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## FACT SHEET

# ISLAM

### ARABIC FOR SURRENDER/SUBMISSION

Established in the 7th C in Saudi Arabia by Mohammad who preached the idea of monotheism (there is only one god). Mohammad is seen as the most important prophet who received divine revelations from Allah (God) and this was then written down in the Qur'an.

Unlike older religions such as Christianity and Judaism, Muslims believe that their religion has not been corrupted by time and the Qur'an represents the inviolate word of God, unlike the Bible and the Torah

Mohammad initially delivered his message at Mecca, (in present day Saudi Arabia) but was forced to flee due to opposition and he moved to Medina, Saudi Arabia.

### A follower of Islam observes his/her faith by observance of the 5 pillars of faith

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|------------------------|--|
| 1. Profession of faith | There is only one god - Allah  |
| 2. Prayer              | Prayer is conducted 5 times per day (dawn, noon, mid afternoon, sunset, evening) it requires ritual cleansing and formalised prayer by prostrating oneself in the direction of Mecca while chanting from the Qur'an.<br>The most important time for prayer is noon on Friday when Muslims are encouraged to pray together and are led by an Imam.  |
| 3. Alms giving         | This is an expression of devotion, Muslims have a moral obligation to provide alms.  |
| 4. Observe Ramadan     | The 9th lunar month is seen as sacred as this was the time when Mohammad received the first revelations from Allah.<br>Requires an individual to fast between daybreak and sunset for the entire month. This illustrates both physical and spiritual discipline. Fasting can also be used to compensate for offences committed.  |
| 5. Hajj (Pilgrimage)   | If a Muslim is financially and physically able, the journey to Mecca should be undertaken at least once in their lifetime. This occurs during the 12th lunar month when pilgrims from around the world make their way to Mecca and in particular to the kaaba, which is the 'House of God', built by Abraham and his son Ismael. The kaaba includes the black stone given to Abraham by the angel Gabriel. Men will often shave their hair and wear common dress to show universality amongst Muslims. They participate in a series of rituals which ends with an animal sacrifice symbolising God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Ismael. If it is possible Muslims will attempt to visit other holy sites, which include Medina where the tomb of Mohammad is located, and Jerusalem in Israel, which is the location for Mohammad's ascent to heaven. |




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**HOLY SITES**

The Holy Mosque at Mecca is the holiest site in Islam and this includes the kaaba (cube) located on the original site of a sanctuary established by the first prophet Adam.

The Prophet's Mosque at Medina is the second holiest site and is where the prophet is buried

Al Aqsa Mosque (Dome of the Rock) is the third holiest site and is located in Jerusalem and was built in 685 CE. This site marks Mohammad's ascent to heaven.

**MOSQUE**

A mosque is a building used for public worship. Both religious and social gatherings take place in a mosque. Mosques vary enormously with regards to design and construction but they all have a place set aside for prayer. Orientation is usually towards Mecca. Worship of images is forbidden under Islam and the interior of mosques are usually decorated with stylised patterns and calligraphy. Men and women worship separately and many mosques have places set aside for women.

One characteristic of a mosque can be a minaret, a tower from which muezzins call people to prayer

**BRANCHES OF ISLAM**

The two main branches within the Islamic faith are the Sunni (90%) and Shi'a (7%), and represent the first main schism of the Islamic faith.

The schism within Islam arose over the appointing of a successor to Mohammad who had left no instruction as to whom should replace him. Because Mohammad was considered to be the last prophet, the succession posed problems and Muslims attempted to solve this problem by establishing a caliph (A successor to the Messenger of God) However, Muslims in Medina believed that Mohammad's son-in-law, Ali, should succeed the prophet. Ali's followers were known as Shi'at 'Ali and are now known as Shi'a and have developed a separate doctrine.

Shi'a believe that Ali and his descendents were divinely inspired and that it was vital to have a religiously authoritative person (Imam) to lead Islam. The Shi'a Imams continued until 878 CE when the twelfth Imam disappeared. Shi'a now have guardians such as Ayatollahs to provide religious guidance. The Ayatollahs reside mainly in Iran and Iraq.

The majority Sunni are seen as the more conservative branch of Islam. Sunni take their name from following the Sunna – the behaviour and example set by Mohammad. They view the Qur'an as the ultimate authority.

Other branches of Islam also exist such as the Sufi (both Sunni & Shi'a) and the Druze.

**SHARI'A**

Meaning the way or path. Shari'a is a set of laws which regulate Islamic life. The main source of law comes from the Qur'an and if adopted by a state, Shari'a provides a constitutional framework for government. Islam is not an evolving religion and therefore the laws of the Qur'an apply to any society from the 7th century through to the 21st century. There exist a variety of interpretations and debate is widespread as to the application of shari'a law to all aspects of life. Shari'a law applies only to Muslims and currently exists in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iran and to Muslim citizens in states such as Nigeria, Mali and Niger.

The Shari'a provides a code for public and private behaviour and proper conduct is expected at all times.




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**DIETARY LAWS**

Muslims categorise food according to three categories:

- Halal: what is lawful or permissible
- Mushbooh: suspect (cholesterol, MSG)
- Haram: that which is prohibited (alcohol, pork, gelatin, animal fat)

For meat to be considered halal it must be prepared according to the following regulations and then it is categorised as Zabiha.

1. Animal must be slaughtered by an adult Muslim.
2. Animal must be conscious at time of slaughter, skin and/or feathers must be clean. Animal must be facing Mecca and a prayer is recited at the time of slaughter.
3. Throat must be cut by single cut without severing spinal cord.
4. Blood must be allowed to drain for purification.

**ISLAMIC DRESS**

"Our bodies did not develop our skin so thin and fur free ... it requires external covering for protection... Our creator designed it this way so we will always need clothing:

**Qur'an**

Men and women must be covered adequately according to the Islamic faith. Men are required to cover their body from navel to knee and women their entire body except for the hands and face. Clothing must not be see-through or tight fitting. A person's clothing must avoid exhibitionism, arrogance or self indulgence.

Female dress, hijab, is designed to protect women and establish Islamic identity.

There are a variety of terms that refer to items of clothing. Hijab literally translates as curtain but is interpreted as a screen/to shield but can also be interpreted as a head scarf.

**Clothing as determined by the Qur'an**

Abayah: a cloak that covers all but head and hands

Cha'dor: a cloak which acts as a shawl to provide head covering

Burqa: Full coverage from head to toe where no part of the body is seen, a gauze is used to cover the eyes and gloves are worn.

Shalwar kameez: literally dress + pants. Dress can be of varying lengths from knee to ankle.