

# Islam

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson talks about Islam. You will cover its history, a brief outline of its significant figures and core beliefs, its different sects, and how it is recognized and practiced. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Islam
2. Sects of Islam
3. Five Pillars

## 1. Islam

The historical chronology of **Islam** goes back to the seventh century in the calm of the Common Era. It is the last of the three monotheistic **Abrahamic** religions, after Judaism and Christianity. The formal unification of the Arabian Peninsula under Islam occurred under the organization and leadership of the **prophet** Muhammad in the seventh century of the Common Era.

Muslims, practitioners of Islam, believe that the divine revelation that gave rise to the Islamic faith is the ultimate, the final, and the perfect revelation. Islam recognizes the Jewish and the Christian prophets but believes that their prophet, Muhammad, is God's greatest prophet. Firmly in the Abrahamic tradition, Islam recognizes Abraham as the first historical patriarch and as one of God's prophets, along with Moses and Jesus.

However, Muslims consider their prophecy and revelation to be preparations for the Seal of the Prophets, the human person of Muhammad—in other words, God had chosen Muhammad to receive the last and the most complete revelation of truth.

As he was approaching 40 years old, Muhammad was known to retreat to the hills and the caves surrounding his home city of Mecca to meditate on and contemplate the problems of justice and inequality in the world. During these times, he received a series of revelations from God's angel, Gabriel, carrying the message that there is only one God, Allah. This and other revelations during these times form the verses of Islam's central sacred text, called the **Qur'an**, or Koran, in which there are at least 99 other names for God.

According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad also received divine insight into God's unity, God's perfection, and God's incomprehensibility. Stories and sayings about the life of Muhammad, which are based on this revelation

and understanding of Allah, are called hadith, or tradition, and together they form the other sacred piece of literature in Islam.

The word Islam itself means surrender. This is generally understood to mean surrendering one's will to God. To authentically do so aligns the practitioner with the will of Allah and the teaching of the Qur'an. Muslims do not believe that Allah is some representation of some other force or power of God. Allah is God, himself, for a Muslim.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Islam**

A religion founded in the present-day Middle East by Muhammad, whom Muslims regard as God's last and greatest prophet.

##### **Abrahamic**

Identifying Abraham as a founding descendant, as in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

##### **Prophet**

One chosen by God to speak and/or teach on his behalf.

##### **Qur'an**

The principal holy book of Islam, given to Muhammad as a perfect revelation from God (Allah).

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## 2. Sects of Islam

Every religion has different denominations, schools, or sects. In Islam, there is one primary division and parting of ways that can be traced back to the year 632, the year of Muhammad's death. It concerned the dispute over the legitimate successor to Muhammad, and it caused a great schism forming two primary groups: the Sunni and the Shiites.

The Shiites believe that Muhammad also received divine revelation informing him that Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, would succeed him as caliph, or religious head of state. The Sunnis believe that Muhammad's father-in-law, Abu Bakr, was the legitimate successor, and would be determined by consensual agreement among the community.



#### DID YOU KNOW

Looking at the entire Muslim population, at least 75% are Sunni, and approximately 20% are Shiite. In addition to the issue of succession, there are some practical differences among these groups, such as certain customs related to prayer; methods of dress, including the hijab; and certain laws that pertain to temporary marriage.

The most consistent difference, and perhaps the most difficult one to reconcile, is the Sunni-Shiite disagreement concerning the hadith: the Islamic tradition that refers to the actions, sayings, approvals, and disapprovals of the prophet Muhammad.

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### 3. Five Pillars

One thing that all Muslim groups agree on, however, is the truth of the Qur'an and the importance of following the Five Pillars of Islam. The Five Pillars outline the duties and responsibilities that every Muslim must adhere to.

- The first pillar is the shahada, which is the profession of faith.
- The second pillar is the salah, which are prayers.
- The third pillar is zakat, which is almsgiving.
- The fourth pillar is the sawm, which is fasting during the month of Ramadan.
- The fifth pillar is the hajj, which is a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Five Pillars allow one to live a life devoted to Allah and therefore progress to a state of greater spiritual purification. Each of these pillars supports that process.

Pillar	Meaning	Description
Shadada	Profession of faith	One must profess one's wholehearted belief in the truth of the oneness of Allah, the truth of the Qur'an, and the truth of Muhammad, God's seal of the prophets.
Salah	Prayers	It has many different interpretations among different Muslim groups. Generally, daily prayer is obligatory. Any belief in Allah cannot be supported without practice, and daily prayer is the most direct and demonstrable way to do so. One who doesn't might be considered a non-believer at worst and a sinner at best.
Zakat	Almsgiving	It's very common in many of the religions of the world. In Islam, one must give 2.5% of one's savings to the poor and needy. This action is, in fact, a form of worship, and supports a spiritual purification of anything remaining after the act of giving.
Sawm	Fasting during the month of Ramadan	Ramadan is the holy month in Islam, which marks the time when the prophet Muhammad received the revelation of the Qur'an. For Muslims, fasting and abstaining from food during this time allows one the opportunity to get closer to God and also to have more self-control with regard to one's desires.
Hajj	Pilgrimage to Mecca	This is a pillar that doesn't affect life on a daily, monthly, or even an annual basis for most people. The obligation of the hajj as the fifth pillar of the faith is to go on pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca, which is the site of Muhammad's birth and revelation. If one has the health and the finances to support the

journey, it is prescribed in the Qur'an to do so at least one time in one's life.



## SUMMARY

**Islam** is the third of the monotheistic Abrahamic religions, after Judaism and Christianity. Muslims do recognize the prophets that came before—Abraham, Moses, and Jesus—but the Prophet Muhammad is considered to be the seal of the prophets with the final and the perfect revelation. That final, perfect revelation is the Qur'an, the sacred text of Islam. The second sacred text that is honored and recognized is the hadith, which is the stories of the prophet's life, his sayings and actions, as well as his approvals and disapprovals of things in the world. The two main **Sects of Islam** are Sunni and Shiite. The divide between them dates back to 632 with the death of Muhammad and a dispute about who would inherit the caliphate, the head of state role. There are **Five Pillars** in Islam that are requisites for following the faith, and they are supports for the process of spiritual purification.

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### Islam

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### Prophet

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### Qur'an

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