

## **HANDOUT: ISLAM FACT SHEET**

**Dates from:** 622 CE in Mecca (in Saudi Arabia) Note: Muslims believe Islam is the only true religion and has no beginning; 622 CE is the date the Islamic calendar began, keyed to an important event in Muhammad's life

**Adherents:** 1.5 billion (940 million Sunni, 560 million Shia)

**Ranking:** Second, behind Christianity

**Prophets:** Muhammad (last and final prophet); also Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Joseph, Moses, David, John the Baptist, Jesus, and others

**Texts:** Holy Qur'an (Qur'an) – primary scripture; also the Hadith (literally "report" or "tradition"), a collection of books chronicling sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers. The original language of Qur'an and Hadith is Arabic. The Qur'an is considered sealed; that is, permanently unalterable.

**Clergy:** Sunni Islam does not have formal clergy; however, imam is a term of respect for one who leads prayers, or sometimes a religious professional. Shiite Islam has hierarchical clergy, from the mullah, who has made a serious study of Islamic law and literature, to the mujtahid, an Islamic religious scholar, to the very powerful ayatollah, who sometimes rule entire countries. An imam in Shiite Islam is the highest of all, with very specific requirements. Some branches of Shia believe there can no longer be an imam, but in any case only one can exist at a time.

### **Major Holidays:**

Ramadan – a month-long holiday observed with fasting during daylight hours and prayer, commemorates when Muhammad was given the Qur'an by the angel Gabriel. The day after the end of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, is a holy day celebrated with decorations and gift giving.

Mawlid al-Nabi – celebrates the birth of the Prophet. Conservative Muslims do not celebrate this holiday or any birthdays.

Ashura – marks an occurrence in 680 CE when 70 Muslims were martyred

Eid al-Adha – marks the end of the Hajj. Traditionally, some Muslims celebrate this three-day festival by sacrificing an animal and sharing the meat with family and the needy.

### **Terms and Fundamental Precepts:**

*Five Pillars of Islam* – profession of faith ("There is one God and Muhammad is his prophet"), prayer toward Mecca five times a day, giving to the poor and performing community service, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and making a pilgrimage to Mecca

*Muslim* – a follower of Islam

*Mecca* – in Saudi Arabia, main holy city of Islam; location of the Kaa'ba

*Shia* – branch of Islam with 560 million adherents; grant authority to lineage of Ali (cousin of Muhammad) and direct descendants of Muhammad; Shia or Shiite is a shortening of Shiat Ali, which means "Partisans of Ali"

*Sunni* – branch of Islam with 940 million adherents; grant authority to lineage of caliphs who retained leadership over the claims of Muhammad's descendants (p.b.u.h.), meaning "peace be upon him," notation appearing after Muhammad's name in English; also appears as (s.a.w.), for the transliteration of the Arabic sallallahu alaihi wasallam of the same meaning

*As Salaam Alaikum* – traditional Muslim greeting; means "Peace be unto you."

*Hijra* – migration of Muhammad and his followers to Medina in year 622 CE, after which Islam spread rapidly; also the beginning of the Islamic calendar

*Sunna* (or *Sunnah*) – way of life prescribed in Islam, based on teachings and practices of Muhammad (therefore on both Qur'an and Hadith)

*Hajj* – a pilgrimage to Mecca which every Muslim is expected to undertake at least once during life; one of the Five Pillars of Islam

*ummah* – community, especially the community of believers; can refer to a group of individuals or the body of Islamic nations

*ablution* – cleansing with water, performed before prayer

*hijab* – headscarf worn by some Muslim women

*halal* – lawful; literally "allowed by Allah;" permitted under Islamic law

*Kaa'ba* – the black cubic building which houses relics of Muhammad; the point toward which all Muslims pray

**Shared with Unitarian Universalism:**

- Value of caring for those less fortunate than oneself
- Value of social justice
- Value of strong families
- Value of commitment to and acting on what one believes most important
- Do not believe in the Trinity or divinity of Jesus, yet respect Jesus as an important prophet and teacher
- In *Singing the Living Tradition* (Boston: UUA Publications, 1993), Hymns 180 and 188 and Readings 509, 607, 609, and 610 come from Islamic tradition.

## **HANDOUT: PILLARS**

The Five Pillars are considered the most essential instructions from Muhammad for how to live as a Muslim. Loyal Muslims are expected to follow the Five Pillars as closely as they can.

### **1: Profess Faith – Shahada**

Shahada – Say with conviction, "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet." This asserts that only Allah deserves to be worshipped, and that Muhammad was the last and final prophet of God's word.

