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Chapter 2: **FAITH AND PRACTICE - part a**

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What do Muslims believe?

Like Jews and Christians, Muslims are monotheists. They believe in one God, the creator, sustainer, ruler, and judge of the universe. Muslims believe in prophets, not just the Prophet Muhammad but the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, including Abraham and Moses, and of the New Testament, Jesus and John the Baptist. They also believe in angels, heaven, hell, and the Day of Judgment. Islam acknowledges that God's revelation was received in the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospels, and the Quran: "We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Torah that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel in which is guidance and light, and confirmation of the Torah that had come before him, a guidance and an admonition to those who fear God" (Quran 5:46). Thus Muslims view Jews and Christians as "People of the Book," a community of believers who received revelations, through prophets, in the form of scriptures or revealed books from God.

As Christians view their revelation as both fulfilling and completing the revelation of the Old Testament, Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad received his revelations from God through the angel Gabriel to correct human error that had made its way into the scriptures and belief systems of Judaism and Christianity. Therefore, Muslims believe that Islam is not a new religion with a new scripture. Far from

being the youngest of the major monotheistic world religions, from a Muslim point of view Islam is the oldest because it represents the original as well as the final revelation of the God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad: "He established for you the same religion as that which He established for Noah, that which We have sent to you as inspiration through Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, namely that you should remain steadfast in religion and make no divisions within it" (Quran 42:13).

Why do Muslims say they are descended from Abraham?

Muslims see themselves, along with Jews and Christians, as children of Abraham, belonging to different branches of the same religious family. The Quran and the Old Testament both tell the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian servant. While Jews and Christians are descended from Abraham and his wife Sarah through their son Isaac, Muslims trace their religious roots back to Abraham through Ismail, his first-born son by Hagar.

According to both Hebrew and Muslim scripture, when after many years Sarah did not conceive a child, she urged Abraham to sleep with her maidservant, Hagar, so that he might have an heir. The child who was the result of that union was a boy named Ismail. After Ismail's birth, Sarah too finally became pregnant and gave birth to Isaac. She then became jealous of Ismail, who as firstborn would be the prime inheritor and overshadow her own son Isaac. So she pressured Abraham to send Hagar and Ismail away. Abraham reluctantly let Hagar and his son go, because God promised that He would make Ismail the father of a great nation. Islamic sources say that Hagar and Ismail ended up in the vicinity of Mecca in Arabia,

and both scriptures say that they nearly died but were saved by a spring that miraculously gushed from the desert.

Islamic scripture and tradition tell a rich story about how father and son were reunited. This reunion gave rise to two of the most visible symbols of Islam. According to Islamic sources, Abraham learned that Hagar and Ismail were alive and found them living near present-day Mecca. After hearing of Hagar's harrowing experiences in the desert and the story of the miracle that saved them, he and Ismail rebuilt the Kaaba, believed to have been originally built by Adam, as a temple to the one true God. It is for this reason that Muslims across the globe turn in the direction of the Kaaba when they pray, as a unifying act of worship of the one true God. Today the Kaaba is considered the most sacred place in the Muslim world. Its distinctive cube shape with its black covering is one of the most familiar symbols in Islam. (See page 23, "What is the Kaaba?") Muslim scripture also tells that Abraham established the rites of the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca, many of which recreate Hagar's experiences there. The pilgrimage attracts over two million people annually and is another striking symbol of the faith. (See page 22, "What do Muslims do on the pilgrimage to Mecca?")

There is one significant difference in the biblical and Islamic accounts of the Abraham story. Contrary to the biblical tradition (Genesis 22:1–2), most Islamic scholars designate Ismail rather than Isaac as the intended victim in the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son at God's command (Quran 37:99–113).

How did Islam originate?

Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam originated in the Middle East. It was not a totally new monotheistic religion that sprang

up in isolation. Belief in one God, monotheism, had been flourishing for many centuries. Knowledge of Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism had been brought to Mecca in Arabia by foreign caravan trade as well as through the travels and contacts of Meccan traders throughout the Middle East. Moreover, Christian, Zoroastrian, and Jewish tribes lived in Arabia.

In the sixth century, Mecca was emerging as a new commercial center with vast new wealth but also with a growing division between rich and poor, challenging the traditional system of Arab tribal values and social security. This was the time and social environment in which the Prophet Muhammad preached the message of the Quran, which formed the basis for the religion we know as Islam, calling all to return to the worship of the one true God and a socially just society.

Muslims believe that God sent revelations first to Moses (as found in the Hebrew scriptures, the Torah), then to Jesus (the Gospel), and finally to Muhammad (through the Islamic scripture, the Quran). Muhammad is not considered the founder of the new religion of Islam. Like the biblical prophets who came before him, he was a religious reformer. Muhammad said that he did not bring a new message from a new God but called people back to the one true God and to a way of life they had forgotten or deviated from.

Because it is not a new revelation, the Quran contains many references to stories and figures in the Old and New Testaments, including Adam and Eve, Abraham and Moses, David and Solomon, and Jesus and Mary. Islam and worship of Allah—the Arabic word for God, meaning literally "the God"—was a return in the midst of a polytheistic society to the forgotten past, to the faith of the first monotheist, Abraham.

To Muhammad, most of his contemporaries in Mecca, with its tribal polytheism, lived in ignorance of the one true God

and His will as revealed to the prophets Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. The revelations Muhammad received led him to believe that Jews and Christians over time had distorted God's original message to Moses and later to Jesus. Thus the Torah and the Gospels were seen by Muslims as a combination of original revelation and later human additions such as the elevation of Jesus from a prophet to the son of God.

The revelations Muhammad received were calls to religious and social reform. They emphasized social justice (concern for the rights of women, widows, and orphans), corrected distortions to God's revelations in Judaism and Christianity, and warned that many had strayed from the message of God and his prophets. They called upon all to return to what the Quran refers to as the straight path of Islam or the path of God, revealed one final time to Muhammad, the last or "seal" of the prophets.

What is the Muslim scripture?

Quran (sometimes written *Koran*) means "recitation" in Arabic. The Quran is the Muslim scripture. It contains the revelations received by the Prophet Muhammad from God through the angel Gabriel. Muhammad, who was illiterate, functioned as God's intermediary; he was told to "recite" the revelation he received. For Muslims, Muhammad was neither the author nor editor of the Quran. Therefore, the Quran is the eternal, literal word of God, preserved in the Arabic language in which it was revealed and placed in an order that was commanded by divine revelation. Over a period of twenty-three years, from Muhammad's fortieth year until his death in 632, the Quran's 114 chapters (called *surahs*) were revealed to him.

Muslims believe that the Quran was initially preserved in oral and written form during the lifetime of the Prophet. The

entire text was finally collected in an official standardized version some fifteen or twenty years after his death. The Quran is approximately four-fifths the size of the New Testament. Its chapters were assembled from the longest chapter to the shortest, not edited or organized thematically. This format has proved frustrating to many non-Muslims, who find the text disjointed or disorganized from their point of view. However, it enables a believer to simply open the text at random and start reciting at the beginning of any paragraph, since each represents a lesson to be learned and reflected upon.

