

# Islam more than a religion

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## Islam More Than A Religion

Despite its huge following around the world and the growing Muslim communities in the United States, Islam is foreign to most Americans who are familiar with Christianity or Judaism. Because most Americans know little or nothing about Islam, they have many misconceptions about Muslim beliefs and rituals. The negative image many people in the United States and Europe have of Islam and the Muslim world has a long history. Many have judged Islam without making an effort to consider this religious tradition on its own terms, without bothering to become acquainted with its teaching and the ways in which Muslims practice their faith.

Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam is a monotheistic religion, based on the belief in one God.. This religion was proclaimed by the Prophet Muhammad in Arabia, in the 7th century A. D. The term Islam virtually means "surrender".

Within Islam the believer (called a Muslim) use the Arabic word for God, Allah, to refer to the creator of the world and of all life within it. Allah is viewed as the sole God----creator, sustained, and restorer of the world. The will of Allah, to which man must submit, is made known through the sacred

scriptures,

the Qur'an (Koran). Allah revealed the Qur'an to his messenger, Muhammad.

According to Islamic beliefs, Muhammad is the last of a series of prophets (including Adam, Noah, Jesus, and others). Muhammad's message concurrently

perfect and do away with the " revelations" attributed to earlier prophets.

From the very beginning of Islam, Muhammad had indoctrinated a sense of brotherhood and a bond of faith among his followers. The Prophet

Muhammad fled

to Medina in AD 622, it was during this time that his preaching was accepted and

the community-state of Islam emerged. During this early period, Islam acquired

its characteristics as a religion uniting in itself both the spiritual and temporal aspects of life. Islam also seeks to regulate not only the individual's relationship to God (through his conscience) but human relationship

in a social setting as well. Thus, there is not only an Islamic religious institution but also an Islamic law, state, and other institutions governing society.

During the earliest decades after the death of the Prophet, certain basic features of the religio-social organizations of Islam were singled out.

The features are to serve as anchoring points of the community's life and fashioning as the " Pillars of Islam." There are five pillars. To these five, the Khawarij sect added a sixth pillar, the jihad, which, however, was not accepted by the general community. Jihad means " holy war" or " holy struggle".

The first pillar is the profession of faith which states, " There is no god but God; Muhammad is the prophet of God." The profession must be recited at least once in one's lifetime, aloud, correctly, and purposively, with an understanding of its meaning and with a covenant from the heart. The second pillar consists of five daily congregational prayers, which may, however be offered individually if one is unable to go to the mosque. The first prayer is performed in the morning before sunrise. The second prayer is performed just after noon, the third in the later afternoon, the fourth immediately after sunset, and the fifth before retiring to bed. However, only three prayers are mentioned in the Qur'an: morning, evening, and middle prayer in the afternoon. In strict doctrine, the five daily prayers cannot be waived even for the sick, who may pray in bed and, if necessary lying down.

The third pillar is the obligatory tax called zakat which means " purification." Zakat indicates that such a payment makes the rest of one's

wealth

religiously and legally pure. In today's society the payment of zakat has become a matter of voluntary charity dependent on individual conscience.

The fourth pillar of the faith is fasting during the month of Ramadan (ninth month of the Muslim lunar calendar). Fasting begins at daybreak and ends

at sunset, and during the day eating, drinking, and smoking are forbidden.

The

Qu'ran (2: 185) states that it was during the month of Ramadan that the Qu'ran was revealed.

The fifth pillar is the annual pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca prescribed for every Muslim once in a lifetime -- " provided one can afford it" and provided a person has enough provisions to leave for his family in his absence.

By the eighteenth century Black Muslims begin to arrive in North America; coming by the thousands, working as slaves on plantations. As slaves

these early communities were cut off from their heritage, families, and inevitable their Islamic identity. During the nineteenth century America experienced an influx of Arab Muslims arriving from Europe, settling in major

industrial cities. The Arab Muslims were generally able to form their communities and to practice their religion freely. The early Twentieth

Century

witnessed the arrival of several hundred thousand Muslims from Eastern Europe;

whom opened a mosque in Maine in 1915 and other mosque soon followed.

After World War II an Islamic movement emerged among blacks in the US; members called themselves the Nation of Islam, but they were popularly known as

Black Muslims. Although they adopted some Islamic social practices, the group

was in large a black separatist and social-protest movement. Their leader, Elijah Muhammad, who claimed to be an inspired prophet, interpreted the doctrine

of Resurrection in an unorthodox sense as the revival of oppressed ("dead") people. The popular leader and advocate Malcolm X (el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz)

broke with Elijah Muhammad and adopted more orthodox Islamic views.

After the

death of Malcolm X in 1965 and the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975, many blacks

turned to Sunni Islam. While most Muslim blacks identify with the traditional Sunni Islam practiced worldwide, the black community's history is entwined with

the Nation of Islam, founded about 1930. Malcom X was among the first black

Muslims to turn to Sunni Islam through the Nation of Islam. Most Muslims are

known as Sunni Muslims; and all other Muslims belong to the Shi'i sect and are known as the Shi'ah.

Today many blacks point to the Islamic faith of their slave ancestors.

Scholars estimate that as many as 20 percent of slaves brought to America were Muslims. In the early part of this century black communities started to take hold to the Islamic faith.

In the Islamic faith the family is the foundation of the Muslim society.

The peace and security offered by a stable family unit is greatly valued and seen as essential for the spiritual growth of its members. A friendly social order is created by the existence of external families; the children are treasured and rarely leave home until the time they marry. Also, Muslim women are seen as an individual in her own right, with the right to own and dispose of her property and earnings. Both men and women are expected to dress in a manner that is modest and dignified; the traditions of female dress found in some Muslim countries are often the expression of local custom. The code in which Muslims eat and drink forbids the consumption of pork meat and any kind of

intoxicating drink. The Prophet Muhammad teachings stated that one's body has rights and the consumption of wholesome food and the leading of a healthy lifestyle is seen as a religious obligation and a way of life.

In today's society many have come to believe that we live in a secular age, meaning, in effect, that religion is not an especially important issue for most people. But there is much evidence to suggest that this is not true. In many societies, including the United States, religion and religious values shape the lives of millions of individuals and play a key role in culture.

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