



Facts about Islam

- **Islam** is an Arabic word meaning submission to God. As a religion, Islam calls for complete acceptance of and submission to the teachings and guidance of God. The word has connotations of peace and wholeness. It has the same root as “salam” - peace (for more information, you may reference [True, Peaceful Face of Islam](#) found on the ADC website).
- A **Muslim** is one who believes in God and that Muhammad was the supreme messenger of God, and seeks to live his or her life in accordance with God’s word as told by Muhammad.
- **Allah** is the Arabic word for God. Allah is also used by Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews in prayer or speech about God. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the three great monotheistic world religions.
- Muslims believe that the **Qur’an** (or Koran) is God’s word as revealed to the prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. The Qur’an is the basis for Muslim beliefs regarding God, worship, morality, knowledge, wisdom, the human relationship to God, and relationships among human beings. Just as Christians believe that Jesus was the manifestation of God, Muslims believe that the Qur’an encapsulates the Word and manifestation of God. The original text of the Quran is in Arabic, and translations are available in libraries and bookstores around the world.
- **Muhammad** is respected as a prophet of Islam. He is not regarded as the “founder” of Islam, but one of many prophets including: Adam, Abraham, Moses, Solomon, and Jesus. Therefore, Islam did not begin or follow Muhammad, who insisted that his followers “call me the servant of God and His messenger.” He is regarded as a human being and in no way divine, but rather the final prophet who completed the revelation began by the earlier prophets.
- The **Hadith** — the teachings, sayings and actions of Muhammad — were reported and collected by his devoted companions. They explain and elaborate on Qur’anic verses, which provide a model of conduct for Muslims.

Five Pillars of Islam

Every action done with the awareness that it fulfills the will of God is considered an act of worship, but the specific acts termed the **Five Pillars of Islam** provide the framework of Muslim spiritual life. They are:



- 1) The **Declaration of Faith**: “I bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is his messenger.”
- 2) **Prayer** is prescribed five times a day as a duty towards God. Prayer strengthens and enlivens belief in God and inspires one to a higher morality.
- 3) **Fasting** is called for during the month of Ramadan. This involves abstention from food, beverages, and sexual activity from sunrise to sunset, as a means to curb evil intentions and desires. Allowances are made for health, age and circumstances. After sunset, families and communities come together for a large meal, meant to celebrate the end of the day’s fast.
- 4) **Zakat** is a proportionately fixed contribution from surplus earnings of individual Muslims. It is spent on the poor and needy, meant to benefit the welfare of society as a whole.
- 5) The **Haji** is the pilgrimage to the Ka’bah in Makkah (Mecca), at least once in a lifetime, provided one has the means to undertake the journey.

The Three Abrahamic Religions

There are three Abrahamic religions that were founded in the Middle East: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. **Muslims, Christians and Jews all worship the same God.** The Qur’an has many stories about Biblical characters which are very similar to those in the Old and New Testaments. Jesus is very highly honored as a prophet, although Muslims believe that Christians erred in regarding him as divine. Muslims greatly respect Mary as the mother of Jesus. They believe in the virginal birth of Jesus through the power of the Spirit of God. However, they believe that errors have crept into the Jewish and Christian traditions and into the text of the Bible. The mission of Muhammad was to correct those errors.

Nonetheless, the Qur’an teaches that Jews, Christians and Muslims are all “People of the Book.” As believers, Jews and Christians have rights under Islamic law to live as “protected peoples.” Historically, Islam has been a relatively tolerant religion, and teaches that “there is to be no compulsion in matters of religion.” In the 7th century, Muslim armies conquered vast territories, but conversion to Islam was voluntary and was not imposed “by the sword”, contrary to what western myths suggest.

Some Misconceptions about Islam

- **Islam, Muslims, and Arabs are not interchangeable terms.** Islam refers to the religion itself, and Muslims are the followers of Islam. Arabs are a linguistic and cultural community with a common history in the founding and following of Islam, but not all Arabs are Muslims. Only 15% of the world’s 1.5 billion Muslims are of Arab descent, with the largest concentration found in Indonesia. There are 12 million Arab Christians and thousands of Arab Jews.



- **“Mohammadanism”** is a misnomer for Islam and offends its very spirit, since Muhammad was a merely a messenger of God.
- The accurate translation of the Arabic word **jihad** should be “exertion of effort or struggle” in accord with the will of God. It is any strenuous effort — physical, intellectual, spiritual — for the good. The “higher jihad” is the personal struggle to become a better Muslim. Jihad can mean standing up to speak the word of truth to tyrants and to call for justice. It can also be a religiously guided military struggle, but it does not mean “holy war.” The Arabic word for war is "harb," which does not appear in the Qur’an.
- **“Islamic fundamentalism”**: There are widespread and diverse movements of spiritual and cultural revivalism in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Many of them are critical of Western influence and seek a return to the authentic roots of their own traditions. A small number of these movements use violent means to achieve political goals. These social and political groups are called fundamentalist, and many of them practice “political Islam.” Some Muslims consider such movements as deviations from authentic Islam.
- **“Shariah”** is often negatively defined as a law code that is violent and teeming with religious bigotry. However, this is not necessarily the case. Shariah is the moral and legal code that guides the Muslim way of life. It addresses religious practices; personal and family life; as well as social, economic, and political life. Based on the Qur’an and the teachings and practices of Muhammad, the several schools of Islamic jurisprudence were codified in the early centuries of Islam. Shari’ah is interpreted and flexibly adapted to local and changing conditions by Islamic judges and courts by the consensus of religious scholars. Muslim countries vary widely in the extent to which Shariah is integrated into public life, and most Arab or predominantly Muslim countries do not abide by any sort of Shariah law.