Recitation of the Quran is central to a Muslim's life; many Muslims memorize the Quran in its entirety. Recitation reinforces what Muslims see as the miracle of hearing the actual word of God expressed by the human voice. There are many examples throughout history of those who were drawn to and converted to Islam upon hearing the Quran recited. Muslims recite passages from the Quran that are included in their five daily prayers; musical and poetic recitations of Quranic verses serve as an introduction to every community event, from weddings and funerals to lectures and business dinners. Quran recitations are performed before stadiums of devout and enthusiastic Muslims whose numbers resemble those of Americans or Europeans attending an opera or concert. Many Muslims experience deep aesthetic pleasure from listening to the rich, resonant, rhyming prose, with its repetitions and subtle inflections.

Why is Arabic so important in Islam?

Muslims believe that the Quran, as well as the Torah and the Gospels, is based on a tablet written in Arabic that exists in heaven with God. They believe that the teachings of these

scriptures, revealed at different times in history, originate from this source. The Quran, recited by Muhammad as it was revealed to him by the angels, and later recorded in Arabic, is thus believed to be the direct word of God. All Muslims, regardless of their native language, memorize and recite the Quran in Arabic, the language in which it was revealed, whether they fully understand this language or not. So too, all over the world, regardless of their local language, when Muslims pray they do so in Arabic. Until modern times, the Quran was printed in Arabic only. Even now, in translations, which more correctly are viewed by Muslims as “interpretations,” the Arabic text is often printed alongside.

The oral recitation of the Quran has remained a powerful source of inspiration to the present day. Chanting of the Quran in Arabic is an art form, and Quran reciters are held in an esteem comparable to that of opera stars in the West. Recordings of the Quran are enjoyed for their aesthetic as well as their religious value. Walking in the streets of a Muslim country, a visitor is bound to hear the Quran being recited on radios or cassettes in shops or passing taxis. Crowds fill stadiums throughout the Islamic world for public Quran recitation contests. Memorization of the entire Quran brings great prestige as well as merit.

What role does Muhammad play in Muslim life?

During his lifetime and throughout the following centuries, the Prophet Muhammad has been the ideal model for Muslims to follow as they strive to do God’s will. Islam places great emphasis upon action—exhorting Muslims to strive, to make an effort, to do their best. Some Muslims say that Mu-

hammad is the “living Quran,” the witness whose words and behavior reveal God’s will. In contrast to the often spiritualized Christian view of Jesus, Muslims look upon Muhammad as both a prophet and a very human figure, one who had great political as well as spiritual insights. Thus Muslims look to Muhammad’s example for guidance in all aspects of life: how to treat friends as well as enemies, what to eat and drink, how to mourn and celebrate. The importance given to Muhammad’s example is a variation on a tradition that originated with pre-Islamic Arabian tribes who preserved their ideals and norms in what was called their *summah* (trodden path). These were the tribal customs, the traditions handed down from previous generations by word and example. Muhammad reformed these practices, and as a result his Sunnah (his words and deeds) became the norm for Muslim community life.

Muhammad’s life translated the guidance revealed in the Quran into action; he lived the revelation, giving concrete form to the laws that God revealed for the various conditions of ordinary human life. For Islam, no aspect of life is outside the realm of religion. Muslims’ observations or remembrances of what the Prophet said and did were passed on orally and in writing through “traditions” (*hadith*). The hadith deal with all aspects of Muhammad’s life, intensely personal as well as public, social, and political. Thus, when Muslims pray or make the pilgrimage to Mecca, they try to pray as the Prophet prayed, without adding to or subtracting from the way Muhammad is said to have worshipped. This is not to imply that Muslims worship Muhammad in any way. Rather, traditions of the Prophet provide guidance regarding personal hygiene, dress, eating, treatment of spouses, diplomacy, and warfare. The detailed records of Muhammad’s actions in war and peace,

his interactions with family, friends, and foes, his judgments in good and bad times, and his decisions when under siege and when victorious recall and reinforce for Muslims what it takes to follow the word of God.

Was Muhammad a prophet like the prophets in the Bible?

In Islam the concept of prophecy is broader than in Judaism and Christianity. Muslims distinguish between “prophets” and “messengers,” to whom God gives a message for a community in book form. Unlike prophets, God’s messengers are assured success by God. While all messengers are prophets, not all prophets are messengers. The word *prophet* is applied to Abraham, Noah, Joseph, and John the Baptist as well as nonbiblical prophets of Arabia like Hud and Salih. *Messenger* is limited to the prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, whose revelations were preserved in scriptural form.

Why is so much known about Muhammad’s life?

Muslims believe that Muhammad not only received God’s final revelation to humankind but also perfectly lived out the revelation he received. Thus he is sometimes referred to as the “living Quran.” Muhammad was and is the model of the Muslim ideal to be emulated by all believers. While Muhammad was alive, people could go directly to him to request his advice or opinion about any topic. When Muhammad died, the Muslim community lost its direct channel of revelation.

Because Muslims believe that Muhammad’s words and actions serve as a living example of the meaning of the Quran,

the early Muslim community was anxious to preserve as many memories of his words and actions as possible. Narrative stories about the Prophet’s example (Sunnah), known as the *hadith* (traditions) of the Prophet, record many aspects of Muhammad’s life, including religious belief and ritual, eating, dress, personal hygiene, marriage, treatment of spouses, diplomacy, and warfare. These detailed records of Muhammad’s actions in war and peace, his interactions with family, friends, and foes, his judgments in good and bad times, and his decisions when under siege and when victorious recall and reinforce for Muslims what it takes to follow the word of God. Excluded from imitation is anything that belonged to his specific capacity as Prophet.

The hadith were collected over a period of several hundred years. In many cases, there are several hadith that deal with the same situation, since many people were typically present when Muhammad was answering questions from the Muslim community. Although there are many hadith collections, two in particular, those compiled by Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj and Ismail al-Bukhari, enjoy special authoritative status in Sunni Islam.

Early on, given the proliferation of traditions of the Prophet, questions quickly arose about the authenticity of the hadith; as a result, a special science of hadith criticism was developed in order to authenticate them. The most important method of hadith authentication was through verification of the chain of transmitters. Most began with the format that so-and-so told so-and-so that she or he heard from so-and-so, tracing the line of transmitters back to either Muhammad himself or one of his Companions who had reported that Muhammad said or did something. Great care was taken to determine the honesty of the various transmitters and whether they could possibly have known the person from whom they received

the hadith. If the chain of transmitters could be proven possible, then the hadith was accepted as authentic.

A second method of hadith criticism focused on the content of the hadith rather than just the chain of transmitters. Those who examined the content attempted to verify that the hadith was consistent with both the Quran and other hadith on a similar topic. In cases where two hadith conflict, religious scholars use the Quran as the final authority with respect to content, regardless of who the transmitter was.

