



PART 9

ISLAM

SUMMARY

The history of Islam, one of the most significant cultural forces in the world today, began around 610 CE in the city of Mecca, when, Muslims believe, Muhammad began to receive revelations from God, which were recorded as the *Qur'an*. Muhammad's message – that there was only one God, who was omnipotent and merciful, and who will judge all humanity at the end of time – was initially not well received in Mecca, and he was forced out. In time, though, the new religion grew, both through conversions and – as a rising imperial power as well as a religion – military expansion. Within a hundred years of Muhammad's death, Islam dominated much of the Mediterranean world, including part of Europe. A schism had emerged, however, between the *Sunni* majority and the *Shi'a* over the succession to Muhammad.

Acceptance of the Muslim creed, which recognizes one God alone, with Muhammad as his prophet, is the first of five pillars which together shape believers' lives. The routine of daily prayers, *salah*, is the most obvious ritual element, but importantly, these are not just individual: by praying in the direction of Mecca, Muslims around the world demonstrate their unity. This sense of a community of believers is perhaps most obvious during Ramadan, the month of fasting, and in the fulfilment of *Hajj*, the duty to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once. Early on, Muslim scholars developed a complex legal system, *Shari'a*, to govern their community, while others made major contributions to the development of the arts and sciences.

Today Islam is thriving, not just in its traditional heartlands, but also in much of the West, as a result of significant migration since World War II. There has also been tension with the West, in part because of foreign policy questions, in part for more fundamental reasons. Some, such as the leaders of Iran's revolution of 1979, go further, seeing Western secularism as irreconcilable with Islam; while others are more comfortable with their faith's place in a pluralistic world.

A Historical Overview



Islam began in Mecca about 610 CE. The dominant religion of Arabia at this time was a form of the old Semitic religion, with shrines of various gods and goddesses in many places. There also appears to have been a widespread belief in a high god, or supreme god, Allah. The other gods were sometimes regarded as angels, and could be asked to intercede with the supreme god on behalf of the worshippers.

Most of the Arabs were members of nomadic tribes, and believed more in human excellence than in any divine power. They believed that what happened to them was determined by Fate or Time, which they thought of, not as a being to be worshipped, but simply as 'the course of events'. Some tribes, or parts of tribes, had become Christian, and there were Jewish communities in Medina and elsewhere in western Arabia. Thus, certain Jewish and Christian ideas were familiar to many Arabs.

BEGINNINGS

Islam began, not among nomads, but among city-dwellers engaged in far-flung commercial enterprises. Towards the end of the sixth century, the merchants of Mecca gained a monopoly of trade between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, which passed up the west coast of Arabia by camel caravan. Mecca had a sanctuary, the Ka'ba, which was an ancient pilgrimage centre, and the surrounding district was sacred. All this facilitated the growth of trade, but the wealth that poured into Mecca led to social tensions, especially among the younger men.

Muhammad was born in Mecca, around the year 570 CE. In about 610, he came to believe he was receiving messages from God, which he was to convey to his fellow Meccans. These messages, or revelations, revealed over 23 years, were later collected and form the *Qur'an*. They asserted that God was One (Allah), and that he was both merciful and all-powerful, controlling the course of events. On the Last Day, he would judge people according to their acts, and assign them to heaven or hell. Part of the conduct he expected of people was a generous use of wealth. In the revelations, Muhammad himself was spoken of, sometimes as simply a warner, telling of God's punishment for sinners, sometimes as a prophet, or messenger, of God. Muhammad sincerely believed these

revelations were not his own composition, but the actual speech of God, conveyed to him by an angel. This is still the belief of Muslims.

Muhammad gained a number of followers, who met frequently with him, and joined him in the worship of God. But his messages were not all well received. The Meccan merchants were roused to vigorous opposition by the criticisms of their practices implied in the *Qur'an*. The merchants spoke of the old pagan gods, but the *Qur'an* came to emphasize that there is only one God – that 'there is no deity but God'. As opposition grew, the Quranic messages began to speak of former prophets who had met with opposition, and of the way in which God had preserved them and their followers, and brought disaster on their opponents. Among the stories were those of Noah and the Flood, Lot and the destruction of Sodom, and Moses escaping from Pharaoh.

EMIGRATION TO MEDINA

Muhammad's followers were now persecuted in various ways by his opponents, who were often their own relatives. Eventually it became impossible for him to carry on his religious activity in Mecca. An initial emigration of a handful of Muslims took place to the neighbouring Christian kingdom of Abyssinia, whose Christian ruler regarded kindly the message of Islam, and refused to hand over the Muslims to their adversaries from Mecca. Later, these emigrants joined the others in the main emigration of Muslims from Mecca in 622, when Muhammad, preceded by about seventy men and their families, emigrated to Medina. This emigration, the *Hijrah*, became the event that marked the beginning of the Islamic era. Medina was a fertile oasis, and the inhabitants were divided into two hostile groups. Most of them accepted Muhammad as prophet, and agreed that they and the emigrants from Mecca would form a single community or federation. Possibly they were more ready to accept Muhammad because they had heard from local Jewish clans that a messiah was expected. They were also hopeful that he would help them to overcome their divisions.

At Medina the religion of Islam took shape. The main ritual forms, modelled on Muhammad's example, were: worship (or prayer), almsgiving, fasting for the whole month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca, including ceremonies at neighbouring sites. The messages revealed to Muhammad at Medina included legal regulations for matters where Arab custom was unsatisfactory, such as the inheritance of wealth and the avoidance of incest.

He is Allah, besides whom there is no other god. He is the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, the Giver of Peace, the Keeper of Faith; the Guardian, the Mighty One, the All-powerful, the Most High! Exalted be He above their idols! He is Allah, the Creator, the Originator, the Modeller. His are the gracious names. All that is in heaven and earth gives glory to Him. He is the Mighty, the Wise One.

The Qur'an, Surah 59:23–24.

If you ask them who it is that has created the heavens and the earth and subjugated the sun and the moon, they will say 'Allah'. How then are they turned away?

The Qur'an, Surah 29:61.

The Jewish clans in Medina were associated with Muhammad's federation, as allies of Arab member clans, but nearly all the Jews refused to accept him as prophet. They mocked parts of the *Qur'an*, and sometimes actively opposed the Muslims. Muhammad expelled two Jewish clans from Medina, and had the men of a third executed. Until after the conquest of Mecca, he had few contacts with Christians.

At first, Muhammad had no special political powers at Medina, beyond being head of the emigrants from Mecca. After a year or two, however, all his followers there – now called Muslims – became involved in hostilities with the pagan Meccans. By 630, Muhammad was strong enough to take Mecca. He treated his enemies generously, and won most of them over to become Muslims. Many tribes all over Arabia also joined his federation and became Muslims. Because of his successes, Muhammad's authority as head of state was unquestioned.

THE FIRST CALIPHS

'He who honours Muhammad must know that he is dead. But he who honours the God of Muhammad must know that He is living and immortal.' Muhammad died in 632, and with these words his first successor, Abu Bakr (c. 573–634), encouraged the Muslim community and pointed them to the task ahead.

On his death, Muhammad left both a religion and a state. At first, the state had the form of a federation of tribes or clans, but as it expanded it became more organized. The head of state was known as the 'caliph' (*khalifa*) – the 'successor' or 'deputy' of Muhammad. Raiding their neighbours had been a normal occupation of the nomadic Arab tribes, and Muhammad and the first caliphs realized they could not keep peace within the federation unless they found some outlet for the energies of the tribesmen. They therefore organized raiding expeditions (*ghazawat*) in the direction of Syria and Iraq. The aim of these was to obtain booty, including domestic animals, and the first raids from Medina were very successful. There was a power vacuum in the region, because the two great powers of the day – the Byzantine and Persian Empires – had been almost constantly at war for half a century, and were now exhausted. In a few decisive battles, the Muslims overcame such opposition as the empires presented. Instead of returning to Medina after each campaign, they established forward base camps, so that they could go further afield in the next expedition. Following this strategy, within twelve years of Muhammad's death they had occupied Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, and were advancing westwards into Libya and eastwards into what is now Iran.

The Byzantine and Persian governors of the provinces fled, and the Muslims made treaties with the local inhabitants, giving them the status of 'protected minorities'. These groups ordered their own internal affairs, but paid tribute, or tax, to the Muslim governor. The status of protected minority was open only to 'people of the book' – communities who believed in one God and possessed a written scripture, such as Jews and Christians. The *jizya* – tax – that these protected minorities paid was in lieu of the *zakat* – poor-due – paid by Muslims, this not being required of minorities. However, the *jizya* did act as an incentive for minorities to accept Islam.

