

What Is Islam?

By Colleen Messina



¹ Muhammad never expected to change the world. He was born in 570 A.D. in Saudi Arabia. He was kind, and his nickname was "the truthful one." The boy was orphaned, and his uncle raised him. Muhammad tended sheep on the dry hills like many young Arabians. Later, he became a successful merchant and married a wealthy widow. However, he felt as though something was missing in his life, so he went on a retreat.



² Muhammad went up to Mount Hira to pray in a small cave. He had studied both Judaism and Christianity, and he wanted to find a deeper meaning for his life. He was also upset about the cruelty of his people. They killed baby girls to control the number of women, and they treated their slaves unkindly. Muhammad had a strong sense of right and wrong. He wanted change, but he had no idea that his prayers would lead to a new religion.

³ According to Islamic beliefs, Islam began in 610 A.D. when Muhammad said that the Archangel Gabriel appeared in the cave. Muhammad was amazed at the angel's first command: 'Read, in the name of Allah!' He wanted to obey, but he tried to explain that he didn't know how to read. Archangel Gabriel still gave Muhammad the message. The messages from the archangel over the next twenty-three years became the Koran, or Qur'ân. The Koran is the poetic, holy book of Islam.

⁴ Archangel Gabriel told Muhammad to preach about Allah. Muhammad began to preach three years after his vision. Mecca had 360 shrines to different gods, and the people didn't like the idea of just one god. They may have thought that more gods gave them a better chance of getting answers to their prayers. So the first Muslims became outcasts, and they moved to the city of Medina in 622 A.D. The Islamic calendar begins at this date instead of from the birth of Christ. Medina later became the center of Islamic civilization.

⁵ By the time Muhammad died, he had united many people in the Arabian Peninsula. It is said that Muhammad met Archangel Gabriel again at the end of his life. The angel led the Prophet to a mysterious animal called the *burag*. This animal had a human face, angel wings, and a horse's body. Muhammad ascended to heaven on its back. Muslims call this event the Night Journey. Muslims all over the world celebrate this event.

⁶ A Muslim is a person who follows the religion of Islam. A Muslim believes in

Allah as the one god. The word "Muslim" means "someone who surrenders to God." Muslims believe in the *Arkan-ul-Islam*, the Five Pillars of Islam. Muslims must do these five things. The first is *Shahadah*, or a declaration of faith. A Muslim says, "There is no god except Allah, and I declare that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." The second pillar, *Salaat*, means that Muslims must pray five times a day. *Zakaat* is the third pillar, and it means to give to the poor. Muslims fast during the month of Ramadan, which is the fourth pillar. The last pillar is *Haj*, a pilgrimage to Mecca.

⁷ All Muslims want to go to Mecca. It was Muhammad's birthplace. Pilgrims wear white robes in Mecca to show equality in Allah's eyes. They circle the Ka'bah, a small building made from bricks covered with a black cloth. The Ka'bah represents monotheism. Millions of pilgrims visit many holy sites each year. Many shops close during prayer time. Meetings are arranged around prayers. Businessmen may say to each other, "Let's meet after evening prayers!"

⁸ Muslims say their prayers in mosques, but some carry a prayer rug with them so they can pray anywhere. Mosques are beautiful buildings that serve as the spiritual centers of their communities. They can be simple or elaborate. Muslims follow certain rules when they are inside their mosques. Everyone takes off their shoes and covers their heads. Often a special area in the mosque is reserved for women. Everyone also washes before praying. Muslims face Mecca when they pray. A niche in the wall shows the direction of Mecca.

⁹ Prayers are important, but Islam is a complete way of life for Muslims around the world. Muslims believe that manners are important. They teach their children to respect others. The Muslim way of life begins moments after a baby is born. The father whispers the name of God, Allah, into his child's ear. Muslims raise their children to have high standards. Muslims are taught to not kill, lie, steal, cheat, or betray their country. They don't gamble, commit adultery, or drink alcohol.

¹⁰ Muslims also have fun. They enjoy wonderful festivals that celebrate historical events. Other holidays honor the Five Pillars of Islam. Births and marriages are marked by great celebrations. During Ramadan, Muslims fast between sunrise and sunset. A celebration called *Id al-Fitr* marks the end of the fast.

¹¹ Muslims prepare delicious foods for these celebrations. Sharing food is an important part of Muslim life. (After all, food was hard to find in the desert.) Yummy pastries called *hama* are covered with honey. Cookies called *kuch* are made with palm sugar. Lamb kebobs are also popular. Muslims do not eat pork as they follow certain dietary rules.

¹² Today there are 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide. The name Muhammad, which means, "highly praised," is given to more boys than any other name. Muslims have variations on their customs in different countries, but they are united in their belief in Allah.

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<p>1. Which angel is reported to have appeared to Mohammad?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> A Michael<input type="radio"/> B Gabriel<input type="radio"/> C Raphael<input type="radio"/> D None of the above	<p>2. Why did Muhammad go to Mount Hira?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> A He was persecuted by his neighbors.<input type="radio"/> B He needed more rocks for his collection.<input type="radio"/> C He felt something was missing in his life.<input type="radio"/> D He enjoyed hiking.
<p>3. Which of the following is not one of the Five Pillars of Islam?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> A Declaring the faith<input type="radio"/> B Praying five times a day<input type="radio"/> C Living in Mecca<input type="radio"/> D Giving to the poor	<p>4. What is the name of the building where Muslims pray?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> A A synagogue<input type="radio"/> B A temple<input type="radio"/> C A mosque<input type="radio"/> D A cathedral
<p>5. Why do Muslims wear white robes when they visit Mecca?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> A White is cooler in the heat.<input type="radio"/> B White represents purity.<input type="radio"/> C White symbolizes that all Muslims are equal in Allah's sight.<input type="radio"/> D White cloth is easy to obtain.	<p>6. What is the name of the holy book of Islam?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> A The Diamond Sutra<input type="radio"/> B The Torah<input type="radio"/> C The Bible<input type="radio"/> D The Koran or Qur'ân

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| <p>7. What was the overall effect of Islam upon the Arabian Peninsula?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> A It united people.<input type="radio"/> B It confused people.<input type="radio"/> C It made people smarter.<input type="radio"/> D It divided the area into many countries. | <p>8. What is the name of the Muslim month of fasting?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> A Divali<input type="radio"/> B Ramadan<input type="radio"/> C Gatorade Month<input type="radio"/> D Festival of Lamb Kebobs |
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