Although some modern scholars, both non-Muslim and Muslims, have raised questions about the authenticity of the hadith, the majority of Muslims continue to consider the hadith as scripture and cite them as evidence of God's commands about a particular topic. Equally important, whether or not they came directly from Muhammad, the traditions of the Prophet provide a rich religious and social history, a substantial record of how the Prophet of Islam has been and continues to be regarded by the Muslim community, and insight into the issues and debates within early Islamic history.

Did Muhammad have multiple wives?

During the prime of his life, Muhammad had one wife, Khadija, for twenty-four years, until her death when he was forty-nine. Much is recorded about Muhammad's relationship with Khadija, who served as his closest confidante and comforter and strongest supporter. They had six children, two sons who died in infancy and four daughters.

After her death Muhammad started to contract other marriages, all but one of them to widows. As was customary for Arab chiefs, some of these marriages were contracted to cement political alliances. Others were marriages to wives of his

companions who had fallen in combat, women who were in need of protection. Remarriage for widows was difficult in a society that placed a high value on a bride's virginity. However, talk of the political and social motives behind many of Muhammad's marriages should not obscure the fact that Muhammad was attracted to and enjoyed the company of women as friends as well as spouses. His life reflects the Islamic outlook on marriage and sexuality, found in both revelation and Prophetic traditions, which emphasizes the importance of family and views sex as a gift from God to be enjoyed within the bonds of marriage.

What do Muslims believe about a worldwide Muslim community (ummah)?

Muslims believe that they are members of a worldwide Muslim community, known as the *ummah*, united by a religious bond that transcends tribal, ethnic, and national identities. This belief is based upon Quran 2:143, which declares that God created the Muslim ummah to serve as witnesses of God's guidance to the nations.

Islam was revealed in a time and place in which tribal loyalty was considered a person's most important identification. The individual's status was based upon membership in a particular tribe. Islam declared the absolute equality of all believers. The primary identity of the Muslim was as a Muslim, rather than as a member of a tribe, ethnicity, or gender. This notion of radical egalitarianism shattered the importance of tribal identities and fostered the belief that Muslims should always defend and protect other Muslims. Quran 9:71 says: "The believers, men and women, are protectors of one another. They enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil. They

observe regular prayers, regularly give alms, and obey God and His Messenger [i.e., Muhammad]. On them will God pour His mercy, for God is exalted in power, wise."

Ummah is often used to refer to the essential unity of all Muslims, despite their diverse geographical and cultural settings. The traditions of the Prophet (*hadith*) speak of the ummah as the spiritual, nonterritorial community of Muslims that is distinguished and united by the shared beliefs of its members. This concept became particularly important during the nineteenth-century era of European colonialism and the rise of nationalism. Islamic resistance movements called for the defense of the ummah against European intrusions throughout the Islamic world. The Ottoman Empire also appealed to the unity of the ummah as a way of reinvigorating Islamic solidarity. Nationalists, although trying to unite their countries on the basis of national loyalty, did not challenge the authority of the concept of the ummah and in fact used it as the basis for calling for political unity. Although nationalists since the 1960s have called for a separation of national and religious identities, Islamists continue to support the notion of membership in the ummah as the primary identity for all Muslims, rather than ethnic, linguistic, or geographic identities. Contemporary Muslims still believe in the ummah as a social identity, despite the secularization of public life and contemporary emphasis on national political identities.

Muslims have been commanded to protect each other and to consider their identities as Muslims to be more important than any other identities they might have. They refer to their membership in the Muslim ummah as the reason for their concern for Muslims throughout the world. Causes that have received broad attention from the worldwide Muslim community include the Afghan struggle against Soviet occupation from

1979 to 1989, ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims in 1994 and of Kosovar Albanian Muslims in 1997, and the ongoing plight of the Palestinians. Muslims have also been active in fund-raising to assist victims of natural disasters in the Muslim world, such as earthquakes in Turkey and Afghanistan.

What are the core beliefs that unite all Muslims?

Despite a rich diversity in Islamic practice, there are five simple required observances prescribed in the Quran that all practicing Muslims accept and follow. These "*Pillars of Islam*" represent the core and common denominator that unites all Muslims and distinguishes Islam from other religions. Following the Pillars of Islam requires dedication of your mind, feelings, body, time, energies, and possessions. Meeting the obligations required by the Pillars reinforces an ongoing presence of God in Muslims' lives and reminds them of their membership in a single worldwide community of believers.

1. The first Pillar is called the *Declaration of Faith*. A Muslim is one who bears witness, who testifies that "there is no god but God [Allah] and Muhammad is the messenger of God." This declaration is known as the *shahada* (witness, testimony). Allah is the Arabic name for God, just as Yahweh is the Hebrew name for God used in the Old Testament. To become a Muslim, one need only make this simple proclamation.

The first part of this proclamation affirms Islam's absolute monotheism, the uncompromising belief in the oneness or unity of God, as well as the doctrine that association of anything else with God is idolatry and the one unforgivable sin. As we see in Quran 4:48: "God does not forgive anyone for associating something with Him, while He does forgive whomever He wishes to

for anything else. Anyone who gives God associates [partners] has invented an awful sin." This helps us to understand the Islamic belief that its revelation is intended to correct such departures from the "straight path" as the Christian concept of the Trinity and veneration of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism.

The second part of the confession of faith asserts that Muhammad is not only a prophet but also a messenger of God, a higher role also played by Moses and Jesus before him. For Muslims, Muhammad is the vehicle for the last and final revelation. In accepting Muhammad as the "seal of the prophets," they believe that his prophecy confirms and completes all of the revealed messages, beginning with Adam's. In addition, somewhat like Jesus Christ, Muhammad serves as the preeminent role model through his life example. The believer's effort to follow Muhammad's example reflects the emphasis of Islam on practice and action. In this regard Islam is more like Judaism, with its emphasis upon the law, than Christianity, which gives greater importance to doctrines or dogma. This practical orientation of Islam is reflected in the remaining four Pillars of Islam.

2. The second Pillar of Islam is *Prayer (salat)*. Muslims pray (or, perhaps more correctly, worship) five times throughout the day: at daybreak, noon, midafternoon, sunset, and evening. Although the times for prayer and the ritual actions were not specified in the Quran, Muhammad established them.

In many Muslim countries, reminders to pray, or "calls to prayer," echo out across the rooftops. Aided by a megaphone, from high atop a mosque's minaret, the muezzin calls out:

God is most great [Allahu Akbar]. God is most great, God is most great, God is most great, I witness that there is no god but God [Allah]; I witness that there is no god but God. I

witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God. I witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God. Come to prayer; come to prayer! Come to prosperity; come to prosperity! God is most great. God is most great. There is no god but God.

These reminders throughout the day help to keep believers mindful of God in the midst of everyday concerns about work and family with all their attractions and distractions. It strengthens the conscience, reaffirms total dependence on God, and puts worldly concerns within the perspective of death, the last judgment, and the afterlife.