Shahada, if said with conviction, is all that is needed to convert to Islam and become a Muslim. In order to say it with full belief, the speaker should 1) believe that the Holy Qur'an is the literal word of God, revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel; 2) believe there will be a Day of Judgment when all people will be resurrected, judged by Allah, and deemed worthy of heaven or condemned to hell; 3) accept Islam with its required practices; and 4) commit to worshipping only Allah.

### **2: Pray – Salat**

Salat – Pray at five specific times a day, facing the holy city of Mecca. Prayers are performed at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and at night. Each set of prayers is only a few minutes long, and can be done almost anywhere. The prayers affirm a Muslim's devotion to God as well as each Muslim's direct relationship with God.

### **3: Give Alms – Zakat**

Zakat, or charitable giving – Give support to those less fortunate, especially the poor. Zakat serves as a reminder that all wealth comes from Allah and should be used to benefit others as well as oneself. Muslims are required by their faith to give 2.5 percent of their wealth to the needy, but may give more if they wish.

### **4: Fasting during Ramadan – Sawm**

Sawm – All adult Muslims fast for the month of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. The fast lasts 29 or 30 days, during which Muslims do not eat or drink anything during daylight hours, only before dawn and after dark. Ramadan is revered as the month when the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad, so Muslims try to live especially pure and faithful lives during Ramadan. The fast also helps Muslims learn

compassion for those who are truly hungry or needy in other ways. Children are not required to fast until they are ten to twelve years old, although they may begin earlier if they choose and their parents permit. If fasting will endanger a person's health, they may break the fast.

### **5: Pilgrimage – Hajj (pronounced HAH-dge")**

Hajj – Every Muslim is expected, at least once in their lifetime, to make a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca. The Hajj takes place during five days in the last month of the Islamic calendar. Pilgrims change into white robes to signify that all are equal in the eyes of Allah. They walk counter-clockwise seven times around the Kaa'ba, the cube-shaped building which houses the holy Black Stone, and perform rites in praise of Allah, in rejection of evil, and in remembrance of events in Islam's history. More than two million Muslims perform the Hajj each year, traveling to Saudi Arabia from all over the world.

## HANDOUT: SUNNI AND SHIA – COMPARISON CHART

	Sunni	Shia
Adherents called	Sunnis	Shiites or Shi'i
Meaning of name	"tradition" or "well-trodden path"	"partisans of Ali"
Current adherents	85-90 percent of Muslims, 1.275-1.35 billion	10-15 percent of Muslims, 150-225 million
Did Muhammad designate a successor?	No	Yes
True successor of the Prophet	Abu Bakr, father of Muhammad's wife, A'isha	Ali ibn Abi Talib, husband of Fatimah, Muhammad's daughter
Qualifications for leader of the faith	Tribe of the Prophet; later, any qualified ruler	Family of the Prophet
Leadership	Imam is a prayer leader; no clerical hierarchy	Imam is exalted position; Ayatollah is title for highest imams
Quality of imams	Human	Infallible manifestations of God; perfect interpreters of the Qur'an
Approach to Islam	Qur'an applies to entire life; individuals approach God directly	More orthodox; Qur'an and laws interpreted by clerics
Holy cities	Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem	Mecca, Najaf, Karbala, Medina, Jerusalem
Day of communal worship (not considered Sabbath or a holy day)	Friday	Friday

## HANDOUT: JUDAISM/CHRISTIANITY/ISLAM

*This chart shows the beliefs held by mainstream adherents of each of the Abrahamic religions. There are many variations in beliefs, in each of these faiths.*

	Judaism	Christianity	Islam
Type of theism	monotheism	monotheism; some Trinitarian	monotheism
Other spiritual beings	angels, demons, the Devil	angels, demons, the Devil	angels, demons, the Devil
Status of Jesus	false prophet	Son of God, savior of humankind	real but not final prophet of God
Jesus' birth	normal birth	virgin birth	virgin birth
Did Jesus die at crucifixion?	yes	yes	no; he ascended to heaven
Resurrection	Jesus was not and will not be resurrected	Jesus was resurrected	Jesus will be resurrected
Who initiated the first sin?	Eve ate the apple and gave it to Adam	Eve ate the apple and gave it to Adam	Both Adam and Eve picked apple
Second Coming	some believe a messiah will come; Jesus was not the Messiah	Jesus will return as Messiah	Jesus will return as Messiah
Human nature	two equal impulses, one good, one bad	sinful by nature	equal ability to do good or evil
Day of worship	Saturday, Sabbath	Sunday, Sabbath	Friday, not a Sabbath
View of sacred text	interpretation is possible to determine God's will	to some, the word of God, infallible; to some, inspired by God, fallible	literal word of God, infallible
View of other Abrahamic faiths	others are false interpretations and extensions of Judaism	Judaism true but incomplete religion; Islam false religion	others are respected, but thought to have wrong and partial revelation