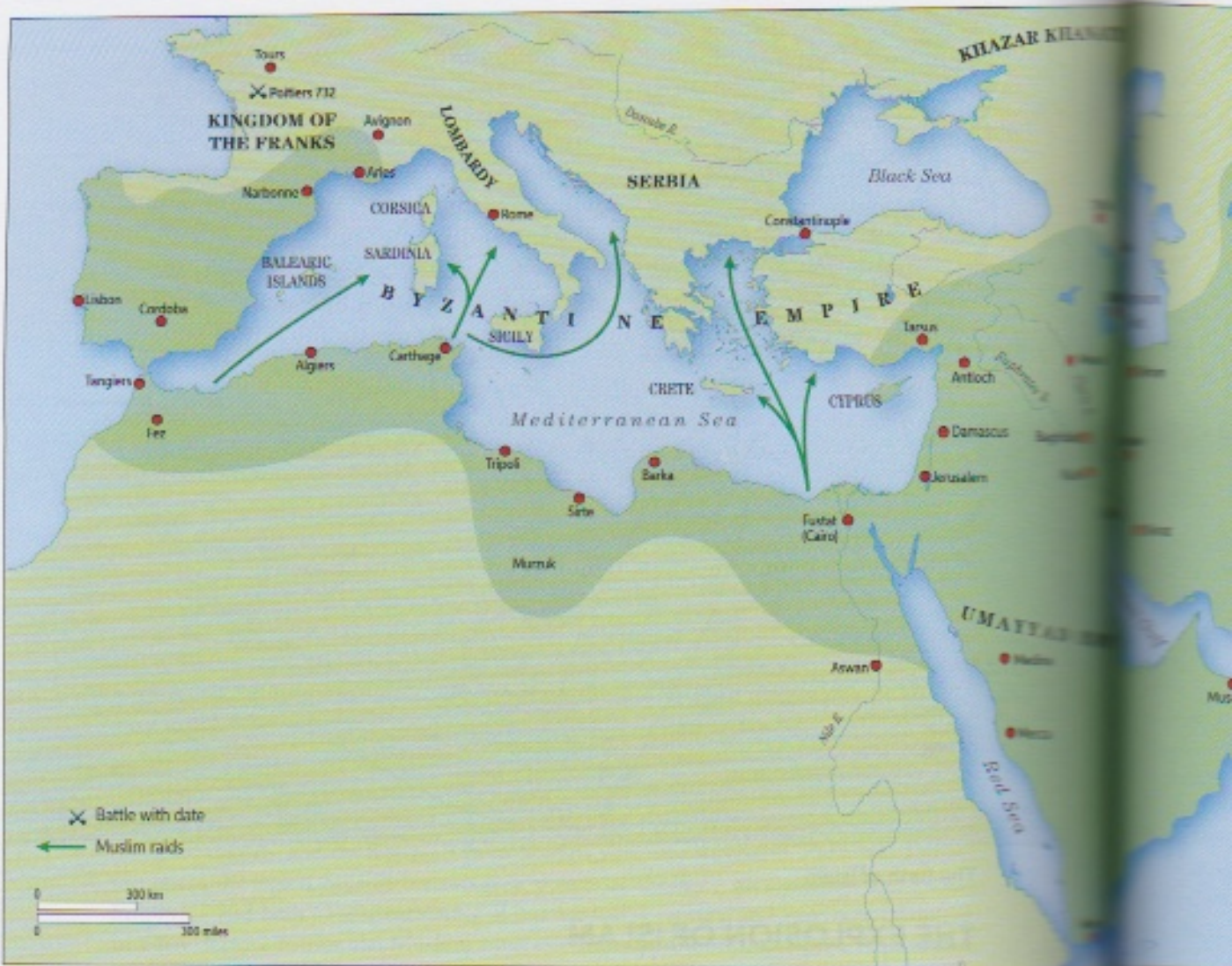


The Birth of Islam

THE EXPLOSION OF ISLAM

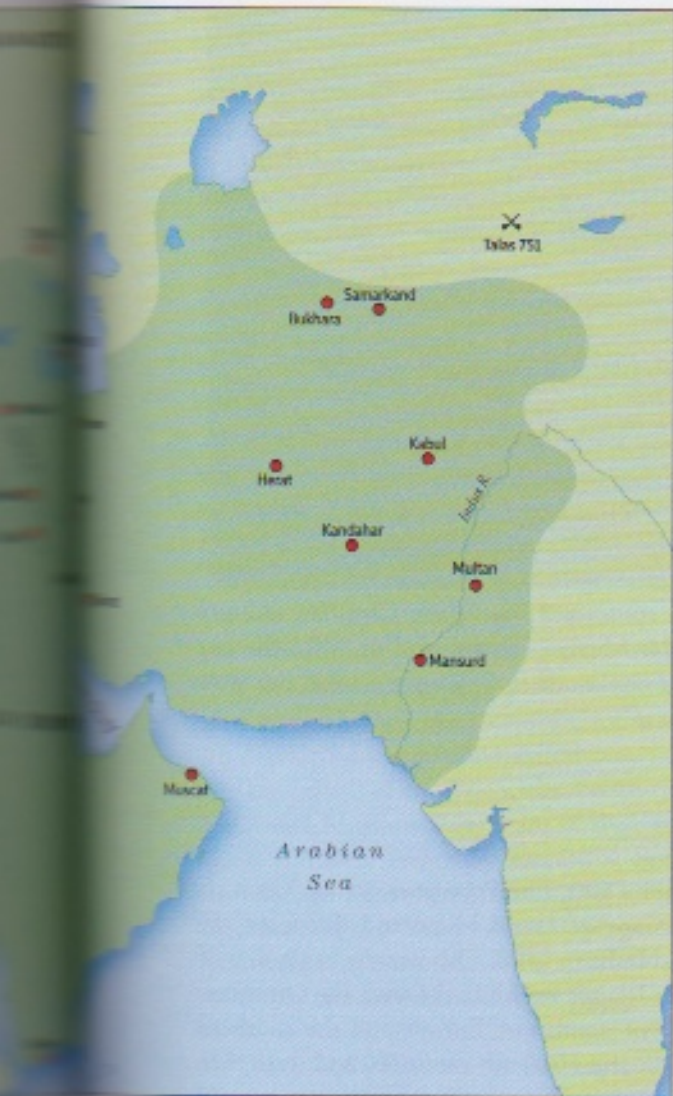
Apart from some periods of civil strife among Muslims, this expansion continued for a century. Westwards the Muslims occupied North Africa to the Atlantic, crossed into Spain, and for a few years held the region round Narbonne, in southern France. At the Battle of Tours, France, in 732 a Muslim raiding expedition was defeated by a French army, but this did not loosen the Muslim hold on Spain. Northwards, they raided as far as Constantinople (modern Istanbul), but failed to occupy any of Asia Minor (Turkey). Eastwards, after occupying the whole of Persia and Afghanistan, they penetrated into central Asia, and crossed the line of the River Indus in modern Pakistan. Until 750, this vast area remained a single state, ruled by the caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty.

Most of the inhabitants of these regions were not immediately converted to Islam, but became protected minorities. The military expeditions, though dignified with the title of



The Extent of Islam in 750 CE

'holy war' (*jihad*), were raids for booty – and not to make converts. The idea that opponents were given the choice of 'Islam or the sword' is false, except in the case of pagan Arab tribes. The protected minorities were on the whole well treated, since Muslim rulers felt it to be a point of honour that their 'protection' should be effective. Members of these minorities, however, saw themselves as second-class citizens, and over the centuries there was a steady trickle of converts to Islam. In this way Islam became the dominant religion in lands which were the original home of Christianity. In the seventh century though, Zoroastrianism – the official religion of the Persian Empire – was in decline, and conversion from it to Islam was quite rapid and extensive.



CONSOLIDATION

In 750 the Umayyad dynasty of caliphs, based in Damascus, ended, and for the next 500 years, the 'Abbasid dynasty ruled from Baghdad. They never took over control of Islamic Spain, and gradually lost authority over other outlying provinces. A local governor with a powerful army would insist on being succeeded by a person of his choice, maintaining only weak links with the caliph. In 945 the 'Abbasid caliph was even forced to delegate supreme political and military authority over Baghdad and the central provinces. However, there continued to be 'Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad, though without political power, until the destructive Mongol invasion in 1258.

Whereas the Umayyad period was one of growth and adaptation for Islam and the Arabs, the first century or two of 'Abbasid rule was marked by consolidation. All the cultural forms needed for the life of a great empire flourished. A central place was given to the development and elaboration of Islamic law, the *Shari'a*, which formed the basis of social structure. The *Shari'a* was derived in part from rules in the *Qur'an*, but to a greater extent from the example of Muhammad, known from the collections of *Hadith* – sometimes translated 'traditions' – stories about his

deeds and sayings. This study of law, or jurisprudence, became the core of Islamic higher education.

Subordinate scholarly disciplines were concerned with the text of the *Qur'an*, the interpretation of the *Qur'an*, grammar, lexicology, and theological doctrine. There were also the 'foreign sciences' – Greek philosophy, medicine, mathematics, and natural science. Many Greek books were translated into Arabic, and considerable advances were made in the sciences, literature, the arts, and the skills of government and administration. Almost at the same time, scientific and mathematical advancement were further enhanced, as advances made in the Muslim East seeped back to the West, with increasing interaction between the worlds of Islam and Europe.

TO THE EAST

After 750, military expansion slowed, and almost the only advance was further into India, where the climax of Islamic power was under the Mughal emperors from 1556 until 1707, when most of the subcontinent was subject to them. Hindus were treated as 'people of the book' because their philosophers – though not most ordinary Hindus – were monotheists. Though there were group conversions to Islam, most of the population remained Hindu.

Islamic rule also spread by peaceful methods. Muslim traders with camel caravans took it into the West African steppe, and sea traders carried it to the East African coast. From India it spread – mainly through trade – to Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines; and from central Asia it moved into eastern China.

Local people were impressed by the confidence and high culture of the Muslim traders, allowed them to marry local women, and often after a time decided themselves to become Muslims. Converts often kept many of their old customs, and did not immediately observe the *Shari'a* fully. But over the centuries they moved closer to standard Islam, and at the same time the number of Muslims kept increasing.

Prior to 1500 the main area where Islam contracted was Spain. Christian military pressure gradually whittled away the area under Muslim control, and in 1492 the last Sultan of Granada had to surrender. Muslims continued in Spain for a time, but were executed or driven out by the Inquisition.

THE IMPACT OF EUROPE

A new era in the history of Islam began about 1500. The Portuguese sailor Vasco da Gama (c. 1460–1524), having rounded the Cape of Good Hope and disrupted the Muslim trade on the East African coast, reached India in 1498. This was the beginning of the impact of Europe on the eastern part of the Islamic world. In the west, the Ottomans took over the caliphate, and conquered much of south-east Europe and the southern coast of the Mediterranean during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and were then in military and diplomatic contact with European states, as well as having commercial dealings. The full force of the European impact, however, was not felt until after the Industrial Revolution.

The impact of Europe on the Islamic world – as on Asia and Africa generally – was many-sided: economic, political, intellectual, and religious. It began with ocean-borne trade, but went on to political interference and finally colonization. As European technology developed, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, richer Muslims wanted to share in its comforts and conveniences, and independent rulers wanted their countries to have railways and other forms of communication, plumbing, electricity for lighting, telephones, and so forth. Military hardware was also high on the list, and it then became necessary to train men to use it. Colonial powers also introduced Western-type education, to train men for minor administrative posts. After 1800, the Christian churches sent



missionaries to most parts of the world, but in Islamic lands they made relatively few converts; their chief contribution was to develop education and medical care.

By the early twentieth century, informed Muslims were aware of their situation. Movements for political independence grew and were eventually successful. Some industry was developed, based on Western technology. Most Muslim countries adopted an essentially Western educational system, because religious leaders were not prepared to adapt the traditional Islamic education they controlled. In many Muslim countries this has led to two parallel systems of education: a secular system inherited from Europe, and a traditional religious system of education, revolving around *madrasahs* (Islamic schools). The discovery of vast quantities of oil in the Middle East was at first exploited by Westerners, but later, when taken over by Muslim governments, became a weapon in world politics. Until the end of World War II, Muslim countries were united in their struggle to be free of colonialism. Since then, splits between 'progressive' and 'conservative' groups have become increasingly apparent; and the conservative and reactionary groups have been strengthened by the development of Islamic fundamentalism.