The prayers consist of recitations from the Quran in Arabic and glorification of God. These are accompanied by a sequence of movements: standing, bowing, kneeling, touching the ground with one's forehead, and sitting. Both the recitations and accompanying movements express submission, humility, and adoration of God. Muslims can pray in any clean environment, alone or together, in a mosque or at home, at work or on the road, indoors or out. It is considered preferable and more meritorious to pray with others, if possible, as one body united in the worship of God, demonstrating discipline, brotherhood, equality, and solidarity.

As they prepare to pray, Muslims face Mecca, the holy city that houses the Kaaba (the house of God believed to have been built by Abraham and his son Ismail). Each act of worship begins with the declaration that "God is most great" ("Allahu Akbar") and is followed by fixed prayers that include the opening verse of the Quran.

At the end of the prayer, the *shahada* (declaration of faith) is again recited, and the "peace greeting"—"Peace be upon all of you and the mercy and blessings of God"—is repeated twice.

3. The third Pillar of Islam is called the *Zakat*, which means “purification.” Like prayer, which is both an individual and communal responsibility, *zakat* expresses a Muslim’s worship of and thanksgiving to God by supporting the poor. It requires an annual contribution of 2.5 percent of an individual’s wealth and assets, not merely a percentage of annual income. In Islam, the true owner of things is not man but God. People are given their wealth as a trust from God. Therefore, *zakat* is not viewed as “charity”; it is an obligation for those who have received their wealth from God to respond to the needs of less fortunate members of the community. The Quran (9:60) as well as Islamic law stipulates that alms are to be used to support the poor, orphans, and widows, to free slaves and debtors, and to support those working in the “cause of God” (e.g., construction of mosques, religious schools, and hospitals). *Zakat*, developed fourteen hundred years ago, functions as a form of social security in a Muslim society. In Shii Islam, in addition to the *zakat*, which is not limited to 2.5 percent, believers pay a religious tax (*khums*) on their income to a religious leader. This is used to support the poor and needy.

4. The fourth Pillar of Islam, the *Fast of Ramadan*, occurs once each year during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and the month in which the first revelation of the Quran came to Muhammad. During this month-long fast, Muslims whose health permits must abstain from dawn to sunset from food, drink, and sexual activity. Fasting is a practice common to many religions, sometimes undertaken as penance, sometimes to free us from undue focus on physical needs and appetites. In Islam the discipline of the Ramadan fast is intended to stimulate reflection on human frailty and dependence upon God, focus on spiritual goals and values, and identification with and response to the less fortunate.

At dusk the fast is broken with a light meal popularly referred to as breakfast. Families and friends share a special late evening meal together, often including special foods and sweets served only at this time of the year. Many go to the mosque for the evening prayer, followed by special prayers recited only during Ramadan. Some will recite the entire Quran (one-thirtieth each night of the month) as a special act of piety, and public recitations of the Quran or Sufi chanting can be heard throughout the evening. Families rise before sunrise to take their first meal of the day, which must sustain them until sunset.

Near the end of Ramadan (the twenty-seventh day) Muslims commemorate the “Night of Power” when Muhammad first received God’s revelation. The month of Ramadan ends with one of the two major Islamic celebrations, the Feast of the Breaking of the Fast, called *Eid al-Fitr*, which resembles Christmas in its spirit of joyfulness, special celebrations, and gift giving.

5. The fifth Pillar is the *Pilgrimage or Hajj* to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. At least once in his or her lifetime, every adult Muslim who is physically and financially able is required to make the sacrifice of time, possessions, status, and normal comforts necessary to make this pilgrimage, becoming a pilgrim totally at God’s service. The pilgrimage season follows Ramadan. Every year over two million believers representing a tremendous diversity of cultures and languages travel from all over the world to the holy city of Mecca to form one community living their faith. In addition to the *hajj* there is a devotional ritual that is referred to as the “lesser pilgrimage.” It is called the *umrah* (visitation) and involves visiting the holy sites at other times of the year. Many who are on pilgrimage also perform the *umrah* rituals before, during, or after the *hajj*. However, performing the *umrah* does not fulfill the *hajj* obligation.

What do Muslims do on the pilgrimage to Mecca?

Those who participate in the pilgrimage wear simple garments, two seamless white cloths for men and an outfit that entirely covers the body, except face and hands, for women. These coverings symbolize purity as well as the unity and equality of all believers.

As the pilgrims approach Mecca they shout "I am here, O Lord, I am here!" When they enter Mecca their first obligation is to go to the Kaaba, which is located inside the compound of the Grand Mosque. (See page 23, "What is the Kaaba?") The crowds of pilgrims move counterclockwise around the Kaaba seven times. This circumambulation, like prayer, symbolizes the believer's entry into the divine presence.

In the days that follow, pilgrims participate in a variety of ritual actions and ceremonies symbolizing key religious events. They walk and sometimes run along a quarter-mile corridor of the Grand Mosque seven times to commemorate Hagar's frantic search in the desert for water for her son Ismail. This rite, in great contrast to the circumambulation of the Kaaba, which centers on spiritual contact with God, symbolizes humankind's ongoing effort, movement, and struggle through life, expressing a believer's persistence in life's struggle for survival. The pilgrims drink water from the well, called Zamzam (meaning "bubbling"), which is located within the Grand Mosque, where Muslims believe God provided water for Hagar and Ismail. They assemble for a day at Arafat, a vast, empty plain, in commemoration of the final pilgrimage of Muhammad, who delivered his farewell sermon to his people from the Mount of Mercy, a hill in the middle of the plain. They symbolically reject the devil, the source of all evil, by throw-

ing stones at three pillars that stand at the site where Satan met Abraham and Ismail and tempted them to disobey God when Abraham was preparing to sacrifice his son in obedience to God's command.

What is the Kaaba?

The Kaaba is seen as the most sacred space in the Muslim world, the site to which hundreds of millions of Muslims throughout the world turn each day when they pray.

Located inside the compound of the Grand Mosque at Mecca, the Kaaba (literally, "cube") is a cube-shaped structure known as the "House of God." It contains the sacred Black Stone, a meteorite believed to have been placed by Abraham and Ismail in a corner of the Kaaba, a symbol of God's covenant with Abraham and Ismail and by extension with the Muslim community itself. The Kaaba is approximately forty-five feet high and thirty-three by fifty feet wide and is draped with a woven black cloth embellished with Quranic verses embroidered in gold.

The Kaaba is considered the first house of worship of the one God, originally built by Adam and replicating the heavenly House of God, which contains the divine throne that is circumambulated by the angels. This heavenly ritual is reenacted during the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) by pilgrims who circumambulate the Kaaba seven times, symbolizing their entry before the divine presence. Adam's Kaaba is believed to have been destroyed by the neglect of believers and the flood, but according to the Quran (2:127) Abraham and his son Ismail rebuilt the holy house. However, by the time of Muhammad the Kaaba was under the control of the Quraysh of Mecca, who used it as a shrine for the tribal gods and idols of Arabia.

