

Islam



Islam is a religion based on the teachings of Muhammad, revered by his followers as the Prophet. Followers of Islam, known as Muslims, believe that God revealed these teachings to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. Muslims are concentrated from southwest to central Asia and parts of Africa. Islam also has many followers in Southeast Asia. Sunni Muslims believe that their leaders should follow Muhammad's example. Shi'a Muslims believe that their leaders should be Muhammad's descendants.

Islam teaches the existence of only one God, called Allah in the Arabic language. Muslims believe in all prophets of Judaism and Christianity. They show their devotion by performing lifelong acts of worship known as the Five Pillars of Islam. These include faith, prayer, almsgiving (charity), fasting, and a pilgrimage to Mecca. The crescent moon (shown above) has become a familiar symbol for Islam. It may be related to the new moon that begins each month in the Islamic lunar calendar, which orders religious life for Muslims. The five points of the star may represent the Five Pillars of Islam.

INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

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▼ Ritual

At least once in their lifetime, all Muslims who are physically and financially able go on hajj, or pilgrimage, to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. There, pilgrims perform several rites, or acts of worship. One rite, shown here, is walking seven times around the Ka'aba—the house of worship that Muslims face in prayer.





▲ Celebration

During the sacred month known as Ramadan, Muslims fast, or abstain from food and drink, from dawn to sunset. The family shown here is ending their fast. The most important night of Ramadan is called the Night of Power. This is believed to be the night the angel Gabriel first spoke to Muhammad.



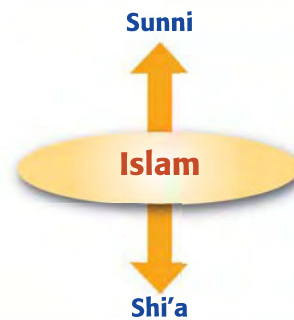
▲ Worship Practices

Five times a day Muslims throughout the world face Mecca and pray to Allah. Pictured here are Muslims praying at a mosque in Turkey.

There are no priests or other clergy in Islam. However, a Muslim community leader known as the imam conducts the prayers in a mosque. Islam also has a scholar class called the ulama, which includes religious teachers.

Learn More About Islam

Major Islamic Sects



Prayer Rug

Muslims often pray by kneeling on a rug. The design of the rug includes a pointed or arch-shaped pattern. The rug must be placed so that the arch points toward Mecca.



The Qur'an

PRIMARY SOURCE



The Qur'an, the sacred book of Muslims, consists of verses grouped into 114 chapters, or suras. The book is the spiritual guide on matters of Muslim faith. It also contains teachings for Muslim daily life. In the following verse, Muslims are instructed to appreciate the world's physical and spiritual riches:

Do you not see that God has subjected to your use all things in the heavens and on earth, and has made His bounties flow to you in exceeding measure, both seen and unseen?

Qur'an, sura 31:20

7. What is the most important night of Ramadan? Why?
8. What are the Five Pillars of Islam?