The Masjid-i Jahan-Numa ('world-reflecting mosque'), usually known as the Jama Masjid, is the principal mosque of Old Delhi, India, and was built by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan between 1650 and 1656 *ct.*

MONTGOMERY WATT

ISLAM TIMELINE

500 CE

1000 CE

1500 CE

2000 CE

- 570 Birth of Muhammad
- 622 Muhammad's hijrah from Mecca to Medina: Muslim Year 1
- 632 Muhammad dies; leadership passes to the caliph
- 661 Umayyad caliphate moves to Damascus
- 680 Death of Hussein at Karbala; commemorated as martyr by Shi'ites
- 711 Islamic Arab armies reach Spain
- 732 Battle of Poitiers stops Muslim expansion into France
- 762 Mansur establishes Baghdad as Abbasid capital
- 1071 Seljuk Turks defeat Byzantines
- 1058–1111 al-Ghazali, Sufi scholar, synthesizer of faith and reason
- 1099 Crusaders capture Jerusalem
- 1165–1240 Ibn al-'Arabi, philosopher of the mystical unity of being
- 1258 Mongol invaders destroy Baghdad
- 1207–73 Rumi, Persian mystical poet
- 1291 Muslims expel Crusaders from Palestine
- 1492 Christians take Granada, final Muslim outpost in Spain
- 1529 Ottoman Turks reach Vienna
- 1703–92 Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, leader of traditionalist revival in Arabia
- 1838–97 Jamal-ad-Din al-Afghani, promoter of modern Islamic cultural revival
- 1924 Kemal Ataturk, modernizer and secularizer, abolishes caliphate in Turkey
- 1947 Pakistan formed as Islamic state
- 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini (1902–89) sets up a revolutionary Islamic regime in Iran
- 2001 Taliban, Afghanistan hardliners, demolish 1500-year-old Buddha statues in Bamiyan as 'idols'
- 2001 Osama bin Laden launches terror attacks in USA

The Unity and Variety of Islam

Islam has two basic groups – the Sunni and Shi'a. Their origins can be traced back to a question which faced the first generation of Muslims: how was Muhammad, 'the Seal of the Prophets', to be succeeded as leader of the Muslim community? For Muslims this question was always a religious as well as a political one.



SUNNIS: COMMUNITY CONSENSUS

The answer of the Sunnis, who constitute the Muslim majority of approximately 85 per cent, can be summarized as follows. No one could succeed Muhammad in his nature and quality as prophet, for the *Qur'an* finalized and perfected the revelation of divine guidance, and declared Muhammad to be 'the Seal of the Prophets'. Muhammad's successor could therefore be no more than the guardian of the prophetic legacy. He would be a caliph (*halifa*) with subordinate authority as leader of the believers, having responsibility for the administration of community affairs, in obedience to the *Qur'an* and prophetic precedent. By the process of consensus (*ijma*), the community would select its caliph from amongst the male membership of the Quraish tribe to which Muhammad belonged.

Following Muhammad's death in 632 CE, caliphal succession passed from Abu Bakr (632–634) to 'Umar (634–644), 'Uthman (644–656), and 'Ali (656–661). These, 'the four rightly guided caliphs' are deemed to have lived so close to the Prophet that their example, together with Muhammad's, is taken to comprise the authoritative *sunna*, or custom, for all later generations of Muslims to follow.

The Sunnis gradually developed a comprehensive system of community law, the *Shari'a*, which provided cohesion within the community, while allowing for variance between four orthodox law schools, the Malikis, Hanafis, Shafi'is, and Hanbalis. The principle of *ijma* remained central; notionally the consensus of the whole community, though in practice that of the legal scholars.

After the 'rightly guided caliphs', the caliphate became a dynastic institution, regarded as the guardian of the *Shari'a*. But in 1924, with the demise of the Ottoman Caliphate, it was abolished. The *ijma* of contemporary Sunni Islam seems to be that, if the *Shari'a* is observed by the national governments of Muslim states, there is no need for the international office of caliph to be restored.



SHI'A: AUTHORITY AND LEADERSHIP

For Shi'a Muslims, the principal figure of religious authority is the *imam*. Muhammad completed 'the cycle of prophethood', and with it the possibility of further divine revelation. But Shi'a Muslims believe he instituted 'the cycle of initiation' for the continuing guidance of the community, by appointing as his successor an *imam*, invested with the qualities of inspired and infallible interpretation of the *Qur'an*. Accordingly, the Shi'a speak of themselves as 'people of appointment and identification'.

The first *imam* was 'Ali. As cousin, adopted son, and later son-in-law of Muhammad, by marriage to Fatima, he was not just a member of Muhammad's tribe, but also of 'the people of his house'. This intimate family relationship is significant: the Shi'a believe 'Ali inherited Muhammad's 'spiritual abilities', his *wilayah*. He was infallible in his interpretation of the *Qur'an* and leadership of the community, and passed on these qualities to the sons of his marriage with Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn, and they to their descendants in the line of *imams*. The Shi'a believe that 'the cycle of *wilayah*' will continue until the end of human history when – on the Last Day – humankind will be resurrected and judged for the afterlife.

The majority of Shi'a, known as Imamis, most of whom live in Iran, believe the cycle will be completed with the messianic return of the twelfth *imam*, often referred to as the '*imam of the period*'. He is said to have been withdrawn into 'occultation' since the third century of Islam. His guidance is still accessible through 'doctors of the law' (*mujtahids*), of whom the most senior in Iran are the *ayatollahs*, who have the right to interpret the *Shari'a* and to make religious rulings.

The history of the Imamis has seen two important offshoots. The Zaidis, mostly found in Yemen today, do not limit the number of *imams* to twelve, and interpret their function in a

The Dome of the Rock, on the Temple Mount, Jerusalem, built by the fifth caliph, 'Abd-al-Malik, is the third holiest place in Islam.

manner similar to the Sunni caliph. The Isma'ilis, meanwhile, have developed highly esoteric doctrines surrounding the *imam*. They have two major groups, the Nizaris, who look to the Aga Khan as their *imam*, and the Musta'lis – more commonly known as the Bohra Muslims – who believe in a hidden *imam* who is represented on earth by their leader, the *Da'i*.

SUFISM

Sunni and Shi'a Islam reflect the diversity of the Muslim response to divine revelation. Sunni Islam tends to be more concerned to create and preserve structures of society within which the community may fulfil its God-given responsibilities. Shi'a Islam began in the martyrdoms of 'Ali and his son, Husayn, and has always been conscious of suffering and alienation in the human condition. It searches for answers in a more esoteric interpretation of the *Qur'an* and *Shari'a*. But there is no hard and fast distinction: Sunni Islam is also concerned with the inner life, and Shi'a with the outer. Moreover, the important mystical tradition of Sufism has seen a confluence of Shi'a and Sunni consciousness.

Sunnism and Shi'ism represent the major doctrinal varieties of Islam: Sufism denotes the inner spiritual life of both. Sufis are not a distinct group or sect; they are simply Muslims – Sunnis or Shi'as – who seek intimacy with God through a discipline of spiritual purification. The heart of Sufism is the love of God, and is built on the Quranic assurance that 'God loves the God-fearing' (*surah* 3:76), and fulfils their devotions in love. God is heard to say in a Holy *Hadith*:

The complete mystic 'way' includes both intellectual belief and practical activity; the latter consists in getting rid of the obstacles in the self, and in stripping off its base characteristic and vicious morals, so that the heart may attain to freedom from what is not God and to constant recollection of Him.

Al-Ghazali, *Deliverance from Error* (12th century).

Nothing is more beloved to Me than that my servant approaches Me with constant acts of devotion. And when I love him I am the eye by which he sees and the ear by which he hears. When he approaches a span, I approach a cubit; and when he comes walking, I come running.

Among early Muslims remembered for their devotional insight ranks a woman from Baghdad, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (eighth century CE), who prayed:

O Beloved of my heart, I have none like unto Thee, therefore have pity this day on the sinner who comes to Thee. O my Hope and my Rest and my Delight, the heart can love none other than Thee.

Later treatises on Sufi devotion defined love as that which 'obliterates from the heart everything except the Beloved'.

Sacred Writings

For Muslims, the *Qur'an* represents the supreme revelation of God's word in written form. It is unique among revealed books, universal in its application, and eternal in its relevance. It is extracted from a tablet on which God's word is recorded and kept in heaven. Orthodox belief among the Sunni majority considers the *Qur'an* to be co-eternal with God. According to the great Muslim scholar and jurist Abu Hanifa (d. c. 767), 'its letters, vowel points, and writing are all created, for these are the works of man; but God's word is uncreated... he who says that the word of God is created is an infidel'.

Muslims show great reverence for the *Qur'an*, handling and storing it with great care. Reading the *Qur'an* is widely considered to bring rewards, increasing with each word read; the reader will be brought closer to God through frequent reading. Memorizing the Quranic text is considered an act of considerable piety: anyone who memorizes the entire text (a *hafiz*) is highly respected. Furthermore, the pages of the *Qur'an* are considered by many Muslims to have healing qualities.

There is a supplementary body of sacred writing in Islam: the *Hadith* collections, or Prophetic Traditions, much more voluminous than the *Qur'an*, which serve as a model for Muslims around the world in their daily lives.



THE QUR'AN

The *Qur'an* is divided into 114 chapters. With the exception of chapter one, The Opening, these are arranged in order of decreasing length. Each chapter (*surah*) has a number and a title, which is typically based on a key word or theme in the chapter: The Women (4), The Cave (18), The Moon (54). The basic unit of a chapter is the verse (*ayah*). In all, the *Qur'an* has more than 6200 verses. The Quranic chapters are identified with two periods: those revealed to Muhammad at Mecca, and those revealed at Medina. The former tend to reflect the voice of Muhammad as protester, criticizing the Meccan status quo centred on idolatry, social injustice, and other evils. The Medinan chapters reflect Muhammad's role as community leader, addressing legal issues, matters to do with building the structures of state, inter-ethnic, and inter-religious relations.

When the Qur'an is read, listen to it with attention, and hold your peace: that ye may receive Mercy.

The Qur'an, surah 7:204.

It is misleading, therefore, to think of Sufism as an 'ism'. The English word comes from the Arabic *tasawwuf*, which could be translated 'self-purification', provided we understand that human endeavour is incomplete unless fulfilled by divine love. *Sufi* (feminine, *sufiyya*) denotes a person whose heart is purified from the pollution of this world.

The prophet Muhammad is venerated by Muslims as a Sufi. Religious tradition tells of the miraculous cleansing of his heart as a child, and of his ascension to heaven (*miraj*) by night when, through prayer, he experienced the mystery of God's all-embracing unity. Amongst his early followers were the so-called 'people of the bench' (*'abl al-suffa*), who rarely left the mosque in Medina, due to the constancy of their prayers. They wore a simple tunic made of wool (*suf*), symbolizing their obedience to the example of the many prophets – especially Jesus son of Mary (*Isa ibn Mariam*) – who practised asceticism in rejection of worldly comforts.

