

Basic Beliefs of ISLAM

The basis for Islamic doctrine is found in the **Qur'an (Koran)**. Muslims believe the Qur'an is the word of God, spoken by the angel Gabriel to **Muhammad**. The Qur'an was only in oral form while Muhammad was living, which means it was constantly interpreted by Muhammad and his disciples. It was written down in the caliphate of Abu Bakr. It alone is infallible and without error. The Qur'an is comprised of 114 **surahs**, or chapters, arranged from longest to shortest. For Muslims Muhammad was the last of God's seven prophets or messengers to mankind.

The Arabic word which gives Islamic religion its name is **islam**, which means "submission," in particular, submission or obedience to God. This submission takes the form of the **arkan ad-din**, or the **Five Pillars of Religion**, which form the active ritualistic life of the Muslim and define the believer's relationship to God.

The Five Pillars of Faith

Shahadah: the confession of faith. The confession of faith is the fundamental expression of Islamic faith and the core of all Islamic law; it is very simple: "There is no God but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God" (la illaha illa 'lah Muhammadun rasul 'llah). The *shahadah* is the first thing spoken to a newborn and the last thing whispered into ears of the dead.

Salat: prayer. Islam enjoins upon the believer five prayers every day. These ritual prayers must be performed in the direction of Mecca and involve first standing, inclining, prostrating oneself, and sitting. The call to prayer is sounded by the muezzin (Muslim crier) from a tower (minaret) within the mosque. The prayers are read from the Qur'an and must be chanted from memory in Arabiyya, or the classical Arabic of the *Qur'an*. It is not allowed to either have a book in one's hand or to chant the Quranic prayers in another language. Personal prayers, called *du'a* in Arabic, can be made in one's own language.

Sawm Ramadan: the fast of the month of Ramadan. During the month of Ramadan, all believers must refrain from food, drink, and sexual relationships from dawn until dusk. The month of Ramadan occurs at different times of the year (the Muslim calendar is a lunar rather

than a solar calendar), so the severity of the fast varies. The fast is intended to purify the believer as a renunciation of the world.

Zakat: alms-giving. The *Qur'an* does not vilify the accumulation of wealth as the Christian gospels do; in fact, Islam manifestly understands the material world as created for the enjoyment of humanity. However, one's duties to God involve distributing one's wealth to the less fortunate. This is instituted in Islamic law, the **Shari'ah**, which constrains everyone to give the equivalent of 2 1/2 percent of their wealth to the poor in the form of taxes (if one's wealth is in money). Islamic society, it is not unfair to assert, was the first welfare state in existence! Just as the fast of Ramadan purifies the believer through renouncing the world, the *zakat* purifies the believer by encouraging a charitable disposition and a lack of attachment to worldly belongings.

Hajj: the pilgrimage to Mecca. Every believer must once in their life make a pilgrimage to the **Ka'bah**, the sacred shrine of Islam in Mecca. By recreating many of the events of the life of Abraham and Ishmael who are, in Islamic tradition, the founders of the Ka'bah, one injects oneself into the core of Islamic history and re-evaluates one's life and one's society in the perspective of that history.

Six Articles of Faith

Monotheism (*Tawhid*): The main message of Islam is monotheism. Belief in monotheism is the cornerstone of the Islamic faith. Muslims believe that all the Prophets sent by God to humanity shared the same central message, and that was the message of monotheism. Monotheism is a term used to refer to the belief in the existence of only one deity (God). Muslims believe that there is only one God who created the universe and everything within it. This one God created the heavens, the earth, the stars, the mountains, the oceans, humans, animals, plants and everything else in existence.

Muslims believe that since there is only one God who created us and who continues to sustain us, then it follows logically that only this one God is worthy of worship. If we want to thank someone for the blessings we have, it should be this one God. If we want to ask someone for more blessings, it should be this one God. Only this one God is able to truly help or harm us. Therefore, we must dedicate our true and pure love only to this one God, and we must reserve our true fear only of this one God. Of course, we are asked to love our family, friends and all

humans. However, our love for God should be at a higher level, since it is God who created our family, friends and everyone else around us. Similarly, since only God can truly harm us, then we should only fear God and not fear anyone or anything else more than we fear God. However, our fear of God should be a higher level since God not only controls our life in this world, but He will judge us in the afterlife. Therefore, Muslims believe that all acts of worship should be directed to the one God.

