



Short Introductions to the World Religions - Islam

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1. Islam is one of the world's largest and fastest growing faiths. The world population of Muslims is over 950 million. About 200,000 Muslims from diverse Asian and African countries live in Canada, besides those, of course, who were born here of Islamic parents and those who converted to Islam.

2. The Arabic word

"Islam" means
"peace and
submission",
meaning the
subordination of the
human will to Allah,
before whom all
people are equal
and in whose
service all believers
are equally
rewarded. The word
"Muslim" means
"one who submits"
his/her will to Allah.
(It is wrong to call
Muslims
"Mohammedans").

3. Muhammad (570
- 632 C.E.) is
revered by Muslims
as the last of Allah's
messengers. Other
prophets who
preceded him,
Noah, Abraham,
Moses, and even
Jesus, are to be
honoured as
prophets of Allah.
But it is to the
prophet Muhammad
that Allah gave his
absolute and final
revelation, the
Qur'an.

4. Muhammad was
40 years old when
he received
revelations from
Allah through the
archangel Gabriel.
The first little
assembly gathered
around him in
Makkah (Mecca).
He encountered
years of resistance
and persecution
during which his
message matured.
Later he established

the Islamic state in Madinah. He fought holy wars to subdue a number of tribes. Islam spread out of the Arabian peninsula and was accepted by millions as the true way of life. (Distorted teaching about Islam and its history is still the source of Christian prejudice against Muslims.)

5. Islam acknowledges the close relationship with the "people of the book", Jews and Christians, and believes in the original writings of Judaism and Christianity. However, it is sceptical about the accuracy and reliability of their transmission throughout the generations.

6. The divine revelations to Muhammad were gathered in the Holy Qur'an during his life time. The Qur'an consists of 114 chapters or "Surahs". It is Allah's final revelation to mankind and is accepted as literally inspired. It has, therefore, to be recited in its original Arabic language.

7. Basic to the essence of Islam is

the sense of obligations. The most important ones are called the "Five Pillars", acts by which a Muslim demonstrates his faith:

(1) Belief (Iman): the Muslim declares his acceptance of Allah as the only one to be worthy of worship and of Muhammad as servant and messenger of Allah.

(2) Prayer (Salat): Muslims must pray to Allah, facing Makkah, five times a day.

(3) Charity (Zakat): Mandatory giving of cash savings, gold, silver, livestock and farming products which purifies the Muslim's wealth.

(4) Fasting (Sawm): Muslims must abstain from all foods, drinks and sexual activity each day during the month of Ramadan, from before sunrise to sunset, thereby trying to draw closer to Allah.

(5) Pilgrimage (Hajj): Every Muslim must make pilgrimage to Makkah once in his/her lifetime, if financially and physically capable.

8. "Shari"ah" is the Islamic law, a code of conduct laid out in the Qur'an and in

the "Hadiths"
(sayings and
practices of
Muhammad), which
is a comprehensive
guide to the
individual as well as
the society as a
whole.

9. The Mosque is
the Islamic house of
prayer. No images
or pictures are
allowed there.
People wash their
faces and limbs
before prayers and
remove their shoes
when entering the
mosque. Only men
are required to pray
in the mosque. For
women prayers
there are optional.
However, men and
women do not mix.

10. There is no
priesthood and no
sacrament in Islam.
The "Imam" is the
prayer leader and
teacher.

11. The main
divisions within
Islam are Sunni and
Shi'a. In theology
and practice they
are very much the
same. Other sects
see themselves as
Muslims, but are not
recognized by
Islamic authorities.

12. The first Surah
of the Qur'an
embodies the sense
of absolute
submission, trust,
praise, and hope
that pervades the

faith of the Muslim.
It has been called
the "essence of the
Qur'an":

"In the Name of
Allah, the Merciful,
the Compassionate.
All praise belongs to
Allah, the Lord, the
sustainer of the
universe; most
Merciful, most
Compassionate,
Master of the Day of
Reckoning. Thee do
we worship, and
Thine aid we seek.
Show us the straight
way, the way of
those whom You
blessed, those
whose portion is not
wrath, and who do
not go astray".

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[Back to content](#)
[World Religions](#)