Strictly speaking, a Sufi should never describe himself, nor a Sufiyya herself, by this term. They use the related word *mutasawwif* (feminine, *mutasawwifa*), 'one who tries to be a sufi'. The difference is critical. A classical Persian Sufi authority (al-Hujwiri) explained it as follows:

The sufi is he that is dead to self and lives by the Truth; he has escaped from the grip of human faculties and has truly attained to God. The mutasawwif is he that seeks to reach this rank by means of self-mortification, and in his search rectifies his conduct in accordance with the Sufis' example.

The way of purification through self-mortification involves the spiritual path, *tarīqah*, which is modelled on the prophet's heavenly ascent. The prophet Muhammad once said that the paths are equal in number to the true believers, meaning that each person should develop his or her own spiritual practice.

As Islam developed and spread, Sufis seeing the danger of undisciplined spiritual practices, insisted that a *mutasawwif* must follow the guidance of a spiritual master (*shaykh*, *pir*). To dispense with a spiritual master is to follow the devil. So the path was institutionalized in a variety of spiritual fraternities, or orders, which followed different masters. They stretched across the medieval Muslim world, and though they varied greatly from one another, each united its followers from different continents in common spiritual disciplines.

All these orders drew a fundamental distinction in the nature of spiritual practice. Acts of self-mortification are called *mujahadat* – a word connected to the Arabic term *jihad*, which means 'striving'. The Prophet Muhammad explained that the highest level of *jihad* is the inward striving of the soul for purification. In a clear reference to the word *jihad*, referring to the personal struggle for self-purification, the *Qur'an* says that Allah 'will surely guide those who strive hard [conduct *jihad*] for Our cause.' (The *Qur'an*, surah 29:69)

God dwells in the heart, according to the Tradition, 'Neither my earth nor my heavens contain me, but I am contained in the heart of my servant who believes.'

Ibn al-'Arabi, *Tarjuman al-Ashnaq* (13th century)

The Qur'an presents a holistic theology, claiming authority over all aspects of life, allowing no separation between sacred and secular. It includes diverse themes, containing morals indicating right from wrong, as well as injunctions to obey and fear God. There are parables, or allegorical stories teaching a lesson, which Muslim scholars stress are not designed as entertainment, but rather for instruction. Passages of sheer ecstasy, relating to Muhammad's revelatory experiences, were later to become models for Islamic mystics. There are legal passages, designed to assist with the organization of the

Muslim community; chapters of encouragement, especially those revealed when the embryonic Muslim community was facing dangers and challenges; sections presenting oral traditions relating to Biblical characters and events; sections including sarcasm, argumentation, response, mercy, and even ruthlessness; and biographical material, from which a life of Muhammad can be constructed.

With such diverse themes, revealed over the final twenty-three years of Muhammad's lifetime, some verses appear to contradict others. This is addressed by the Qur'an itself in *surah* 2:106, which explains that, where the content is contradictory, later verses abrogate earlier verses. Muslims consider this does not point to error in the earlier verse; rather, the relevance of the verse being abrogated was specific to a time or context, with the later verse addressing a broader or later context. So prayer in the direction of Jerusalem, referred to in *surah* 2:143, was abrogated by *surah* 2:144, stipulating prayer towards Mecca. This reflected the changing relationship between the emerging Muslim community and the Jewish community of Arabia.



Bronze casting of a surah from the Qur'an.

Whatever communications We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or like it. Do you not know that Allah has power over all things?

The Qur'an, *surah* 2:106

COMPILATION AND TRANSLATION

According to the Prophetic Traditions, the first official collection of the Qur'an took place under the first Caliph, Abu Bakr. However, regional variations occurred in copies of the Qur'an written or memorized, so the third Caliph, 'Uthman, made an official collection in 649/50. Oral traditions continued to circulate and diversify, and this variety was compounded by the inadequacies of contemporary Arabic script. Further reform and standardization were considered necessary, and this was undertaken by Abu Bakr bin Mujahid (d. 936). As a result of his efforts, seven readings of the Quranic text were accepted as canonical.



The *Qur'an* in its Arabic original has been prescribed in liturgical contexts by three of the four Sunni law schools since the earliest period of Islamic history. Only the Hanafite school has shown some flexibility, with founder Abu Hanifa allowing worshippers with no Arabic to recite the opening *surah* of the *Qur'an* in Persian, a right subsequently extended to speakers of other languages. In the twentieth century, there was further liberalization of attitudes towards translation – especially in Turkey and Egypt – amongst other schools of thought besides the Hanafite school. Nevertheless, translated texts are still considered as commentaries on the *Qur'an*, not the *Qur'an* itself.

Muslim prayer

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

Praise be to God, The Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds;

Most Gracious, Most Merciful;

Master of the Day of Judgment.

Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek.

Show us the straight way,

The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace,

Those whose (portion) is not wrath,

And who go not astray.

The Qur'an, Surah 1, transl. Yusuf Ali, 1934.

Used daily many times as a prayer.

THE HADITH

Hadith accounts are divided into two groups. The sacred *Hadith qudsi* are considered to include God's direct words, mediated through Muhammad, as in the case of the *Qur'an*; whereas the prophetic *Hadith sharif* record Muhammad's own wise words and deeds. The influential scholar al-Ghazali (1058–1111) shows the importance of the *Hadith* collections when he says:

God has but one word, which differs only in the mode of its expression. On occasions God indicates His word by the Qur'an; on others, by words in another style, not publicly recited, and called the Prophetic tradition. Both are mediated by the Prophet.

The *Qur'an* recognizes earlier sacred writings: the Torah given to Moses, the Psalms to David, and the Gospel to Jesus. However, it charges both Jews and Christians with corrupting these earlier revelations, by changing the text, or wilfully misinterpreting it. Hence, the *Qur'an* sees itself as the final, perfect revelation, supplanting those which went before. Some Islamic thinkers recognize a measure of divine authority in the earlier scriptures, but challenge their interpretation by Jews and Christians.

PETER G. RIDDELL

CHAPTER 45

Beliefs



The Arabic term *iman* is used to designate the system of belief in Islam, drawing on Quranic verses.

ONENESS OF GOD

The Islamic belief system is centred on an uncompromising monotheism, called *tawhid*, the oneness of God. Many Quranic verses provide an insight into the attributes and characteristic features of God:

Allah is He besides Whom there is no god, the Everliving, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist; slumber does not overtake Him nor sleep; whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His; who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they cannot comprehend anything out of His knowledge except what He pleases. His knowledge extends over the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of them both tires Him not, and He is the Most High, the Great

(surah 2:255).

God is supreme, eternal, and omnipotent. He sees all things and is present everywhere. He is the sole creator and sustainer of the universe, and controls life and death for all creatures. God has ninety-nine names, according to Muslim belief, representing his numerous attributes and aspects. The *Hadith* accounts provide the most important source for these names. Some relate to compassion and love, yet the depiction of God within Muslim theology is more of a God whom one reveres, of whom one is in awe, and to whom one is obedient.

The nature of God can be gleaned in part by a series of negative statements made within the Islamic sacred writings:

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Say: He is Allah, the One! Allah, the eternally Besought of all! Whom all creatures need. He neither eats

O you who believe! Believe in Allah and His Apostle and the Book which He has revealed to His Apostle and the Book which He revealed before; and whoever disbelieves in Allah and His angels and His apostles and the Last Day, he indeed strays off into a remote error.

Qur'an, surah 4:136

nor drinks. He begetteth not nor was He begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him

(The Qur'an, surah 112).

God is not a trinity, but is one. God has not been created, nor is he in a relationship of father, brother, or son with any other. He depends on no one, and has no needs. Nothing resembles him. He is without imperfections.

ANGELS

Belief in angels is another important article of faith. The *Qur'an* records that angels are created from light, and are so numerous that only God knows their exact number. Angels have no offspring, being neither male nor female, and serve God in various ways. The

classical commentator Tabari defines angels as: 'God's messengers between Him and His prophets, and those of His servants to whom they are sent'.

The greatest of the angels is Jibril, or Gabriel, who was, according to Muslim belief, the angel who transmitted the *Qur'an* to Muhammad. Jibril also functions as the Holy Spirit within Islamic belief. An angel was the means used by God to tell Mary of the impending birth of her son Jesus:

When the angels said: O Mariam, surely Allah gives you good news with a Word from Him (of one) whose name is the Messiah, Isa son of Mariam, worthy of regard in this world and the hereafter, and of those who are made near (to Allah)'

(The Qur'an, surah 3:45).

Angels are assigned other tasks by God, according to Islamic belief. They utter continuous praise of God, they bear his throne, and accompany believers in prayer. According to the *Hadith*, angels also record the deeds of every person. The angel Izra'il is responsible for drawing out the souls of the dying, while Israfil will sound the trumpet on the Last Day, the Day of Judgment. Other angels guard hell and direct its affairs. The *Qur'an* warns that opposing the angels is tantamount to opposing God, as they are his envoys:

Whoever is an enemy to Allah and His angels and apostles, to Gabriel and Michael – Lo! Allah is an enemy to those who reject Faith

(surah 2:98).

REVEALED BOOKS

Sacred Scriptures revealed to humankind throughout history are of two types. The more substantial ones are called *Kutub* (books), while the smaller ones are known as *Suhuf* (scrolls). More than 100 works are believed to have been revealed throughout history, including scrolls revealed to Adam, Seth, Enoch, and Abraham, but now lost.

Only four revealed scriptures have survived, according to Islamic belief, and are mentioned by name in the *Qur'an*. The first is the *Tawrat*, the Jewish Torah, given by divine inspiration to Moses, according to the Quranic record: 'And before [the *Qur'an*] was the Book of Moses as a guide and a mercy...' (*surah* 46:12). This was followed by the *Zabur* (Psalms), revealed to David; the *Injil* (Gospel), revealed to Jesus; and the *Qur'an*, revealed to Muhammad. The various revealed books represented God's blueprint for people to live according to God's law.

For Muslims the *Qur'an* is the last and the definitive revelation, the repository of perfect truth, and it supplants all earlier revelations sent by God to humankind through the prophets. This is stated clearly in *Hadith* accounts anticipating events in the End Times:

Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah's Apostle said 'How will you be when the son of Mary [that is, Jesus] descends amongst you and he will judge people by the Law of the Qur'an and not by the law of Gospel?'

(*Sahih Bukhari*, Vol. 4, Book 55, No. 658).

