

Introducing Islam To non-Muslims

I. Islam and Muslims.

The name of this religion is Islam, the root of which is Silm and Salam which means peace. Salam may also mean greeting one another with peace. One of the beautiful names of God is that He is the Peace. It means more than that: submission to the One God, and to live in peace with the Creator, within one's self, with other people and with the environment. Thus, Islam is a total system of living. A Muslim is supposed to live in peace and harmony with all these segments; hence, a Muslim is any person anywhere in the world whose obedience, allegiance, and loyalty are to God, the Lord of the Universe.

II. Muslims and Arabs.

The followers of Islam are called Muslims. Muslims are not to be confused with Arabs. Muslims may be Arabs, Turks, Persians, Indians, Pakistanis, Malaysians, Indonesians, Europeans, Africans, Americans, Chinese, or other nationalities.

An Arab could be a Muslim, a Christian, a Jew or an atheist. Any person who adopts the Arabic language is called an Arab. However, the language of the Qur'an (the Holy Book of Islam) is Arabic. Muslims all over the world try to learn Arabic so that they may be able to read the Qur'an and understand its meaning. They pray in the language of the Qur'an, namely Arabic. Supplications to God could be in any language.

While there are one billions Muslims in the world there are about 200 million Arabs. Among them, approximately ten percent are not Muslims. Thus Arab Muslims constitute only about twenty percent of the Muslim population of the world.

III. Allah the One and the Only God.

Allah is the name of the One and Only God. Allah has ninety-nine beautiful names, such as:

The Gracious, The Merciful, The Beneficent,
The Creator, The All-Knowing, The All-Wise,
The Lord of the Universe, The First, The Last, and others.

He is the Creator of all human beings. He is the God for the Christians, the Jews, the Muslims, the Buddhists, the Hindus, the atheists, and others. Muslims worship

God whose name is Allah. They put their trust in Him and they seek His help and His guidance.

IV. Muhammad.

Muhammad was chosen by God to deliver His Message of Peace, namely Islam. He was born in 570 C.E. (Common Era) in Makkah, Arabia. He was entrusted with the Message of Islam when he was at the age of forty years. The revelation that he received is called the Qur'an, while the message is called Islam.

Muhammad is the very last Prophet of God to mankind. He is the final Messenger of God. His message was and is still to the Christians, the Jews and the rest of mankind. He was sent to those religious people to inform them about the true mission of Jesus, Moses, David, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham.

Muhammad is considered to be the summation and the culmination of all the prophets and messengers that came before him. He purified the previous messages from adulteration and completed the Message of God for all humanity. He was entrusted with the power of explaining, interpreting and living the teachings of the Qur'an.

V. Source of Islam.

The legal sources of Islam are the Qur'an and the Hadith. The Qur'an is the exact words of God; its authenticity, originality and totality are intact. The Hadith is the report of the sayings, deeds and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet's sayings and deeds are called Sunnah. The Seerah is the writings of followers of Muhammad about the life of the Prophet. Hence, it is the life history of the Prophet Muhammad which provides examples of daily living for Muslims.

VI. Some Islamic Principles.

A. Oneness of God:

He is One and the Only One. He is not two in one or three in one. This means that Islam rejects the idea of trinity or such a unity of God which implies more than one God in one.

B. Oneness of mankind:

People are created equal in front of the Law of God. There is no superiority for one race over another. God made us of different colors, nationalities, languages and beliefs so as to test who is going to be better than others. No one can claim that he is better than others. It is only God Who knows who is better. It depends on piety and righteousness.

C. Oneness of Messengers and the Message:

Muslims believe that God sent different messengers throughout the history of mankind. All came with the same message and the same teachings. It was the people who misunderstood and misinterpreted them.

Muslims believe in Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Ismail, Jacob, Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad. The Prophets of Christianity and Judaism are indeed the Prophets of Islam.

D. Angels and the Day of Judgement:

Muslims believe that there are unseen creatures such as angels created by God in the universe for special missions.

Muslims believe that there is a Day of Judgement when all people of the world throughout the history of mankind till the last day of life on earth, are to be brought for accounting, reward and punishment.

E. Innocence of Man at Birth:

Muslims believe that people are born free of sin. It is only after they reach the age of puberty and it is only after they commit sins that are to be charged for their mistakes. Not responsible for or can take the responsibility for the sins of others. However, the door of forgiveness through true repentance is always open.