Belief in the Angels: Muslims believe that just as God created human beings, He has also created angels. However, humans were given free will, whereas angels are always obedient to the will of God. Angels are not able to disobey God, and they carry out all the tasks entrusted to them by God. Muslims do not delve into useless details of how angels were created or where and how they exist. This is knowledge that is beyond our understanding as human beings. We were created within this universe, and everything we observe around us is a creation of God. God created the laws of physics that govern our existence. Even though these laws apply to the entire universe as we know it, they do not apply to God because He is the one who created them in the first place. It is impossible for us to understand something that falls outside the normal laws of physics that we know. All knowledge we have of angels was revealed to us by God through the Prophets and Messengers He sent to humanity. For example, we have been told that angels were created before humans, and that they were created from light. We have also been told about specific angels and their tasks. For example, the angel Gabriel is responsible for transmitting the revelations from God to the Prophets and Messengers.

Belief in the Prophets and Messengers: Muslims believe that God created humans and that He wanted us to be able to live a good life. He does not want us to be misguided or to live miserable lives. He also does not want us to harm other humans or to do other morally evil actions. Therefore, God will hold every human being accountable for every action they have done in their life. In order to teach humanity what is right and what is wrong, God has sent Prophets and Messengers to guide us. These Prophets and Messengers are human beings just like the rest of us. But they were selected to take on the role of receiving guidance and revelations from God through the angel Gabriel and to spread the message among the rest of humanity.

So what is the difference between a Prophet and a Messenger? Messengers are those individuals to whom God sent new revelations constituting a new message for humanity. For example, Moses was a Messenger whose message was the Torah. Jesus was a Messenger whose message was the Bible. Mohammad was a Messenger whose message was the Quran. On the other hand, Prophets were assigned the task of calling people to an existing message. For example, Prophets David and Solomon did not come with a new message, but were calling their people to abide by the existing message of their people.

As you could probably already tell from the previous paragraph, Muslims do believe in Moses, Jesus and many of the same Prophets mentioned in the Bible. However, Muslims believe that all of these Prophets, including Jesus, were normal human beings. Jesus was not the son of God, he was simply a Messenger from God. God gave many of the Prophets and Messengers signs to prove to their people that they are truly Prophets. For example, Jesus was given the ability to heal the sick and even to revive the dead by the will of God. Muslims believe that Jesus never claimed to be a God or the son of God.

Belief in the Holy Books: As mentioned in the previous section on Prophets and Messengers, Muslims believe that God revealed certain messages to guide humanity and to teach them right from wrong. The goal of all of these messages was to guide people to worship God only, and to liberate humanity from the oppression of worshipping false Gods such as idols or kings. Also, the messages were sent to help humans establish a set of laws that would enable them to minimize injustice and evil actions and to make them live happy and fruitful lives. These messages are known as the Holy Books. They include the Torah, Bible and the Quran.

Belief in the Day of Judgment: Muslims believe that God will hold every human being accountable for each of their actions no matter how small. Since God is the most just, He will not allow someone who lived their entire life stealing, cheating and hurting others to escape with no punishment. God is able to punish these people in their life here on earth, and can punish them even more severely on the Day of Judgment. Also, God will reward those who were patient and who prevented themselves from hurting others for their own personal gain. Although they could have joined others in stealing and cheating to increase their wealth and material possessions during their life, they instead were kind to others and volunteered to help the less fortunate. How can these people and the first group have the same fate in the end? Indeed, when the time comes, the world will end and the Day of Judgment will arrive. Every human being will be held accountable for every action they did, even if it is an atom weight of goodness or evil, they will be rewarded or punished for it.

Belief in Predestination: Muslims believe that God is all knowing. He knows what actions we will take before we take them. In fact, God knew before we were created how we will live our lives and every action that we will do. This does not mean that God controls us. Humans were given free will and they have full control over their actions. However, God simply knows all events that have occurred in the past or will occur in the future. As mentioned earlier, the laws of physics, and the laws of space and time as we know them do not apply to God. In fact, God created those laws. Therefore, even though it is very difficult for us to understand, God is all knowing. Even though we have free will, God is aware of what we will do. Muslims believe that if God wanted to stop something from happening or force something to happen, he is certainly able to do so. Therefore, everything occurs because God has allowed it to happen.