The Quraysh held an annual pilgrimage to the Kaaba and a fair that attracted pilgrims from all over Arabia.

Tradition tells us that one of the first things Muhammad did when he returned from exile and triumphantly entered Mecca was to cleanse the Kaaba of its 360 idols and restore the “religion of Abraham,” the worship of the one true God.

What is the significance of Mecca?

Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and the most sacred location in the Islamic world. It is the site of the Grand Mosque, which houses the Kaaba. (See page 23, “What is the Kaaba?”) Millions of Muslims travel there each year from all over the world to perform the *hajj*. Mecca is seen as housing the spiritual center of the earth, where actions of worship such as the circumambulation of the Kaaba (see page 22, “What do Muslims do on the pilgrimage to Mecca?”) are believed to be duplicated in heaven at the Throne of God. Mecca, like Medina, is closed to non-Muslims.

How do Muslims pray?

Prayer, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, is central in the life of a Muslim. Here are some highlights:

Five times each day, hundreds of millions of Muslims face Mecca (holiest city of Islam, birthplace of Muhammad, and site of the Kaaba, or House of God) to pray—at daybreak, noon-time, midafternoon, sunset, and evening. These five obligatory prayers have to be performed in Arabic, regardless of the native tongue of the worshipper. Each part of the prayer has its function within this daily ritual and is designed to combine meditation, devotion, moral elevation, and physical exercise. Prayers can be performed individually or in congregation.

The actions and words a Muslim uses during the prayer demonstrate his or her ultimate submission to God. This process combines faith and practice, putting into action what is expressed in the First Pillar of Islam, in which Muslims proclaim their belief in the one God and in Muhammad as God’s messenger.

Preparing to meet and address the Lord, Muslims perform a ritual ablution, or cleansing, to ensure that they are in a state of spiritual and physical purity. First, they cleanse their minds and hearts from worldly thoughts and concerns, concentrating on God and the blessings he has given them. Second, they wash hands and face, arms up to the elbow, and feet, then say, “I bear witness that there is no god but God; He has no partner; and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger.” This purification process is as spiritual as it is physical, as can be seen in the fact that sand can be used if water is not available. The objective is for the mind and body to be clean as Muslims approach or put themselves in the presence of God.

The movements Muslims perform while praying, individually or in groups, reflect past customs used when entering the presence of great kings or rulers: raising our hands in greeting, bowing, and finally prostrating ourselves before this great power. Worshipers begin by raising their hands and proclaiming God’s greatness (“Allahu Akbar”—God is most great). Then, folding their hands over stomach or chest or leaving them at their sides, they stand upright and recite what has been described as the essential message of the Quran, the opening discourse:

Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds; the Beneficent, the Merciful; Master of the Day of Judgment. You alone do we

worship and from you alone do we seek aid. Show us the Straight Way, the way of those upon whom You have bestowed Your grace, not of those who have earned Your wrath or who go astray. (Quran 1:2–6)

After reciting another (this time self-selected) verse from the Quran, Muslims bow and proclaim, “Glory to God in the Highest,” three times. Returning to an upright position, they say, “God hears the one who praises Him” and “Our Lord, all praise belongs to you!”

The next phase of worship involves what is commonly called “prostration” in English, although it does not involve lying down at full length. The position Muslims take represents an expression of ultimate submission. Before beginning the act of prostration, Muslims first repeat, “Allahu Akbar” (God is most great). Then they fall to their knees, placing hands flat on the ground and bringing their foreheads down between their hands to touch the ground. While in this bowing position, Muslims recite three times, “Glory to the Lord Most High!” After this, they stand up and repeat the entire cycle of prayer.

Prayer includes sitting on the heels and reciting a formula known as “the witnessing” because it contains the declaration of Muslim faith. The witnessing is followed by asking God’s blessings for the first and last of God’s Prophets, Abraham and Muhammad.

Finally, prayer is ended with an invocation of peace (*salam*). Worshippers turn their heads right and left and say, “May the peace, mercy, and blessings of Allah be upon you.” Although this invocation is addressed to fellow believers on the right and left, some Muslims also believe they are addressing their guardian angels, who remain over their shoulders as they

pray. After completing the obligatory prayers, Muslims can privately petition (*dua*) God regarding their individual needs. There are recommended prayer texts in Arabic for such individual needs and problems, but in these prayers the worshipper can also address God in his or her own native language and own words.

When Islam first appeared in the Middle East, it was common practice in the Byzantine and Sasanian empires to prostrate oneself before the Byzantine emperor (a Christian) and the Shah of Persia (a Zoroastrian), since both rulers were both king and high priest. However, Muslims historically were especially strong in refusing to prostrate themselves before anyone or anything but Allah. In the mid-seventh century the Tang Dynasty of China recorded that a delegation of Arab and Persian visitors refused to prostrate themselves in front of the emperor, who was believed to be the “Son of Heaven.”

In modern times we can still find examples of prostration in other religions. To the present day Anglican and Catholic clergy prostrate themselves before the altar at the beginning of the Good Friday liturgy, and so do the ordinands in the rite of ordination. Members of some Catholic monastic orders regularly prostrate themselves instead of genuflecting before the blessed sacrament at the altar of Christ.

Do Muslims believe in angels?

Like Jews and Christians, Muslims believe that angels are a part of God’s creation. Angels act as God’s agents and serve Him by protecting humans, relaying His messages, or performing a variety of other functions. For example, the angel Gabriel brought divine revelation to Muhammad; the angel Michael provides sustenance for human bodies and knowledge to human minds; the angel Israfil will sound the trumpet at the Final Judgment.

According to Islamic tradition, angels are created from light. Unlike humans, they do not have free will. They are absolutely obedient to God's commands and are everlastingly engaged in worship and service to Him. Many Muslims believe that two angels attend each human being, recording all of his or her words and actions up until the moment of death. They will present this account on the Day of Judgment.

Do Muslims believe in heaven and hell?

Muslims do believe in heaven and hell, in eternal reward or punishment depending on whether human beings follow the will of God and act with justice and mercy toward others during their lifetime. The Quran frequently emphasizes the ultimate moral responsibility and accountability of each believer. On the Day of Judgment, a great cataclysmic cosmic event that will occur at a moment known only to God, all will be raised from the dead. God will judge each person by the standards brought by the person's community's prophets and scripture, using the record of each person's actions throughout his or her life that are recorded in the Book of Deeds: "Then those whose balance of good deeds is heavy will attain salvation, but those whose balance is light will have lost their souls and abide in Hell forever" (Quran 23:102-103)

The Quran's vision of the afterlife is both spiritual and physical. Bodies and souls will be joined, and the pleasures of heavenly gardens of bliss and the pain of hellfire will be fully experienced. The Garden of Paradise is a heavenly mansion of peace and bliss with flowing rivers, beautiful gardens, and cool drink from a shining stream. Quranic descriptions of heavenly bliss are life-affirming, emphasizing the beauty of creation and enjoyment of its pleasures within the limits set by God:

Those who believe and do righteous deeds, they are the best of creatures. Their reward is with their Lord: Gardens of Paradise beneath which rivers flow. They will dwell therein forever, God well-pleased with them and they with Him. This is for those who hold their Lord in awe. (98:7-8)

Later traditions elaborated on the joys of paradise and the role of *houris*, or beautiful companions. The Quran makes no reference to a sexual role for the houris, but some Western critics have rendered *houris* as meaning "virgins" and seized upon one popular belief that has been used to motivate some Muslim suicide bombers. However, many Quranic commentators and most Muslims understand houris as virgins only in the sense of pure or purified souls.