God thus sends his angels with revealed books to the created world. A key link in this chain is provided by messengers and prophets, who must transmit the content of the revealed books to all people. Islamic belief considers a messenger (*Rasul*) to be a prophet (*Nabi*) of a specific type. A messenger is given a new set of divine laws and a new revealed book, whereas a prophet who is not a messenger is sent to transmit and implement previously revealed dispensations. The *Qur'an* mentions some twenty-five messengers by name, while the *Hadith* collections refer to a total of 124,000 prophets, of whom 313 were messengers. All prophets, whether messengers or not, are believed to perform miracles. The *Qur'an* also mentions that prophets – who have also been labelled 'guides' (13:7) and 'warners' (35:24) – have come to 'every nation', so Muslims accept that the founders of other great religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, may also have been prophets in their own time and place.

The words of the prophets are not their own, but those of God. The medieval scholar Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) portrays this prophetic role as mediator in the following terms:

Allah has chosen individuals from among humankind whom He has honoured by Himself speaking to them to mould them according to His understanding, and to make them the mediators between Himself and His servants.

It is in this context that Islamic prophets are believed to be free from sin.

Many of the prophets named in the *Qur'an* have counterparts in the Bible:

And We bestowed upon [Abraham] Isaac and Jacob; each of them We guided; and Noah did We guide aforetime; and of his seed (We guided) David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron. Thus do We reward the good'

(surah 6:84).

However, this is not the case with all: for example, Hud, Salih, and Luqman are all considered as Arabian prophets.

Muhammad represents the last messenger and prophet of God. Furthermore, according to the Islamic sacred writings, he is the greatest of all the prophets, having been given special functions:

Narrated Jabir bin 'Abdullah: Allah's Apostle said, 'I have been given five things which were not given to any amongst the Prophets before me'

(Sahih Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 8, No. 429).

These comprise divine assistance in achieving victory over his enemies, the right of prayer for his followers anywhere in the world, the right to take booty after battle, a mission to all humankind, and the right of intercession on the Day of Judgment.

RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT

The message transmitted by the prophets, contained in revealed books, borne by angels, and originating from God, warns Muslims of an impending Day of Resurrection and Judgment. The exact time of the Day of Judgment is unknown to all except Allah. All that is known is that it will be on a Friday, the tenth day of the month of Muharram.

The *Hadith* collections point to signs of the approaching Day of Judgment. These include an increase in sin in the world, widespread disobedience of parental authority and disrespect for elders, an increase in debauchery, an increase in the numbers of women vis-à-vis men in the world, and incompetent people of lowly station assuming positions of leadership.

On the Day of Judgment, all people will be judged according to their sincere repentance and good deeds, measured by the degree to which they have followed God's law (the *Shari'a*). Everyone's deeds will be weighed on scales, and no last minute repentance will be accepted:

And repentance is not for those who go on doing evil deeds, until when death comes to one of them, he says: Surely now I repent; nor (for) those who die while they are unbelievers. These are they for whom We have prepared a painful chastisement

(The *Qur'an*, surah 4:18).

The Islamic sacred writings describe an afterlife, with the descriptions being especially graphic in the *Hadith* collections. If one earns favour from God on the Day of Judgment, according to good deeds, right belief, and sincere repentance of sins, heaven is the reward. This is a place of eternal bliss, resembling a garden with rivers, carpets, cushions, fruit, and pure maidens.

In contrast, an eternal hell awaits those who have not followed God's law, or held right belief. Hell is a place of great torment, with fire and boiling water, where skin is scalded, renewed, and scalded again. The Tree of Zaqqum provides bad fruit, and the damned are forced to eat from it:

*... the tree of Zaqqum? Surely We have made it to be a trial to the unjust.
Surely it is a tree that grows in the bottom of the hell; its produce is as it were
the heads of the serpents. Then most surely they shall eat of it and fill (their)
bellies with it. Then most surely they shall have after it to drink of a mixture
prepared in boiling water. Then most surely their return shall be to hell*

(surah 37:62–68).

Belief in God's decrees is the final article of faith. The *Qur'an* stresses that all is decreed by God:

*And the sun runs on to a term appointed for it; that is the ordinance of the
Mighty, the Knowing. And (as for) the moon, We have ordained for it stages till
it becomes again as an old dry palm branch*

(surah 36:38–39).

God controls the past, present, and future of each individual Muslim. Among the Muslim masses, this translates to a firm belief in God's preordination of all things, often verging on fatalism. This receives sustenance from Quranic verses such as the following:

*Wherever you are, death will overtake you, though you are in lofty towers, and if
a benefit comes to them, they say: This is from Allah; and if a misfortune befalls
them, they say: This is from you. Say: All is from Allah, but what is the matter with
these people that they do not make approach to understanding what is told (them)?*

(surah 4:78).

At the level of Islamic scholarship, this article of faith has given rise throughout history to a dynamic debate about the degree of human ability to determine events, within an overall framework of God's predestination.

PETER G. RIDDELL

Worship and Festivals

The *Qur'an* sees men and women as religious beings. 'I created ... humankind only that they might worship me,' the Muslim hears God say in the *Qur'an*. Each individual is an 'abd of God, a term which conveys the twin meanings of 'worshipper' and 'servant' in a single word. And this description applies to all aspects of human life, all of which is lived under the command of God. There is no distinction between worship and the wholeness of human life.



SUBMISSION TO GOD

Islam understands itself fundamentally as being 'natural religion', in that every created thing exists in dependence upon God, in obedience to his creative and sustaining power, and with the purpose of expressing adoration to God. For the human, this should lead to a conscious commitment to a life of thankful and praise-giving obedience to God. The word *muslim* means one who lives his life according to God's will; Islam means 'submission to God'.

Worship (*ibada*) and the activities of the workaday world (*mu'amalat*) are joint expressions of the character of 'abd. The mosque cannot be separated from the marketplace. As far as worship is concerned, the *Qur'an* sees body and spirit as inseparably combined in the wholeness of human worship. Islam has no term for 'spirituality'; for its religious devotion seeks to preserve an equilibrium between the 'outward' and the 'inward' in worship. Believers' external acts of worship depend

O believers, when you stand up to pray, wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads, and your feet up to the ankles. If you are defiled, purify yourselves.

The Qur'an, surah 5:8.

Public worship is seventeen times better than private worship.

Al-Ghazali

on their internal intention, and the *Qur'an* is concerned that both should be 'for the pleasure of God'. So while the holy law provides a code of practice as a framework for Muslim worship, the worship depends on the inner dynamic of thankful and praise-giving obedience, the discipline of the soul to 'remember God always'.

THE SHAHADAH

The Islamic code of conduct is founded upon the bedrock of the testimony of faith, the *shahadah*. This is the first pillar of Islam. When spoken in Arabic, and with sincere intention, it is a commitment to obey God and follow the prophet.

'I bear witness that there is no god but God; I bear witness that Muhammad is the Apostle of God.' These are the first words breathed into a child's ear at birth, and the last which Muslims would utter with their dying breath – the lantern for life and the hope for the mercy of God in the life hereafter. They point to the one God, who has spoken finally through the *Qur'an*; and they point to Muhammad, 'the Seal of the Prophets', sent to all humankind to transmit and interpret the *Qur'an*. The words of the *shahadah* summon Muslims to worship throughout the world, and their meaning is the heart of prayer and meditation.

PRAYING TOGETHER

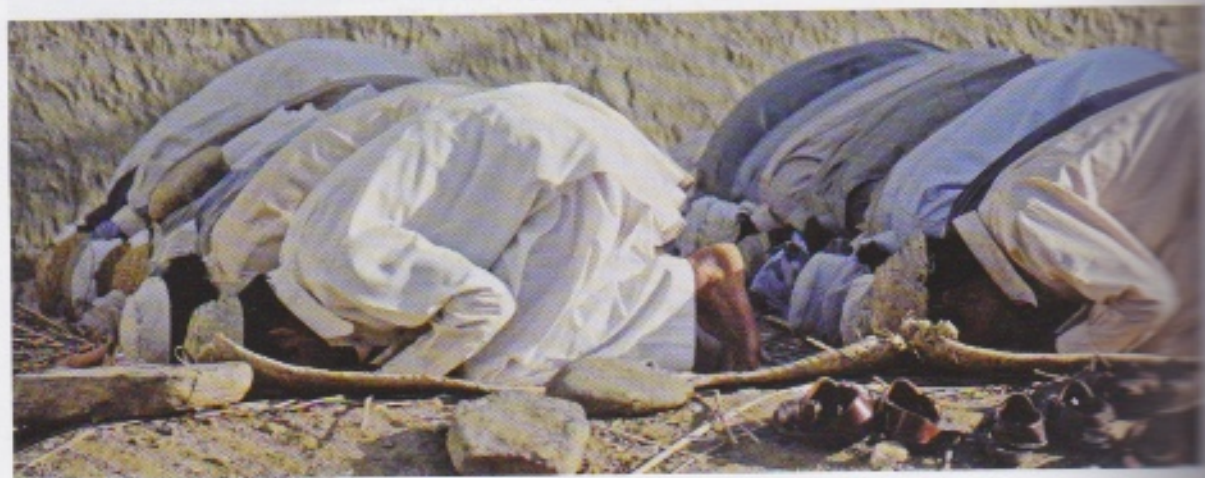
The *Qur'an* identifies a human being as 'worshipper', and also places the individual worshipper, male or female, in the context of a worshipping community.

Hold fast, all of you, to the rope of God, and do not separate ... and may there spring from you a community who invite to goodness, enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; such are they who are successful.

The *Qur'an*, surah 3:103

The *Shari'a* codifies and coordinates the practice of a worshipping community. Worship is a communal act, as well as one of individual commitment. To affirm the unity of God (*tawhid*) is

Muslim men, barefoot, pray together, facing Mecca.



necessarily to affirm the unity of the created order and of humankind in right worship.

This community orientation of Islamic worship is symbolized and demonstrated in the ritual of *salah*, the liturgical form of prayer, which it is the duty of all Muslims to observe at fixed hours. Prayer is the second pillar of Islam. There are five prayer times, each preceded by obligatory ritual washing: dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, sunset, and night. They serve to remind Muslims, in a regular and disciplined manner, of their status before God as 'worshipful servants'. From the moment of the *muezzin's* call, and the preliminary washings, Muslims practise *salah*. On Fridays *salah* is a communal act.

