



History and Region

Islam is one of the three Abrahamic faiths (Judaism and Christianity being the other two). Muslims believe in one God and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the last and final prophet sent down to earth. Muslims prefer to use the term Allah (it's the Arabic term for God and as such is universal) when they refer to the Creator of all humankind. The divine revelations were sent to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) who was living in the Holy City of Makkah, Arabia. Muslims have three holy sites/mosques which they are encouraged to visit at least once in their lifetime if they have the means: *Haram al-Sharif*, the mosque in Makkah which houses the Ka'bah (the point of direction that Muslims all over the world pray); *Masjid al-Nabi*, the mosque in Medinah where the Holy Prophet is buried; and *Bayt al-Maqdis* on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Sacred Texts

The Holy Qur'an is the sacred text of Muslims and is said to be the word of God. This was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) through the Angel Jabrail (Gabriel) over a period of 23 years, initially in Makkah and thereafter in Medinah. Initially the Holy Qur'an was memorised by the companions of the Prophet and during the 2nd Caliphate was put down in written form. Apart from the Holy Qur'an the Muslims also follow the teachings and practices of the Holy Prophet referred to as Hadith and Sunnah.

Teachings and Beliefs

Muslims have six basic beliefs which can be summarized:

- Belief in oneness of God;
- Belief in all his Angels;
- Belief in divine books revealed: Tawrat (Torah -Old Testament or Hebrew Bible), Zabur (Psalms), Injil (Gospel), and the Qur'an;
- Belief in all Prophets as messengers from God (Muslims believe that 124,000 prophets were sent to this earth, beginning with Adam and the Prophet Muhammad as the last);
- Belief in Day of Judgement when all creatures will be judged according to their actions;
- Belief in Destiny (Qadar), namely that whatever happens in one's life is preordained.

The fundamental teachings are contained in the Qur'an and known as the Five Pillars of Islam which all Muslim must abide by:

1. *Shahadah*: A covenant that all Muslims take - Bearing witness and professing one's faith by reciting the creed: There is no deity but God (Allah) and Muhammad is the last and final messenger of God.
2. *Salāt*: To pray five times a day at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and evening. Muslims must face in the direction of Makkah when they pray. Also, attendance at the *mosque*, the place of worship, for group worship on a Friday is compulsory for all males.
3. *Zakat*: Giving alms and caring for the welfare of those in need. Every Muslim has to give a minimum of 2.5% of their wealth as charity each year.
4. *Sawm*: Fasting during the month of Ramadan from dawn to sunset for 29 or 30 days (the Muslim calendar is a lunar calendar) at which time the fast is completed and a person could have a meal. In the evenings people attend special prayers in the mosque.

5. *Hajj*: a pilgrimage to Makkah that all Muslims should undertake in their lifetime if they are fit and well enough to do so and have the necessary funds. This is seen as an act of great faith which unites Muslims around the world.

Key words and phrases in Islam:

Inshallah: A statement frequently used by Muslims which means "God Willing".

Bismillah: All Muslims before they begin any action whether it be reading, doing some work or even eating would say it and means "In the name of Allah".

Alhamdulillah: Muslims would say this word when they hear any good news or actions and means "all praise is due to Allah".

As-Salamu Alaykum: Greetings from a Muslim and it means "peace be with you".

Muslims are advised in the Holy Qur'an that "when a greeting is offered you answer it with an even better greeting, or (at least) with its like. God keeps count of all things" [Surah an-Nisa; 4: 86].

Wa alaykum salam wa rahmatullah wa barakatuhu: this is the response made by a Muslim when he or she is greeted and it means may the peace mercy and blessings of Allah be with you as well.

Jazakallahu Khayran: When someone does you a favour a Muslim would thank him using this phrase which means "may Allah reward you for the good".

Holy Days & Festivals

Islam has relatively few holidays compared to most other religions; nevertheless, their sacred days and times are very important to Muslims. Traditionally, Muslims celebrate two major festivals: *Eid al Fitr* and *Eid al Adha*, and one month of daytime fasting – *Ramadan*. Important holy days include:

Ramadan: This holy month begins with the first light of dawn commemorating the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Throughout this month Muslims strengthen their relationship with God by abstaining from food and drink as well as trying to keep away from wrong thoughts and actions.

Eid al-Fitr: An important religious holiday celebrated by Muslims worldwide that marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting. It is a thanksgiving to Allah and involves prayer, giving alms and enjoying family feasts.

Eid al-Adha: Commemorates Ibrahim's (Abraham) willingness to sacrifice his son as an act of submission to God's command. Also known as 'Feast of Sacrifice'.

Laylat al-Qadr: First revelation of Qur'an to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Observed during the last ten days of Ramadan. Also known as 'Night of Destiny' or the 'Night of Power'.

Islamic New Year: The Islamic year is marked by the event known as Hijra which occurred in 622AD, when the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) migrated from Mecca to Medina. The Islamic calendar is based on the lunar cycle.

Approved by the Islamic Council of Victoria