Hell is a place of endless pain, suffering, torment, and despair, with roaring flames, fierce boiling waters, and scorching wind. The destiny of the damned, their eternal punishment, is a just punishment, the result of human choice:

Verily, the sinners will be in the punishment of Hell, to remain therein. It will not be lightened for them and they will be overwhelmed in despair. And we shall not be unjust to them, but it is they who have been unjust to themselves. (43:74-76)

The Quran's comprehensive and integrated view of life contrasts with Christianity's tendency to compartmentalize life into the sacred and profane, body and soul, sensual and spiritual. In contrast to the "spiritual" images of a more sedate, celibate, and blissful Paradise predominant in Christian visions of heaven, the Quran does not draw a distinction between enjoying the joys of beatific vision and those of the fruits of creation.

In modern times, more conservative and fundamentalist writers and religious leaders continue to appeal to literalist interpretations of the afterlife. Most contemporary Muslim commentary tends to emphasize the importance of moral responsibility and accountability in this life and its direct connection to divine justice with eternal reward and punishment without getting into explicit, concrete descriptions of the afterlife.

Do Muslims believe in saints?

Saint in Arabic is somewhat equivalent to the Arabic word *wali*, which means “friend, helper, or patron.” There is no mention of saints in the Quran, which emphasizes that God alone is the wali of believers and there is no helper but Him. In fact, the Quran warns about “intercession,” seeking help from anyone but God. Therefore, some Muslims are opposed to the concept of sainthood as un-Islamic. They say that such beliefs and practices violate monotheism by potentially treating saints as if they are equal to God. Others, however, believe that there can be intercession with God’s permission and that some receive a special favor from God allowing them to intercede for others. Certain saints are known for providing intercessions for particular causes: helping women to bear children, solving domestic problems, curing illnesses, or avoiding certain disasters.

The Christian and Islamic concepts of sainthood differ in a number of ways. Sainthood in Islam is not determined by Catholicism’s method of canonization but rather by a more informal process of acclamation. The majority of popular saints are Sufi saints. (Sufis are the mystics of Islam; see page 56, “Are Sufis Muslims?”) The tombs of Sufi saints are often the object of pilgrimage and a focal point for festivals and

processions celebrating a saint’s birth or death. Other Sufi saints are more remembered for their wise sayings, virtues, and miracles. A significant number of popular, Sufi, and legendary saints are women.

What do Muslims believe about Mary and Jesus?

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is a prominent figure in Islam and the only woman mentioned by name in the Quran. The Quran upholds Mary as one of the four perfect examples of womanhood (66:12). An entire chapter, Surah 19, is dedicated to her and her history. Mary is mentioned more times in the Quran than in the entire New Testament, and more biographical information about her is contained in the Quran than in the New Testament.

The Quranic account of Mary includes the pregnancy of her mother, Anna, Mary’s birth, the annunciations of the coming births of John the Baptist and Jesus, and affirmation of the virgin conception and birth of Jesus: “[Remember] her who preserved her chastity, into whom We breathed a life from Us, and made her and her son a token for mankind” (21:91). The Quran teaches that Mary is to be revered because she completely submitted herself to God’s will, even though it meant that her own family would accuse her of unchastity when it was discovered that she was pregnant (19:16–21). The Quran also records Jesus as an infant verbally defending Mary’s innocence (19:27–34).

Jesus is an important figure in the Quran, which affirms the truth of the teachings of Jesus as found in the Gospels. Like Christians, Muslims believe in the virgin conception of Jesus by God’s Spirit. The Quran also records some of Jesus’

miracles, including giving sight to the blind, healing lepers, raising the dead, and breathing life into clay birds (5:110). This last miracle is not recorded in the canonical New Testament but does appear in the noncanonical Gospel of Thomas. The Quran also reports Jesus' proclamation of the need to worship God as the only God and his own status as a witness to God (5:116–17).

Muslim and Christian beliefs about Jesus differ in two areas. First, although Muslims believe in the virgin conception and birth of Jesus through an act of God's Spirit, they do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God. They believe that he is one of the long line of righteous prophets and second only to Muhammad in importance (6:83–87). For Muslims, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity represents a form of polytheism, proclaiming belief in three gods rather than one God alone (4:171, 5:17, 5:72–77).

Second, Muslims do not believe in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (4:157–58). They believe that, although it appeared that Jesus was crucified, instead God took Jesus to Himself in a manner similar to what happened to Elijah (3:55, 4:157–589). Muslims do not believe in the Christian doctrine of Original Sin, so there is no theological need for the all-atoning sacrifice of Jesus through his crucifixion and resurrection. Muslims further believe that each of us will be held accountable before God for our own actions and thus responsible for our own salvation. Therefore, we will not be able to rely upon anyone else, not even Jesus or Muhammad, to save us from our sins.

Do Muslims have a Sabbath like Jews and Christians?

Friday is the Muslim day of congregational worship. It was not traditionally considered a day of rest, but in some Mus-

lim countries today Friday has replaced the Sunday holiday, which was instituted by colonial powers and therefore often seen as a Western, Christian legacy.

In both Muslim and Western countries, congregational prayer (*juma*) in a mosque takes place at noon on Friday. Many Muslims in America arrange to use their lunch hour or a flexible work schedule (coming to work earlier or staying later) in order to attend their hour-long Friday services. (See next question.) Those who cannot do so go to their mosque or Islamic center on Sunday for congregational prayer, religious education classes, and socializing.

Do Muslims have a weekly worship service?

Muslims gather at a mosque on Friday for the noon congregational prayer (*juma*). Together Muslims of different ages, ethnic groups, and social status stand side by side in straight rows facing the niche in the wall (*mihrab*) that indicates the direction (*qibla*) of the Holy City of Mecca. Men and women worship in separate groups, women behind the men—for reasons of modesty, because prostrations are part of the prayer ritual. Traditionally only men were required to attend the Friday congregational prayer. Increasingly today, however, women attend the service in large numbers. The prayer is led by an *imam* (leader), who stands in front of the congregation.