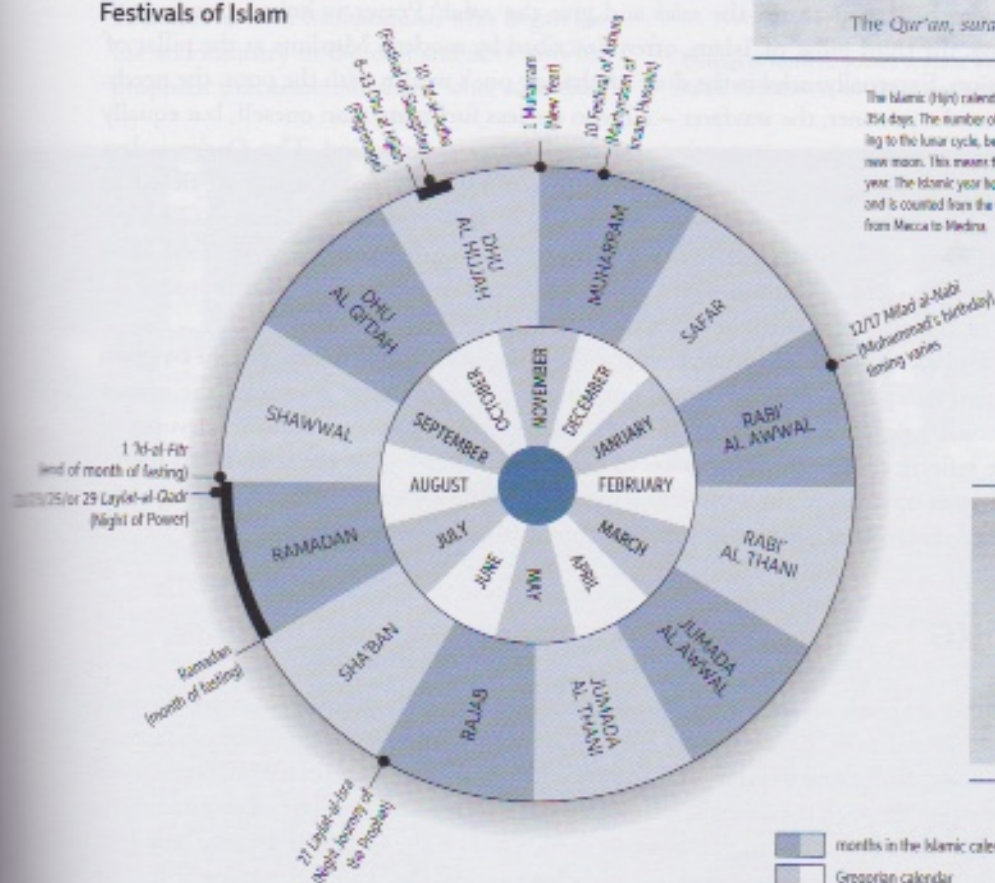
... proclaim thy Lord's praise before the rising of the sun, and before its setting, and proclaim thy Lord's praise in the watches of the night, and at the ends of the day ...

The Qur'an, surah 20:130.

A mosque that was founded upon godfearing from the first day is worthier for thee to stand in; therein are men who love to cleanse themselves; and God loves those who cleanse themselves.

The Qur'an, surah 9:109.

Festivals of Islam



The Islamic (hijri) calendar is based solely on the lunar year of 354 days. The number of days each month is adjusted according to the lunar cycle, beginning about two days after the new moon. This means that the festivals move backward each year. The Islamic year begins on the first day of Muharram, and is counted from the year in which Muhammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina.

'Public Worship is seventeen times better than private Worship.'

Al-Ghazali

An expression of this is the common direction – towards the Ka'ba in Mecca – in which all Muslims turn in prayer. Around the globe, all are united in direction, and in intention, within a human circle of worshippers. At a signal from the prayer leader – the *imam* – men and women assemble separately in rows, at the mosque, or in the home or place of work, taking care that each person is close to the next. Carefully following the lead of the *imam*, they pray as a single body, quietly reciting words of prayer from the *Qur'an*. At the same time, they bow their bodies in a series of ritual movements until, from an initial standing position, all are upon their knees, with foreheads touching the floor – the whole congregation enacting, as a single body, its submission before the majesty of God, and asking for his guidance and mercy. Each of the five sets of prayers includes the repetition of *Allahu akbar* – 'God is greatest' – and of the first *surah* of the *Qur'an*, itself a prayer. At the end of the prayer, each person passes the Arabic words of peace to neighbours on right and left: *as-salamu alaikum*, 'peace be upon you'. Private prayers often follow the public service.

ALMSGIVING

'O you who believe, perform the *salat* and give the *zakah*.' Prayer is linked closely with almsgiving, the third pillar of Islam, often described by modern Muslims as the pillar of social action. Externally, *zakah* is the duty of sharing one's wealth with the poor, the needy, the debtor, the prisoner, the wayfarer – all who are less fortunate than oneself, but equally part of the worshipping community and equally precious to God. The *Qur'an* is less concerned with the quantity, and more with the quality, of giving. When it is offered 'in search of God's pleasure and for the strengthening of their own souls, it is as the likeness of a garden on a hill; the rainstorm smites it and it brings forth its fruit twofold'. The inward attitude is all-important; discretion is preferred to ostentation, and reproach on the part of the giver makes the action worthless.

The *Shari'a* is meticulous in determining the amounts of alms which should be given on different categories of possessions, but contemporary practice simplifies the matter to an annual rate of 2.5 per cent of one's cash balance. However Muslim devotional literature reflects equally the inwardness of *zakah* as 'purification' of the soul. It is a mercy to the giver as much as to the recipient; a means to atone for sins which are motivated by human self-centredness, or by irresponsible stewardship of possessions.

FASTING

Special alms are given on the two main religious festivals of the Islamic calendar, the first of which, *Id al-Fitr* or *Bairam*, marks the end of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting. Fasting (*sawm*) is the fourth pillar of Muslim worship, and involves total abstinence from food and drink through the daylight hours of the entire month, from early dawn to sunset.

In some ways this is the most obviously communal of the duties of Islamic worship. The physical discipline means that social behaviour of the whole community has to

change for the duration of the month; the pace of life slows down, and there is time for reflection. It is a period when social relationships are reaffirmed, reconciliations encouraged, and the solidarity of the community is expressed. Mosque attendance swells, particularly on the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*), towards the end of the month, when Muslims commemorate the descent of the *Qur'an* from heaven, and the beginning of Muhammad's ministry.

The fundamental intention of fasting is thanksgiving. Inwardly, the fast is thought of as a disciplining of the soul, to wait patiently upon God who guides and provides. This inward aspect is of great importance. Muhammad is reported to have said that, of all the duties of worship, *sawm* is the most loved by God, since it is seen only by him.

THE HAJJ

The fifth of the fundamental duties of Islamic worship – to be fulfilled once in a lifetime if at all possible – is the *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca and its vicinity. Here are the most holy places for Muslims, full of 'memorials' of God's guidance in times past. There are associations with Muhammad, who began his life and ministry in the city, and also with his prophetic precursor, Abraham, who, according

Throngs of Muslims, clothed in white, walk around the Ka'ba, Mecca, in the first rite of their pilgrimage.



to the *Qur'an*, built the Ka'ba, helped by his son, Ishmael, as a sign of their submission to God, with the prayer that God would show them 'our ways of worship'.

A visit to Mecca has religious significance for Muslims at any time of the year. But with the twelfth month of the calendar, *Dbu al Hijjah*, the season of the *Haji*, or Great Pilgrimage, arrives. At any other time it is known as *Umra*, the Little Pilgrimage. Pilgrims flock to Mecca, each wearing the simple pilgrimage clothing of white cloth, denoting the state of ritual purification. They congregate in the Great Mosque, and the first rite of pilgrimage is performed – the circumambulation around the Ka'ba. This is followed by running seven times between two small hills, recalling the plight of Hagar and her son, Ishmael, who, in Islamic, Jewish, and Christian tradition, were saved from certain death by a spring of water which God caused to break through the desert sands. This well is named in the Islamic tradition as *zamzam*, and from it the pilgrims may draw holy water, before journeying a few miles out of Mecca to Mount Arafat, where the *Haji* comes to its climax. Here the pilgrims observe the rite of 'standing' from midday to sunset in meditation before God. Then they begin the return journey to Mecca, stopping overnight at Mazdalifa, where each pilgrim gathers pebbles. The following day, these are thrown ritually against three stone pillars, in the neighbouring village of Mina, recalling the moments in Abraham's life when he resisted Satan's temptations to disobey God. God had commanded him to prepare his son Ishmael for sacrifice as a test of his obedience (*islam*). The *Qur'an* tells how the child was ransomed 'with a tremendous victim', and in joyful recollection of this act of divine mercy, the pilgrims offer the ritual sacrifice of sheep or camels, the meaning of which is clearly stated in the *Qur'an*: 'their flesh and blood reach not to God, but your devotion reaches him'.

With the intention of magnifying God, and remembering him 'with a more lively remembrance', Muslims throughout the world join with the pilgrims in Mina for the Feast of the Slaughter, which brings the *Haji* to an end. Muslims remember their corporate identity and responsibility, as a worshipping community created by Muhammad. Muhammad believed this festival was the fulfilment of the Muslim community for which Abraham is said to have prayed before the Ka'ba:

Our Lord make us submissive to thee, and of our seed a community submissive to thee, and show us our ways of worship, and turn towards us. Lo! thou, only thou, art the Relenting, the Merciful

(The *Qur'an*, surah 2:128).

The Islamic (*Hijri*) calendar is based on the lunar year of 354 days. The number of days each month is adjusted according to the lunar cycle, beginning about two days after the new moon, which means the festivals move backward each year. The Islamic year begins on the first day of Muharram, and is counted from the year in which Muhammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina.

DAVID KERR

The Law of Islam

Down the centuries, the traditional education of Muslims has rested on twin pillars: theology taught them what they should believe, and the sacred law prescribed how they should behave. In practice, the law has been the senior partner, for Islam has always been far more explicit about the quality of life God has ordained for his creatures than about the nature of the Creator himself. Although the role of Islamic law has changed considerably in recent years, it can still be described as 'the epitome of Islamic thought, the most typical manifestation of the Islamic way of life, the core and kernel of Islam itself'.



SHARI'A

The sacred law of Islam is called the *Shari'a* – a word which originally meant 'the way to a watering-place', but came to be used of the path of God's commandments. It is regarded by Muslims as firmly based on divine revelation, derived from four main sources:

1. The *Qur'an*, which, they believe, has existed eternally in Arabic in heaven, and was revealed piecemeal to Muhammad by the angel Jibril (Gabriel) as occasion demanded.
2. The *sunnah*, or practice of the Prophet, as enshrined in countless traditions of what he said, did, or permitted.
3. The *ijma'*, or consensus of the Muslim community, or of its leading scholars.
4. *qiyas* – analogical deductions from the first three sources.

Orientalists have, however, shown that the raw material of the *Shari'a* was provided by pre-Islamic customary – and even codified – law and the administrative practices of early Islam, systematized and Islamicized by scholar-jurists in the light of those Islamic norms which had come to be accepted. They also insist that, for a number of decades, the law was wide open to foreign influences current in the conquered territories, or ingrained in the minds of converts to Islam.

