

Basic Facts of Islam¹

- Islam, which is typically translated as "submission to God" (Quran, chapter 3, verse 19), is derived from the Arabic word salam, which means "peace." When Muslims greet one another, they will do so by saying "Assalamu Alaikum," which means "peace be upon you."



- Most Arabs are Muslims, but most Muslims are not Arabs.
- Worldwide, there are approximately 1.2 billion Muslims. Islam is the dominant religion throughout large portions of Asia and Africa, with the largest Muslim populations living in Indonesia (170.3 million), Pakistan (136 million), Bangladesh (106 million), and India (103 million).
- Islam is the second largest of the three major monotheistic religions, the others being Christianity and Judaism. Muslims believe that the Quran is God's word as revealed to the prophet Muhammad (570-632 C.E.) through the angel Gabriel.
- The practice of Islam is based on "five pillars":

Shahada: to declare one's belief in God and the prophetic role of Muhammad;

Salat: to pray five times every day (dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset and evening);

Zakat: to give charity to those in need;

Sawn: to fast from food, water, and other bodily pleasures during daylight hours in the month of Ramadan;

[Haj: to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime if this is physically and economically possible.](#)

- According to Islam, there are many prophets, including Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.
- Muslims worship God directly. Religious leaders do not have any divine characteristics; people and objects are not considered holy. It is, in fact, sacrilegious to worship anything or anyone outside of God.
- Muslims, unlike Christians, do not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, although they do believe he was a prophet.
- Women and men dress modestly out of reverence for God. Muslim women are not more submissive than other women. Some argue that Muslim women, in fact, have been treated better than women in other cultures. For example, women in Islam were given the right to vote about 1,400 years ago, centuries before other women. Of course, like many other cultures, patriarchal culture can corrupt Muslim culture.
- There are two main sects of Islam: Sunni and Shiite. One of their main differences is in their beliefs about who were the leaders following the death of Prophet Muhammad.

Sunni, from the Arabic word for "tradition," accepted the succession of Muhammad's elected successors. The majority of Muslims in the world today are Sunnis.

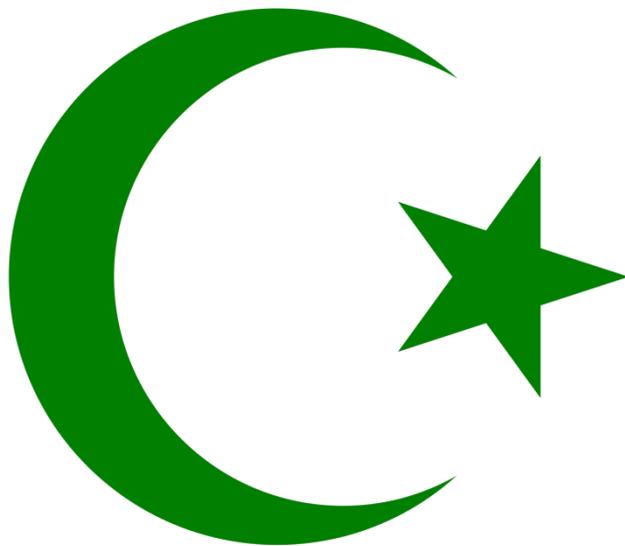
¹ PBS. "Teachers Guide – Basic Facts About Islam." Teacher Centre.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/terror/background/6.html> (19 September 2016).

Shiite, from the Arabic word for "faction," believe that leaders must be descendants of Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali. They rule Iran and also have a sizeable presence in Iraq and Syria.

Wahhabism, an extremely strict interpretation of Islam founded in the 18th century by Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab, is practiced in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. It is the form of Islam espoused by Osama bin Laden. It is often discounted by Islamic scholars.

- Muslims follow the lunar calendar, and thus their holidays move approximately 11 days on the Christian calendar. There are two major holidays in Islam: Eid al Adha is at the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca and Eid al Fitr is at the end of Ramadan. Ramadan is the ninth month of the lunar calendar when it was thought that the Prophet Muhammad received the Quran.
- Islam is very family-oriented. The primary means of transmitting the religion are through the family. Therefore parents, both mothers and fathers, take on a big responsibility when raising children. This family orientation also translates into a community-oriented way of life that can greatly conflict with Western notions of individuality.
- Jihad (struggle) is not the initiation of violence in the name of Islam. Rather, the religious precept directs Muslims to study, preach, and defend Islam.



The crescent moon has become a symbol for many of Islam, even though its origins are cultural (and not explicitly stated in the Quran).