A special feature of the Friday prayer is a sermon (*khutba*), often delivered from a wooden platform (*minbar*) modeled on the platform used by Muhammad when he gave sermons to his community. The preacher begins by reciting a verse from the Quran and then gives a short talk addressing the affairs and problems of the community, often combining religious advice on social or political issues with commentary based on

the Quran's message. Although in mosques with a permanent staff the imam will usually deliver the sermon, any member of the congregation can do so.

Do Muslims have religious holidays or holy days?

Muslims celebrate two great Islamic holidays. The first is Eid al-Fitr, the Feast of the Breaking of the Fast of Ramadan, whose celebration extends for three days. The second holiday, which is the greater of the two, occurs two and a half months after the first and extends for four days. This is the Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, which marks the annual completion of the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). These holidays represent a religious obligation for Muslims as well as a social celebration.

In America, Eid prayers are observed in every community where Muslims reside, and gatherings to celebrate the occasions are common. In 2001 the U.S. Post Office issued a stamp to commemorate the Eid al-Fitr. Many Muslim children stay home from school to celebrate these festivals, and in some areas school authorities recognize the Eids as holidays for Muslim youngsters, as they recognize the Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Traditionally, both Eids are occasions for exchanging visits with relatives and friends. As at Christmas celebrations, gifts of money or new clothes are given to children, and special sweets and other foods are served to family and guests.

In many contexts other religious holidays are celebrated, such as the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad and, in Shii Islam, the birthdays of Ali and the Imams. Shii annually commemorate the "passion" of Hussein during a ten-day period of remembering, ritually reenacting, and mourning the last

stand of the Imam Hussein and his followers against the army of the caliph. (See page 45, "What is the difference between Sunni and Shii Muslims?")

Does Islam have a clergy?

Islam does not have an ordained clergy or representatives of a church hierarchy in the way that Christianity does. Any Muslim can lead the prayer or officiate at a wedding or burial. In fact, however, historically certain functions came to be filled by a class that took on distinctive forms of dress and authority that are clergy-like. A variety of roles have come to be played by religious scholars and leaders.

In early Islam, pious Muslims from many walks of life also led prayer or became scholars of the Quran and Islamic sciences, but over time many turned these activities into a profession. Every mosque has an *imam*, respected in the community, the one who "stands in front" to lead the prayer and delivers the Friday sermon. In smaller congregations, various members take turns in performing this role. Larger communities have a full-time imam, the chief official who performs the many functions that a priest or rabbi might perform: leading a ritual prayer, administering the mosque or Islamic center or school as well as community activities, visiting the sick, and instructing young people preparing to marry, etc.

Scholars of the Quran, Islamic law, and theology (who are called *ulama*, meaning "the learned") came to represent a permanent class of religious scholars often distinguished in society by their form of dress. They claimed a primary role as the protectors and authoritative interpreters of Islam. Many titles exist for Islamic religious scholars, reflecting their functions in interpreting Islam, some in theology, others in law.

Among the ulama, *mujtahid* is a special title for one who is qualified to interpret Islamic Law (using *ijtihad*, or independent reasoning). A *mufti* is a specialist in Islamic law competent to deliver a *fatwa*, a legal interpretation or judgment. In Sufism (Islamic mysticism), a Sufi master (*pir*) functions as spiritual leader of his followers.

In Sunni Islam, many governments have created the position of Grand Mufti, or senior religious leader. In Shii Islam (the Twelver or Ithna Ashari sect), a hierarchy of religious leaders evolved, at whose apex were Grand Ayatollahs.

In modern times, Islamic reformers include not only the ulama but also educated laity who combine a knowledge of Islam and modern sciences. Today the laity share with the ulama the role of interpreters of Islam.

What is a mosque?

The word *mosque* comes from the Arabic word *masjid* (place for ritual prostration). The Prophet Muhammad's mosque in Medina, the first Muslim place of worship, functioned as a gathering place for worship, meditation, and learning. Unlike churches or synagogues with their rows of benches or pews, the mosque's main prayer area is a large open space, the expansive floors adorned with oriental carpets. An important feature of the prayer area is the *mihrab*, an ornamental arched niche set into the wall, which indicates the direction of Mecca (which Muslims always face when praying). Next to the mihrab is the *minbar*, a raised wooden platform (similar to a pulpit) modeled after the one that the Prophet Muhammad ascended to give his sermons to the community. The prayer leader delivers his sermon from the steps of the minbar.

Because of the need for cleansing prior to prayer, most mosques have a spot set aside for performing ablutions away from the main prayer area.

The mosque, as the sacred space for individual and congregational worship, has social and intellectual significance for Muslims. Mosques have served as places for prayer, meditation, and learning as well as focal points for the religious and the social life of the Muslim community throughout its history. A mosque's atmosphere is one of tranquility and reflection but also of relaxation. When visiting a mosque, one is as likely to see people chatting quietly or napping on the carpets as praying and reading the Quran.

Historically, wherever Muslims have settled in sufficient numbers, one of their first efforts has been to erect a mosque. In twenty-first-century America, where Islam will soon be the second largest religion, mosque construction has increased exponentially. Over 2,100 mosques and/or Islamic centers, large and small, located throughout the United States in small towns and villages as well as in major cities, are currently serving a diverse American-Muslim community. Many of these mosques incorporate and reflect the diversity of Muslims in America. The membership of others, however, is drawn along ethnic or racial lines. The same phenomenon has been seen in other faiths. For example, one could find two Catholic churches with separate schools, one Irish and one Italian- or French-speaking, across the street from each other. In some places more mosques than might otherwise be needed have been created to accommodate such differences. In some cities and towns one can identify separate Arab, South Asian, Turkish, or African-American mosques.

Mosques have served a multiplicity of functions all over the world. Beyond their use for individual worship and Friday

congregational prayer, they are often the site of Quranic recitations and retreats, especially during Ramadan. They are used as centers for the collection and distribution of *zakat* (charitable contributions). Many pilgrims visit their local mosques when they depart for and return from the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) and *umrah* (minor pilgrimage). The dead are placed before the *mihrab* for funerary prayers. Mosques are sometimes the nucleus of an Islamic center housing activities for a multigenerational, multiethnic Islamic community. (See next question.) Marriages and business agreements are often contracted in the mosque, and education takes place in various forms. In times of crisis, worshippers gather for mutual support and to receive guidance from religious leaders.

What is an Islamic center?

An Islamic center is similar to the Christian and Jewish community centers that have become an integral part of many churches and synagogues in America and around the world. For Muslims, it provides a place for prayer as well as a location for social gatherings, community celebrations, and religious classes. In America, many of these community activities take place on Sunday, when Muslims are free from weekday work obligations. The center may be a building that stands alone or part of a mosque complex.

The diverse offering of some American mosques and centers might include youth sports activities, social services such as job and computer training, job placement, and programs featuring political candidates. Internationally, mosques and Islamic centers have also provided the social services that some governments have failed to offer their citizens.

Are there any divisions in Islam?