The *Shari'a* has often been classified under five categories:

1. What God has commanded
2. What God has recommended, but not made strictly obligatory

3. What God has left legally indifferent.
4. What God has deprecated, but not actually prohibited
5. What God has expressly forbidden.

As such, its scope is much wider than any Western concept of law, for it covers every aspect of life. Obviously a great deal of it could never be enforced by any human court, and must be left to the Day of Judgment. But, in theory, the *Shari'a* was a divinely revealed blueprint, to which every Muslim – from caliph to slave – must attempt to approximate.

In theory, human regulations were only appropriate in those matters which God had left 'legally indifferent'. In practice, from a very early date, even the official courts allowed a number of 'devices' which eased the inconvenience of some of the *Shari'a*'s precepts.

Muslim rulers, moreover, found its standards of proof too exacting for the maintenance of public order. Muslim merchants found its prohibitions too restrictive for the life of the markets, while local communities of Muslims found its rigid precepts too alien to their age-old customs. So less rigid courts soon appeared beside the official *qadis*' courts. But the fact remains that, until little more than a century ago, the *Shari'a* remained the basic and residual law – to which lip-service, at least, was almost always paid – throughout of the Muslim world.

INTERPRETING THE LAW

But the *Shari'a* was not a system of law that was either codified or uniform. Although it is regarded as firmly based on divine revelation, it has been developed and elaborated by generations of legal scholars, who interpreted the relevant verses in the *Qur'an* and those traditions which they accepted as authentic. They also drew from these sources a plethora of analogical deductions. At first, moreover, any adequately qualified jurist had the right of *ijtihad* – going back to the original sources to derive a rule of law to cover any problem that arose.

At a very early date, the Muslim community became divided between the Sunni, or 'orthodox', majority and the Shi'a and Khariji minorities, which split into further exclusive sub-sects, while the Sunni majority divided into a number of different schools or 'rites'. As these schools and sects crystallized, the right of independent deduction was progressively replaced by the duty to accept the authority of the great jurists of the past (*taqlid*). Today, even the most learned Sunni jurists are normally considered to be under this authority. The Ithna 'Ashari sub-sect of the Shi'a, which remains the dominant sect in Iran, still recognizes *mujtahids* who may exercise *ijtihad* in certain circumstances. It is only among the Isma'ili Shi'as that the *imam* – or, in some cases his representative, the Da'i Mutlaq – can give a wholly authoritative ruling.

CIVIL LAW

Since about the middle of the nineteenth century, the position of Islamic law has changed radically throughout the greater part of the Muslim world. First in the Ottoman Empire, next in what was then 'British India', and subsequently elsewhere, the impact of modern life has loosened the sway of the *Shari'a* in two major ways. In many spheres of life, the *Shari'a* has been displaced by new codes of law, largely derived from the Western world. In the Ottoman Empire in the 1850s and 1860s, for example, the Commercial Code, the Penal Code, the Code of Commercial Procedure, and the Code of Maritime Commerce were all based on French models. But when the Ottoman reformers came to the law of obligations – contract, tort, etc. – they debated whether again to turn to European law or to compile a comparable code derived from Islamic sources.

Eventually the latter view prevailed. So the resultant code, commonly known as the *Majalla*, completed in 1876, was compiled from the rulings of a selection of Sunni jurists – although all these opinions had received some form of recognition from the Hanafi school. The *Majalla* was thus of immense jurisprudential significance. For the first time in history, a code of law based firmly on principles derived from the *Shari'a* was enacted by the authority of the state. And for the first time, again, a compilation was made of provisions of heterogeneous origin, selected on the broad principle of their suitability to modern life, rather than their established precedent in one particular school. Moreover, all these new codes were administered in secular courts by personnel trained in modern law schools. It was only family law that continued to be applied in the age-old way in the *Shari'a* courts, uncoded and unreformed.

The second change was less obvious, but equally important. In 1915, the position of Muslim wives, sometimes tying them – even in impossible circumstances – to their husbands under the dominant Hanafi rules, virtually compelled the Sultan to intervene even in matters of family law. So he issued two imperial decrees permitting wives to request a judicial dissolution of marriage in certain circumstances sanctified by one or another of the Sunnī schools. Once this dyke had been opened, the tide came in very fast indeed. In 1917 the Ottoman Law of Family Rights was promulgated, based on an extended application of these principles.

In one Muslim country after another, much the same happened. In 'British India' the new secular codes were based on the Common Law of England, rather than the Civil Law of France. Here both secular law and the uncoded family law of different religious communities were administered by the same courts. In Turkey, by contrast, the *Shari'a* was abolished and European codes, only slightly adapted, adopted in its place.

In Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, the *Shari'a* remains dominant – though even there statutory regulations began to proliferate. Most Muslim countries, however, now have largely secular codes in all except family law – which must, they insist, remain distinctively Islamic. And even this has been codified – in whole or in part – in a way which makes it more suitable for modern life. In countries such as Somalia and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, the presence of Marxist influence in such codes is sometimes plain to see.



I AM A MUSLIM

I had my first lessons in religion – Islam – on my mother's lap, and learnt to utter a few verses from the *Gur'an* by heart.

Her recitations of the *Gur'an* in the early hours of the morning left a lasting impression on me, which resounds in my ears to this day whenever I remember her. I lost my father when I was barely one year old, and my young mother had a hard time bringing up a family of six children, hence she sought refuge in religion and prayers, and took special care in our religious education. The verses she memorized carry us through in our daily prayers all our life.

During my youth and working life I was not a particularly devout Muslim. My religion has become much more important following my retirement. Part of this rekindled interest is undoubtedly influenced by my association with fellow Muslims. Even so, I wouldn't call myself a strict follower of the faith. I shun some of the practices and puritanical teachings of the so-called 'fundamentalists'. I pray daily, but wouldn't like to be coerced into religious rituals. Rather, I find comfort and solace in praying to Allah in solitude. Although praying in congregations can be inspiring, I sometimes find it too repetitive and ritualistic.

I have a family with two grown-up children, both born in the West. Being raised in a Western society made a significant difference in their upbringing. In particular, compared with my upbringing in India, they had minimal religious teaching. This concerns me, as I feel responsible for alienating them from their faith. I now believe that religious education is an essential part in moulding the character of a person, irrespective of the religion they decide to follow. The moral and religious aspects of life have become all the more important in the present-day world, where families struggle to stay together, and societies seem to be going through a period of upheaval. My wife and I are, therefore, taking extra care with our grandchildren, making sure they receive basic lessons in religious and moral education.

A few years ago I performed the *Hajj* pilgrimage with my family, which has left another lasting impression on me. The annual *Hajj* is a once-in-a-lifetime occasion for Muslims to meet fellow pilgrims from all over the world. It is an experience that tests one's patience, tolerance, and physical endurance. It also inspired a sense of fellow feeling for others.

A mosque is supposed to be a place for prayers and social contact. Unfortunately, I find there is little scope to talk with, and enquire about, others; the only other way to socialize with fellow Muslims is at private parties or weddings.

Muslims have very few religious festivals, the main two being after Ramadan and Bakrid ('*Id-al-Adha*'), and young and old, rich and poor alike meet to celebrate these with great fervour. My recollection of '*Id* (*Eid*) celebrations in childhood is one of rejoicing and excitement, as well as days of preparations. We all dressed in our new clothes and visited friends and relations. I remember there being plenty of delicious food, which was prepared and exchanged. The best part for the children was collecting money from the elders, and then all visiting the cinema house. Everybody knew everybody else in the town, and it was important to visit them to make up any differences. It was a time of renewing ties and friendships. Unfortunately, I find there is little community life in this country. It is probably this feeling of isolation that impels us to our religion.

Although my religion is not so important to me, at times of trouble my thoughts go automatically towards religion. A feeling of helplessness makes me submit to God Almighty. I feel my religion is my personal affair, and I don't like the intervention of a third person; but I do regard the prophet Muhammad as a good role model, who has left marvellous examples of compassion, piety, simplicity, and honesty. There is no walk of life for which he has not left guidance. Although I pray daily, I only read the scriptures occasionally.

Because the Qur'an is in Arabic, which I hardly understand, I read translations, as well as various interpretations and commentaries.

I get comfort in submission to Allah, and thank Him for His bounty, my good health, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the sunshine, and the seasons we enjoy without our asking or paying for it. If living in a secular society means not recognizing these gifts of God, then I don't want to live in such a society. I would much rather be a religious person.

As a religious person, I observe certain food regulations. Islam has strict guidelines about what to eat and what not to eat. For example, it forbids the consumption of any intoxicating drinks. I wear Western clothes for convenience and climatic reasons, and I think everyone's right to wear and eat what they want. However, I think it is good for people to dress in a way that reflects their distinctive culture. Otherwise this world becomes a monotonous and boring place to live in.

I am not a strict follower of Islam, yet our family life is much influenced by our faith. We follow our religion in matters relating to marriage, birth, and death. My wife performs prayers five times a day, and recites the Qur'an. My son also attends the mosque once a week, and is permitted. However, living in a Western society is not always possible to meet the requirement that a Muslim should pray five times a day. Again, there is no holiday for our festivals and sometimes they fall on a working day, which can present difficulties. For example, in the month of Ramadan, a Muslim is supposed to fast from daybreak to sunset. Because this may mean sixteen or seventeen hours of fasting, depending on the season, it becomes very strenuous for a working person. There are limitations to following our religion in Western terms.

Mohammad A. Khan

Thus the present picture is very different from that of the past. Whereas the once-dominant *Shari'a* is now, for the most part, confined to family law, the current tendency is to produce civil codes that incorporate principles derived from Islamic law alongside those of an alien origin. A few countries have, even more recently, begun to introduce some Islamic criminal sanctions and economic practices — a clear evidence of a resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism. In most Muslim countries, moreover, the law — whatever its origin — has been codified by legislative enactments. Thus the authority of the law, once implicit and transcendent, is now, in most countries, constitutional, resting on the will of the people as expressed by their executive or legislature.

NORMAN ANDERSON

Islam in the Modern World



The story of the Islamic world from 1700 has often been described in terms of the 'decline of Islam' confronted by the 'rise of the West', or the struggle between a vanishing 'tradition' and a triumphant 'modernity.' This is now rejected as an over-simplified picture.

RIVAL CAMPS

The increasing political corruption and military weakness of the once powerful imperial structures of the Ottomans of Turkey, the Safavids of Iran, and the Mughals of India was paralleled throughout the eighteenth century by the economic expansion of the British, French, and Dutch empires. Economic penetration alone, however, had little immediate impact upon Muslim religious developments, which were directed at the social and moral reconstruction of Islamic societies, and a reorientation of the Sufi tradition. Sunni revival movements arose out of local conditions, while ideas of reform were disseminated by traditional means, such as the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Indeed the holy cities of Mecca and Medina were centres of study visited by scholars from as far afield as India and Morocco.