↓ BELIEVE IN

F. State and Religion:

Muslims believe that Islam is a total and a complete way of life. It encompasses all aspect of life. As such, the teachings of Islam do not separate religion from politics. As a matter of fact, state and religion are under the obedience of Allah through the teachings of Islam. Hence, economic and social transactions, as well as educational and political systems are also of the teachings of Islam.

VII. Practices of Islam.

God instructed the Muslims to practice they believe in. In Islam there are five pillars, namely:

A. Creed (Shahada):

The verbal commitment and pledge that there is only One God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God, is considered to be Creed of Islam.

B. Prayers (Salat):

The performance of the five daily prayers required of Muslims.

C. Fasting (Saum):

Fasting is total abstinence from food, liquids and intimate intercourse (between married couples) from dawn to sunset during the Month of Ramadan.

D. Purifying Tax (Zakat):

This is an annual payment of a certain percentage of a Muslim's property which is distributed among the poor or other rightful beneficiaries.

E. Pilgrimage (Hajj):

The performance of pilgrimage to Makkah is required once in a lifetime if means are available. Hajj is in part in memory of the trials and tribulations of Prophet Abraham, his wife Hagar and his eldest son Prophet Ishmael.

VIII. Other Related Aspects.

A. Calendar:

Islamic practices are based on the lunar calendar. However, Muslims also use the Gregorian calendar in their daily religious lives. Hence, the Islamic calendar includes both the Common Era and the migration (Hijra) year of the Prophet of Islam from Makkah to Madinah in the year of 623 C.E.

B. Celebrations (Eid):

Muslims have two celebrations (Eid); namely, Eid of Sacrifice and Eid of Fast-Breaking. The Eid of Sacrifice is in remembrance of the sacrifice to be by Prophet Abraham of his son. The Eid of Fast-Breaking comes at the end of the month of fasting, Ramadan.

C. Diets:

Islam allows Muslims to eat everything which is good for the health. It restricts certain items such as pork and its by-products, alcohol and any narcotic or addictive drugs.

D. Place of Worship:

The place of worship is called Mosque or Masjid. There are three holy places of worship for the Muslims in the world. These are: Mosque of Kaaba in Makkah, Mosque of the Prophet Muhammad in Madinah, and Masjid Aqsa, adjacent to Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

A Muslim may pray anywhere in the world whether in a Mosque, a house, an office, or outside. The whole world is a place of worship. It is preferable that Muslims pray in a congregation, however, he/she may pray individually anywhere.

E. Holiday:

The holy day of the Muslims is Friday. It is considered to be sacred and the Day of Judgement will take place on Friday. Muslims join together shortly after noon on Friday for the Friday congregational prayer in a Mosque. A leader (Imam) gives a sermon (Khutba) and leads the congregational prayer.

F. Distribution of Muslims in North America:

There are approximately five million Muslims in North America and are distributed in its major cities such as New York, Detroit, Boston, Toledo, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, Cedar Rapids (Iowa), Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Edmonton, Vancouver, Windsor, Winnipeg, Calgary, and others.

C. Contributions in North America:

Muslims are now established in North America. Sears Tower and the John Hancock buildings in Chicago were designed by a Muslim chief architect, originally from Bangladesh. Muslims have established academic institutions, community centers and organizations, schools and places of worship. They live in peace and harmony among themselves and among other groups of people in the society. The rate of crime among Muslims is very minimal. Muslims in North America are highly educated and they have added to the success of American scientific and technological fields.

The Muslims of the early period of the Islamic era were pioneers in medicine, chemistry, physics, geography, navigation, arts, poetry, mathematics, algebra, logarithms, calculus, etc. They contributed to the Renaissance of Europe and world civilization.

IX. Non-Muslims.

Muslims are required to respect all those who are faithful and God conscious people, namely those who received messages. Christians and Jews are called People of the Book. Muslims are asked to call upon the People of the Book for common terms, namely, to worship One God, and to work together for the solutions of the many problems in the society.

Christians and Jews lived peacefully with Muslims throughout centuries in the Middle East and other Asian and African countries. The second Caliph Umar did not pray in the church in Jerusalem so as not to give the Muslims an excuse to take it over. Christians entrusted the Muslims, and as such the key of the Church in Jerusalem is still in the hands of the Muslims.

Jews fled from Spain during the Inquisition, and they were welcomed by the Muslims. They settled in the heart of the Islamic Caliphate. They enjoyed positions of power and authority.

Throughout the Muslim world, churches, synagogues and missionary schools were built within the Muslim neighborhoods. These places were protected by