

## **Islam: Basic Beliefs**

Islam is an Arabic word which means "surrender, submission, commitment and peace." Thus, Islam can be defined as a path to attain complete peace through voluntary submission to the divine will.

### **How did Islam begin?**

Islam is a monotheistic faith centered around belief in the one God (Allah). In this regard, it shares some beliefs with Judaism and Christianity by tracing its history back to the patriarch Abraham, and ultimately to the first prophet, Adam. All the prophets preached the same universal message of belief in one

God and kindness to humanity. The last in the series of prophets, according to Muslims, was Muhammad. Muhammad was born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia around 570 CE. He worked first as a shepherd and then as a merchant. He was not happy with the people around him because of superstitions and social and economic injustice. The people were worshipping many gods and had forgotten the message of prophet Abraham to worship one God. Muhammad loved to pray and meditate in the mountains. On one of those occasions, in the year 610 CE, when he was about 40 years old, he received a revelation from God through the angel Jibril (Gabriel). He continued to receive messages from God throughout his life and he began preaching to others what he had learned. His main message is that there was no other God but Allah and that people should lead their lives in a way that was pleasing to Allah.

### **How many Muslims are there?**

Islam spread quickly first throughout Arabia and surrounding countries and then throughout the world. There are 1.2 billion Muslims in the world with 7 million in the United States. Only about 18% of Muslims are Arabs and live in the Middle East. The countries with the largest Muslim populations are Indonesia and India. There are two basic groups of Islam: the Sunnis (about 80% of the world's Muslims) and the Shi'ites (about 20% of the world's Muslims). Although they share the same basic beliefs, they disagree on who was the rightful leader of Islam after Muhammad's death.

### **What does Islam mean?**

Islam is an Arabic word which means "surrender, submission, commitment and peace." Thus, Islam can be defined as a path to attain complete peace through voluntary submission to the divine will.

### **Who is Allah (God)?**

"Allah" is simply the Arabic word for God. He is the same universal God worshipped by people of all faiths. The word "Allah" is sometimes preferred over God because it is neither masculine nor feminine. Also, there is no plural for "Allah."

### **What do Muslims believe?**

Muslims have six major beliefs:

1. Belief in one God (Allah)
2. Belief in the Angels
3. Belief in the holy books sent to all the prophets including Torah that was revealed to the prophet Moses, Bible that was revealed to the prophet Jesus, and Qur'an (Koran) that was revealed to the prophet Muhammad
4. Belief in all the prophets sent by God including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Although Muslims believe in Isa or Jesus they don't think of Jesus as the Son of God the way Christians do.
5. Belief in the Day of Judgment and life after death. The best reward for performing good deeds is getting closer to God.
6. Belief in divine decree. This means that God is all-powerful and nothing can happen without

His permission, however, he has given human beings freedom to choose whether to be good or bad. In the end, everyone will be questioned about how they lived in this life.

### **What are the Five Pillars of Islam?**

These are guides for daily life for putting the beliefs of Muslims into practice:

1. Shahadah (declaration of faith)—to bear witness or testify that there is no god except one God (Allah) and Muhammad is His prophet or messenger.
2. Salat (ritual prayer)—the five daily prayers are performed at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and night. The prayers are offered in Arabic language and facing the direction of Mecca. They aren't very long and usually take a couple of minutes.
3. Zakah (alms tax) —Giving 2.5% of one's wealth to the poor and needy.
4. Sawm (fasting)—Muslims fast during the daylight hours in the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar called Ramadan. The purpose is to remind people of the goodness of what they have and to show equality with the poor. Ramadan is a time for study and self-discipline.
5. Hajj (pilgrimage): Muslims believe in making a pilgrimage to Mecca to the Ka'bah at least once in their lifetime. The Ka'bah is believed to have been built by Ibrahim (Abraham) and one of his sons. Muhammad restored it to worship Allah. For this reason it is a very sacred place to Muslims.

What is the final revealed scripture (a sacred text) for Muslims?

Muslims believe that the last revealed scripture sent by God is the Qur'an or Koran. It is the speech of God revealed in the Arabic language to Muhammad during his mission of twenty-three years. The Qur'an was written down by scribes and memorized during the lifetime of Muhammad. The Qur'an emphasizes moral, ethical and spiritual values with the aim of establishing justice for everyone. Many Muslims try to learn to read the Koran in its original language, Arabic. It is not uncommon for Muslims to memorize whole chapters of it. They read part of it every day. The Sunnah is a record of Muhammads words and deeds. The Sunnah is used to help interpret the Koran. There is also instruction in it on belief, worship and behavior.