Two outstanding – but contrasting – figures were the Indian Sufi, Shah Wali Allah (1702–62) of Delhi, and the puritan Arab, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92). Although each stressed the *Qur'an* and the Prophet's *sunna* (model example) as binding sources for faith and law, and each rejected the blind imitation of generations of medieval legal scholarship, Wali Allah accepted the possible vision of an immanent God, while Abd al-Wahhab emphasized the transcendence of the One Unique – and unknowable – God. Their influence has come down to the present.

MODERNIZERS

By the end of World War I, the three Muslim empires lay dismembered, and European colonial powers occupied, or directly influenced, the entire Muslim world. 'Modernity', understood as a cluster of social, political, economic and cultural institutions and

values, was a transformation historically originating in Europe and North America. In the European overseas dominions, Muslims experienced modernity within a power relationship between themselves and their colonial masters, which ensured their responses to it would differ significantly. Specifically, Muslims experienced Europe's power not as secular, but as Christian power. While Muslims welcomed the material benefits of science and technology, they remained ambivalent to modern values, such as democracy, and hostile to missionary propaganda against the core of their faith. In places such as India, Algeria, and Palestine, the retreat from colonial rule down to the 1960s left much suffering and bitterness in its wake. Not surprisingly, modern Muslim reformers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries found it difficult to embrace either social change as secularization, or the marginalization of religion away from concerns for political, economic, or social problems.

Two early major Sunni modernist reformers were the Indian Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–98) and the Egyptian Muhammad 'Abduh (1845–1905), both of whom received a more or less traditional education, had an early relationship with Sufi spirituality, and later gained first-hand experience of Europe, influences which informed their efforts at social reform focused upon education and the need to modernize Islam. They held that, rather than interpreting the *Qur'an* in terms of the Prophetic Traditions (*Hadith*), revelation could be understood solely in its own terms, implicitly proposing that every Muslim could search scripture's meaning for him/herself. The banner of all modernist thought was *surah* 13:12: 'God does not alter what is in a people until they alter what is in themselves.' Rather than adhere literally to the past, Muslims must shape their future in the public interest, in order to deal with the dramatic new circumstances of the modern era. Religious debate and controversy has continued through the twentieth century to the present day.

THE RADICALS

The aim of more radical reformers was to Islamize modernity, rather than modernize Islam. Two key radicals who helped to shape movements sometimes called 'fundamentalist' or 'Islamist' were the Indian/Pakistani Abu al-Ala Maududi (1903–79) and the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), both of whom believed deeply that Muslims should conduct their entire lives according to God's law. Their work also provided a strident, if not trenchant, critique of secular Western societies. A similar impulse moved Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution in Iran in 1979. Radicals became the chief target of secularists who formed the backbone of the new political elites of the new Muslim nation states following independence from colonial powers. Underlying these controversies is a contest over rival claims of authority to interpret the foundational religious sources. Some secularists even attempted to justify the separation of religion from politics by appealing to the Prophet's model community in Medina.

BEYOND 9/11

Over the past quarter of a century, Western observers and governments have noted the phenomenon of a 'resurgent Islam'. The tragic events of 11 September 2001 seemed to some to confirm fears of a 'clash of civilizations'. In this perception, two important factors have been overlooked. First, discussions among Muslim leaders worldwide, conservatives included, expressed long-held concern over the dangers of mounting religious extremism within the community, well aware that their own agendas



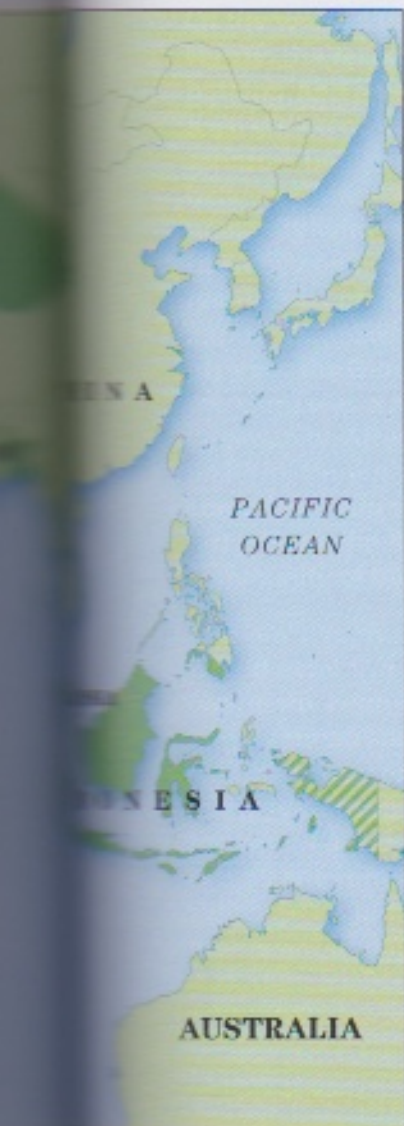
The Islamic World Today

were in danger of being hijacked by a minority. Second, extremists have articulated in religious terms current social-political problems that plague their own and other Muslim societies. Such problems include the corruption of, and repression by, regimes closely supported by Western governments, some of whose policies are widely regarded as perpetrating injustices upon Muslim peoples in areas such as Palestine, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Algeria, Iraq, and Bosnia. Effective resolution of such conflicts would help to undermine solutions proposed by extremist religious groups, and give moderate Muslim voices a forum for debate with often equally immoderate and unrepentant secularist power holders.

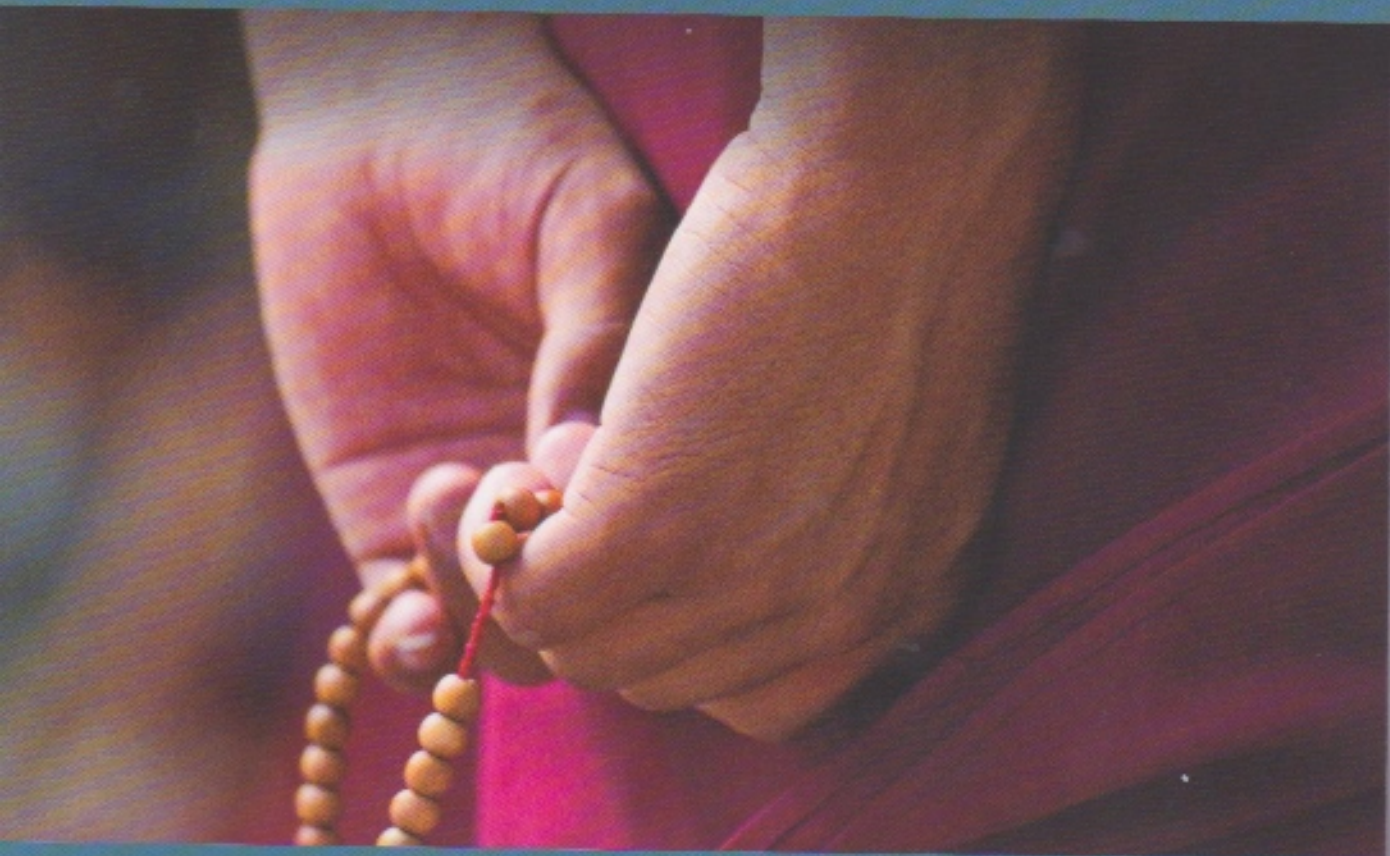
WOMEN AND MEN

In this multifaceted debate a growing contribution is to be expected from Muslim women. The individual's sense of the broader Muslim community is strong; men and women pray as equals in the eyes of God, and the contribution of each to community life is accepted equally by God: 'I will deny no man or woman among you the reward of their labours' (The *Qur'an*, *surah* 3:195). Whereas the spiritual equality of men and women has been traditionally agreed upon, questions of patriarchal power and social equality have been hotly contested for more than a century. Modernist thinkers, male and female – challenged by radicals, both male and female – have sought to reduce male privilege in the family, for example, by arguing that the *Qur'an*'s true intent supported monogamous marriage, not polygyny; by raising the marriage age, and thereby abolishing union with, or between, children; by restricting the male right of divorce, and increasing the grounds upon which women may seek divorce. Yet the overall goal of change is still to preserve a harmonious and stable family life, contributing to the greater good of the community, with the relationship of its parts – men, women, and children – based upon equity. It is part of the contest over who may 'speak for God' in interpreting the divine message. Female scholars and laywomen, albeit slowly and quietly today, are insisting their voices be heard too. As the future unfolds, observers should be more attentive to what Muslims, men and women, say as well as do.

DAVID WAINES



A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO
**WORLD
RELIGIONS**



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