayer (when water is not available, there are other acceptable practices). During the prayer recital there are also ritual movements (rak'ha) which should be performed. All prayer is performed in the direction of Mecca.

Mosques offer talks on Fridays by the Iman (a Quranic scholar) just before the midday prayer.

Rituals

Like most religions, Islam observes some of the major events in a persons life:

- **Akikah.** An informal birth ceremony. This ceremony is not practiced widely.
- **Shadada.** The marking of a young Muslim's formal entry into Islam. There is no set age for this rite, though it is most commonly celebrated during the teenage years.
- **Marriage Ritual.** Witnesses observe the groom's formal offer of marriage and the bride's acceptance of it. There is no elaborate ceremony. The **waleemah** is the reception which includes music and dancing.
- **Funerals and Mourning.** This includes the recitation of the **janazah** (prayers for the dead) at the gravesite and may include a service at the funeral home. Muslims do not condone cremation and burial of the dead takes place within 24 hours of death. The official mourning period for a family member is 40 days.

Holy Days and Festivals

- **Ramadan.** This Holy Festival takes place in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. It is a time of fasting and daily repentance.
 - **Lailat ul-Qadr** – The final 10 days of Ramadan. Muslims celebrate Muhammad's first revelation.
 - **Id al-Fitr** – The feast period just after the month-long fast of Ramadan. It lasts for three days.
- **Id ul-Adha.** Two to three months after Ramadan, animals are slaughtered to benefit the poor. The purpose of the the *Id ul-Adha* is to celebrate the faithfulness and obedience of Abraham.
- **Al-Isra Wal Miraj.** Celebrated on the 27th Day of the 12th month in the Islamic Calendar. It marks Muhammad's journey from Mecca.
- **Maulid al-Nabi.** Celebrates the birth of Muhammad.

Timeline

c. 570 C.E.	Birth of Muhammad
610 C.E.	Muhammad receives the first revelation of the Qur'an.
620 C.E.	Muhammad's night journey to Jerusalem.
622 C.E.	Hijra. The move of Muhammad and his early community to Medina. The first year of the Muslim Calendar.
632	Death of Muhammad
638	Muslims conquer Jerusalem.
680	Beginning of Shii movement which believes that the succession of leadership in the Muslim community should be hereditary.
750-1258	Development of Islamic law, patronage of art and culture, rising trade, agriculture and industry.
1095-1453	Crusades
1281-1924	Ottoman Empire
1501-1722	Safavid Empire (Iran)
1526-1857	Mughal Empire (south Asia)
1700-1800	Islamic revivalism and reform.
1928	Muslim Brotherhood founded in Egypt
1947	Foundation of Pakistan as a homeland for Muslims.
1956	The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is established.
1967	Arab-Israeli war
1973	Second Arab-Israeli war
1978-1979	Iranian Revolution and the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran under the Ayatollah Khomeini.
1981	Assassination of Anwar al-Sadat, Egyptian president.
1988	Benazir Bhutto elected as prime minister of Pakistan. The first elected female head of state.

Copyright

Copyright © Des McCabe 2013.

The moral rights of the author have been asserted.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced by any mechanical, photographic or electronic process, or in the form of a phonographic recording; nor may it be stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or otherwise be copied for public or private use, other than for 'fair use' as brief quotations embodied in articles and reviews, without prior written permission of the publisher. You may however use the material / content provided that you acknowledge Diversiton and the author where relevant.

Produced by Diversiton

Diversiton is non profit making and all resources are used to support the development of new products and services to promote equality and inclusion. If you can suggest any way to improve further editions of this book we would welcome your comments and ideas.

Diversiton
8 Osborne Promenade
Warrenpoint
Co Down BT34 3NQ
Northern Ireland
Europe
Tel: 00 44 28417 54777
email: mail@diversiton.com
web: www.diversiton.com

Published by New Activity Publications.

ISBN 1-904969-17-8

ISBN 978-1-904969-17-4

New Activity Publications contributes 25% of all net revenues received towards projects in Africa to help people who are starving and suffering from extreme poverty. Thank you for buying this book.

www.newactivitypublications.com



Disclaimer

Every care has been taken to ensure that the contents of this book are factual and accurate. However, we cannot accept responsibility for any errors or the accuracy of any particular content. If in doubt or if you need specific information, you should always take professional advice or refer to local specialists. If you are aware of any errors in this book please contact us and we will be happy to make any corrections.