Muslim and Christian beliefs share some similarities, but they also have significant differences:

**Similarities:**

**Monotheism:** Both religions believe in the existence of one God (Allah in Islam, God in Christianity).

**Prophets:** Both religions recognize many of the same prophets, such as Abraham, Moses, and Noah, although their stories and roles can vary.

**Holy Scriptures:** Both have holy texts. Muslims follow the Quran, while Christians follow the Bible, which includes the Old Testament (shared with Judaism) and the New Testament.

**Morality:** Both emphasize moral values like compassion, charity, honesty, and justice.

**Prayer:** Both involve regular prayer and worship, although the forms and rituals differ.

**Differences:**

**Belief in Jesus:** A central difference is the belief in Jesus Christ. Christians consider Jesus the Son of God and believe in the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Muslims view Jesus as a prophet, servant of God but not divine, or Son of God neither they believe in Trinity. As Muslims are strictly monotheistic, believing God is born of no one, neither he gave birth to anyone.

**Salvation:** Christians generally believe in salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross, while Muslims believe in salvation through faith, good deeds, and submission to Allah.

**Worship Practices:** Worship practices differ; for instance, Christians attend church services, celebrate the Eucharist, and baptize, while Muslims pray five times a day, fast during Ramadan, and make the pilgrimage to Mecca.

**Holidays:** Major holidays differ. Christmas and Easter are significant in Christianity, while Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha are important Islamic holidays.

**Religious Leadership:** The religious hierarchy and clergy structures vary. Christianity has priests, bishops, and denominational leaders, whereas Islam does not have a centralized clergy and don't believe in intermediary between God and Human Being. Every Human being can read Quran and interpret it, it is even encouraged in Quran.

**Views on the Afterlife:** Concepts of heaven, hell, and the afterlife differ between the two religions.

**View on Pictures and Idols:** The difference in the use of pictures and idols between Christianity and Islam arises from their religious traditions. Islam discourages visual representations of God and prophets to prevent idolatry and maintain the oneness of God, while certain Christian denominations use images, statues, and icons as aids to worship without considering them objects of worship, though the use varies among Christian traditions.

It's important to note that within both Islam and Christianity, there is a wide diversity of beliefs and practices among different denominations and sects, so these general similarities and differences can vary significantly.

**What is Halal and Haram?**

**Halal:** Halal refers to things that are allowed or permissible in Islam. It's often used to

describe food and drinks that are prepared and consumed in accordance with Islamic dietary laws. For example, halal meat is prepared by following specific guidelines, such as humane animal treatment and proper slaughter methods.

**Haram:** Haram is the opposite of halal. It means things that are forbidden or prohibited in Islam. For instance, consuming pork and alcohol is considered haram in Islam. Engaging in activities like gambling and stealing are also considered haram because they go against Islamic moral and ethical principles.

**Is Islam only a Arab/Asian religion and how can it be called a global religion it imposes its culture which is very much opposed and different from Western culture?**

Islam is not solely an Arab religion, nor is it limited to any one culture or ethnicity. While Islam originated in the Arabian Peninsula and its holy city, Mecca, is in modern-day Saudi Arabia, it has since spread to become a global religion with followers from diverse backgrounds and cultures around the world. Here's why it's considered a global religion:

**Universal Message:** Islam's core beliefs and teachings are not tied to any specific culture. They are based on the Quran, which Muslims believe is the universal word of God, and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. These teachings encompass principles of faith, morality, and worship that can be followed by people from various cultural backgrounds.

**Global Spread:** Islam has spread through trade, conquest, and migration over centuries. Today, it's one of the world's major religions with significant populations in regions as diverse as South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, Europe, and the Americas. The majority of Muslims are not Arabs

**Adaptation:** Muslims adapt their religious practices to local cultures while maintaining core Islamic principles. For example, Islamic prayer and fasting are observed worldwide, but the way they are practiced may vary depending on cultural and regional factors.

**Diversity:** There is a rich diversity of cultural expressions within the Muslim world. Muslims from different regions have their own customs, languages, and traditions that coexist with their Islamic faith. This diversity reflects the global nature of the religion.

It's important to understand that Islam is not a monolithic entity, and there is a wide range of beliefs and practices among Muslims. While there may be cultural differences between some Western societies and Islamic practices, it's essential to differentiate between the religion of Islam and cultural traditions that may be practiced by some Muslim communities.