As a world religion, Islam is practiced in diverse cultures in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and America. Differences in religious and cultural practices are therefore wide-ranging. Although there are no denominations in Islam such as exist in the Christian faith (Roman Catholic, Methodist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, etc.), like all faiths, Islam has developed divisions, sects, and schools of thought over various issues. While all Muslims share certain beliefs and practices, such as belief in God, the Quran, Muhammad, and the Five Pillars of Islam, divisions have arisen over questions of political and religious leadership, theology, interpretations of Islamic law, and responses to modernity and the West.

The division of opinion about political and religious leadership after the death of Muhammad led to the division of Muslims into two major branches—Sunnis (85 percent of all Muslims) and Shiis (15 percent). (See next question.) In addition, a small but significant radical minority known as the Kharijites should be mentioned. Although they have never won large numbers of followers, their unique theological position has continued to influence political and religious debate up to the present day.

Sunni Muslims believe that because Muhammad did not designate a successor, the best or most qualified person should be either selected or elected as leader (*caliph*). Because the Quran declared Muhammad to be the last of the prophets, this caliph was to succeed Muhammad as the political leader only. Sunnis believe that the caliph should serve as the protector of the faith, but he does not enjoy any special religious status or inspiration.

Shiis, by contrast, believe that succession to the leadership of the Muslim community should be hereditary, passed down to Muhammad's male descendants (descended from Muhammad's daughter Fatima and her husband Ali), who are known as Imams and who are to serve as both religious and political leaders. Shiis believe that the Imam is religiously inspired, sinless, and the interpreter of God's will as contained in Islamic law, but not a prophet. Shiis consider the sayings, deeds, and writings of their Imams to be authoritative religious texts, in addition to the Quran and Sunnah. Shiis further split into three main divisions as a result of disagreement over the number of Imams who succeeded Muhammad. (See page 48, "What are the divisions among Shii Muslims?")

The Kharijites (from *kharaja*, to go out or exit) began as followers of the caliph Ali, but they broke away from him because they believed him to be guilty of compromising God's will when he agreed to arbitrate rather than continue to fight a long, drawn-out war against a rebellious general. After separating from Ali (whom they eventually assassinated), the Kharijites established a separate community designed to be a "true" charismatic society strictly following the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. The Kharijite world was separated neatly into believers and nonbelievers, Muslims (followers of God) and non-Muslims (enemies of God). These enemies could include other Muslims who did not accept the uncompromising Kharijite point of view. Sinners were to be excommunicated and were subject to death unless they repented. Therefore, a caliph or ruler could only hold office as long as he was sinless. If he fell from this state, he was outside the protection of law and must be deposed or killed. This mentality influenced the famous medieval theologian and legal scholar Ibn Taymiyya and has been replicated in mod-

ern times by Islamic Jihad, the group that assassinated Egypt's President Anwar Sadat, as well as by Osama bin Laden and other extremists who call for the overthrow of "un-Islamic" Muslim rulers.

Differences of opinion about political and religious leadership have led Sunnis and Shiis to hold very different visions of sacred history. Sunnis experienced a glorious and victorious history under the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs and the expansion and development of Muslim empires under the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. Sunnis can thus claim a golden age in which they were a great world power and civilization, which they see as evidence of God's guidance and the truth of the mission of Islam. Shiis, on the other hand, struggled unsuccessfully during the same time period against Sunni rule in the attempt to restore the imamate they believed God had appointed. Therefore, Shiis see in this time period the illegitimate usurpation of power by the Sunnis at the expense of creating a just society. Shii historical memory emphasizes the suffering and oppression of the righteous, the need to protest against injustice, and the requirement that Muslims be willing to sacrifice everything, including their lives, in the struggle with the overwhelming forces of evil (Satan) in order to restore God's righteous rule.

Divisions of opinion also exist with respect to theological questions. One historical example is the question of whether a ruler judged guilty of a grave (mortal) sin should still be considered legitimate or should be overthrown and killed. Most Sunni theologians and jurists taught that the preservation of social order was more important than the character of the ruler. They also taught that only God on Judgment Day is capable of judging sinners and determining whether or not they are faithful and deserving of Paradise. Therefore, they

concluded that the ruler should remain in power since he could not be judged by his subjects. Ibn Taymiyya was the one major theologian and jurist who made an exception to this position and taught instead that a ruler should and must be overthrown.

Ibn Taymiyya's ire was directed at the Mongols. Despite their conversion to Islam, they continued to follow the Yasa code of laws of Genghis Khan instead of the Islamic law, Shariah. For Ibn Taymiyya this made them no better than the polytheists of the pre-Islamic period. He issued a *fatwa* (formal legal opinion) that labeled them as unbelievers (*kafirs*) who were thus excommunicated (*takfir*). This fatwa established a precedent: despite their claim to be Muslims, their failure to implement Shariah rendered the Mongols apostates and hence the lawful object of jihad. Muslim citizens thus had the right, indeed duty, to revolt against them, to wage jihad. Ibn Taymiyya's opinions remain relevant today because they have inspired the militancy and religious worldview of organizations like Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network.

Other examples of divisions over theological questions include arguments over whether the Quran was created or uncreated and whether it should be interpreted literally or metaphorically and allegorically. Historically, Muslims have also debated the question of free will versus predestination. That is, are human beings truly free to choose their own actions or are all actions predetermined by an omniscient God? What are the implications of such beliefs upon human responsibility and justice?

Islamic law provides one of the clearest and most important examples of diversity of opinions. Islamic law developed in response to the concrete realities of daily life. Since the heart of Islam and being a Muslim is submission to God's

will, the primary question for believers was "What should I do and how?" During the Umayyad Empire (661–750), rulers set up a rudimentary legal system based upon the Quran, the Sunnah, and local customs and traditions. However, many pious Muslims became concerned about the influence of rulers on the development of the law. They wanted to anchor Islamic law more firmly to its revealed sources and make it less vulnerable to manipulation by rulers and their appointed judges.

Over the next two centuries, Muslims in the major cities of Medina, Mecca, Kufa, Basra, and Damascus sought to discover and delineate God's will and law through the science of jurisprudence. Although each city produced a distinctive interpretation of the law, all cities shared a general legal tradition. The earliest scholars of Islamic law were neither lawyers nor judges nor students of a specific university. They were men who combined professions such as trade with the study of Islamic texts. These loosely connected scholars tended to be gathered around or associated with major personalities. Their schools of thought came to be referred to as law schools.

While many law schools existed, only a few endured and were recognized as authoritative. Today, there are four major Sunni law schools (Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, and Shafii) and two major Shii schools (Jafari and Zaydis). The Hanafi came to predominate in the Arab world and South Asia; the Maliki in North, Central, and West Africa; the Shafii in East Africa and Southeast Asia; and the Hanbali in Saudi Arabia. Muslims are free to follow any law school but usually select the one that predominates in the area in which they are born or live.

Perhaps nowhere are the differences in Islam more visible than in the responses to modernity. Since the nineteenth century, Muslims have struggled with the relationship of their religious tradition developed in premodern times to the new