

Key Beliefs in Islam

Islam

Islam is a monotheistic religion — Muslims believe in only one god, Allah. They believe in many prophets.

Tawhid is Central to Islam

"Say, 'He is Allah, [who is] One.'" Qur'an 112:1

- 1) The word Allah is from the Arabic al-ilah, meaning 'the god', i.e. the only god. Several of the ninety-nine names of Allah (see below) make this clear, including al-Ahad (the one and only) and al-Wahid (the one).
- 2) Saying Allah is the only god is the first part of the shahadah, the Muslim declaration of faith (see p.21).
- 3) Shirk — believing in other gods as well as Allah, or that anyone or thing could share in Allah's oneness — is seen as the worst sin. Muslims therefore disagree with the Christian idea of the Holy Trinity (see p.2) and with polytheism (believing in multiple gods). Images of Muhammad aren't allowed, in case of shirk.

"Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that..." Qur'an 4:116.
'Association with Him' is worshipping other gods as well as Allah.

"let the first thing to which you will invite them, be the Tauhid [Tawhid] of Allah."
Sahih al-Bukhari 93:469

- 4) According to a hadith (see p.19), Muhammad said that when telling non-Muslims about Islam, the first thing Muslims should mention is Tawhid.

Allah has Many Characteristics

"In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful" (Qur'an 1:1) is the phrase known as the bismillah.

- 1) **MERCIFUL** — Muslims believe Allah shows mercy and compassion. All but one of the Qur'an's chapters begin by saying this — it's known as the bismillah. They believe Allah is kind and forgives people's sins.
- 2) **OMNIPOTENT** — Allah is all-powerful. He created the universe and is in control of everything. He has predetermined people's lives (decided what will happen), though people do have free will (see p.20).
- 3) **BENEVOLENT** — Allah is all-good — he can do no evil. He cares for his people — this is seen in his intervention in the world, e.g. his revelations to the prophets were to show people how to live a good life.
- 4) **JUST** — Muslims believe Allah will judge people's behaviour in a fair way. This concept is particularly important to Shi'a Muslims — known as 'Adl', it's one of the 'Usul ad-Din' (see p.16).
- 5) **IMMANENT** — Allah is present and involved in the world. He's close to every human and knows them.
- 6) **TRANSCENDENT** — Allah's also above everything — he can't be thought of in human terms. He has no equal.

"And We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein." Qur'an 50:16

There are ninety-nine names for Allah listed in the Qur'an. Each refers to one of his characteristics. Points 1-4 above are each English translations of one of these names (originally in Arabic). Muslims recite them in daily prayers.

Adam and Ibrahim were Prophets...

Belief in the prophets is an article of faith for both Sunnis and Shi'as (p.16).

- 1) Allah's compassion means he can't leave people to sin without helping them. So he sends messages about how to live a good life. He almost always does this via angels, who pass on his words to human prophets (rasuls). Risalah is the concept of messaging — the way Allah communicates with humans.
- 2) Allah chose many people as prophets. 25 prophets are mentioned in the Qur'an, although some believe there have been 124 000. Some prophets were given holy books to pass on to humankind.
- 3) Muslims believe the prophets taught the same basic ideas, most importantly belief in one god. They see all the prophets as equal to each other — "We make no distinction between any of them" (Qur'an 2:136).
- 4) Muslims believe the prophets performed miracles — they did so to prove they were really prophets.
- 5) The first prophet was Adam, who was also the first man, created by Allah in his image. Others were Ibrahim (Abraham), Isma'il (Ishmael), Musa (Moses), Dawud (David), Isa (Jesus) and Muhammad.
- 6) Adam was sent to Earth after eating fruit forbidden to him by Allah. Allah forgave him his sin though. Adam is considered to have been the first Muslim. Some believe he first built the Ka'aba (p.23).
- 7) Ibrahim rejected the idea of many different gods. Muslims can learn from his devotion to Allah — he proved his faith by being willing to sacrifice his own son, Isma'il (see p.24). Ibrahim is thought to have rebuilt the Ka'aba and he and his family's story plays an important role in the hajj rituals (see p.23).

...Isma'il, Musa, Dawud, Isa and Muhammad were Prophets too

- 1) Ibrahim's son Isma'il was also a prophet and helped him build the Ka'aba. It's believed many Arabs, including Muhammad, are descended from Isma'il — he's known as Abul Arab, the father of the Arabs.
- 2) Musa is the only prophet that Allah spoke to directly, rather than through the angel Jibril (Gabriel). He's important as he kept trying to guide people to believing in one god, even when they worshipped others.
- 3) Dawud is known for killing Jalut (Goliath) during a battle between Jalut's large army and Talut's (Saul's) smaller one. Dawud later succeeded Talut as king. As well as his bravery, Muslims can learn from his wisdom and his loyalty to Allah — he would pray for a third of each night.
- 4) Allah sent Isa when he thought people had strayed from Musa's teachings. Muslims believe Isa wasn't crucified (Allah wouldn't let that happen) but after 3 years' teaching Allah brought him up into heaven.
- 5) Muslims believe all these prophets paved the way for Muhammad:

Muhammad

- Muhammad was born about 570 CE in Makkah (Mecca). One day, while Muhammad was meditating, Allah sent the angel Jibril to him with a message.
- Muhammad was scared at first, but as Jibril gradually revealed more and more of the message from Allah, Muhammad began preaching this message to others.
- The early messages said people should worship one god, Allah, and that people would be judged on their behaviour. Later on, the revelations gave more detail on how Muslims should live their lives.
- Eventually, this message from Allah was written down as the Qur'an. The Qur'an is seen by Muslims as a miracle — the final revelation from Allah.
- Muhammad is often called the 'seal of the prophets' — most Muslims believe he was the last prophet that there will be. He is believed to have been a wise leader, who settled disputes and brought different communities together. He performed several miracles.
- As Muhammad was Allah's last prophet, Muslims pay particular attention to his words and actions. They use them to work out how to live their lives (p.19), as they see him as a role model.

The Qur'an is the Word of Allah

Qur'an is sometimes spelt 'Koran' in English.

- 1) Muslims think the Qur'an is the most important holy book. They believe it's a complete and accurate record of Allah's exact words to Muhammad, as Qur'an 53:10-11 describes: "he revealed to His Servant what he revealed. The heart did not lie [about] what it saw." The Qur'an allows humans to know Allah.
- 2) In the Qur'an, Allah tells Muslims what they need to know and how to lead their lives to please him. Muslims try to live according to its guidance. This helps them be rewarded by Allah and get to Paradise.
- 3) Many Muslims learn the Qur'an by heart. The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic — if it's written in another language the meaning might change, so Muslims learn Arabic to ensure they're reading the true Qur'an.
- 4) There's often dispute over how to interpret the Qur'an though, e.g. in relation to jihad (p.23). It can be difficult to apply its teachings to modern life, because so much has changed since it was revealed.

The Qur'an is Divided into 114 Surahs

- 1) The Qur'an is organised into 114 surahs (chapters), each made up of ayahs (verses). The surahs are in order of length — longest first, shortest last (except surah 1, a short statement of Muslims' basic beliefs).
- 2) Because the Qur'an is so important, Muslims treat it with great respect. The Qur'an is often ornately decorated, inside and out. Many Muslims:

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| 1. keep their Qur'an <u>wrapped up</u> to keep it clean | 3. keep it on a <u>higher shelf</u> than all other books |
| 2. <u>wash their hands</u> before touching it | 4. place it on a <u>special stand</u> when they read it |



- 3) The Qur'an is read during private and public prayers, so Muslims get to know it well.