

[See this page in the course material.](#)

Learning Outcomes

- Describe the basic tenets of Islam



Figure 1. The Islamic house of worship is called a mosque. (Photo courtesy of David Stanley/flickr)

Islam

Islam is monotheistic, Abrahamic religion that follows the teachings of the prophet Muhammad, born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 570 C.E. Muhammad is seen as an earthly prophet, not as a divine being, and he is believed to be the messenger of Allah (God), who is divine. The followers of Islam, whose U.S. population is projected to double in the next twenty years (Pew Research Forum 2011), are called Muslims. It has over 1.8 billion followers worldwide (24% of the population), making it the world's second-largest religion. It is one of the fastest-growing religions in the world, with Muslims expected to account for 30% of the global population by 2050.^[1] Births to Muslims between 2010 and 2015 outnumbered deaths by 152 million (213 million births vs. 61 million deaths), meaning Muslims have the highest fertility rate of any

religious group at 2.9 children per woman (Christians are 2.6 children per woman and Hindu and Jewish fertility rates are 2.3) ^[2]

About 13% of Muslims live in Indonesia, the largest Muslim-majority country; 31% of Muslims live in South Asia, the largest population of Muslims in the world; 20% in the Middle East–North Africa region, where it is the dominant religion; and 15% reside in Sub-Saharan Africa. Sizeable Muslim communities are also found in the Americas, the Caucasus, Central Asia, China, Europe, Mainland Southeast Asia, the Philippines, and Russia.

Most Muslims belong to one of two denominations: Sunni (87–90%) or Shia (10–13%) (Pew Research). Following Muhammed's death in 632 C.E., disagreements arose over who would be the next caliph, or leader. Those who believed that Muhammed's father-in-law, Abu Bakr, was the first caliph became known as Sunnis, and those who followed Muhammad's son-in-law and cousin Ali ibn Abi Talib became known as Shias. Today Shia Muslims are the majority in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon, and Azerbaijan, as well as being a politically significant minority in Pakistan, Syria, Yemen and Kuwait.

Islam means "peace" and "submission." The sacred text for Muslims is the Qur'an (or Koran). As with Christianity's Old Testament, many of the Qur'an stories are shared with the Jewish faith. While divisions exist within Islam, all Muslims are guided by five core beliefs or practices, often called "the five pillars":

1. Shahadah: the profession of faith in God. This is commonly recited, and translates to "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet."
2. Salat: daily prayer. These prayers are performed five times a day, at set times, with the individual kneeling and prostrating in a particular pattern while facing in the direction of Mecca (the birthplace of Muhammed, and therefore of Islam itself). The five prayer times correspond to dawn, noon, afternoon, evening, and night.



3.

Figure 2. One of the cornerstones of Muslim practice is journeying to the religion's most sacred place, Mecca. (Photo courtesy of Raeky/flickr)

Zakat: almsgiving. This is given as a tithe (often around 2.5% of a person's income) and is used to support holy places and mosques around the world, as well as those within the same community as the payer.

4. Sawm: fasting as a spiritual practice, as is done during the month of Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslims do not eat or drink from sunup to sundown for an entire month. Ramadan includes special daily prayers called *taraweeh*, which take place at mosques and last for 1-2 hours, and a period of seclusion, or *I'tikaf*, during the last ten nights of the month. The fast is meant to allow Muslims to seek nearness and to look for forgiveness from God, to express their gratitude to and dependence on him, to atone for their past sins, and to remind them of the needy.[32] During Ramadan, Muslims are also expected to recommit to the teachings of Islam by refraining from violence, anger, envy, greed, lust, profane language, gossip and to try to get along with fellow Muslims better. In addition, all obscene and irreligious sights and sounds are to be avoided
5. Hajj: pilgrimage to the holy center of Mecca. The reason for this journey is to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad, hoping to gain enlightenment as Muhammad did when he was in the presence of Allah.

While Muslims celebrate many special occasions and events, there are two specific days set aside as holy days: *Eid ul Fitr* and *Eid ul Adha* (*Eid* or *Id* is a word meaning festival). The holiday, *Eid ul Fitr*, marks the end of Ramadan and is a time of feasting, fine clothes, decorating

one's home, praying, and making amends. *Eid ul Adha* is a festival to remember the prophet Ibrahim's (known as Abraham in Judaism and Christianity) willingness to sacrifice his son when God ordered him to do so. [\[3\]](#)

Jihad and Terrorism

Following the 9/11 attacks in 2001 by the terrorist group Al-Qaeda, the word "jihad" has become a contentious term associated with extremists who justify their violent actions as part of a political project, or a religious war against nonbelievers. Jihad is an Arabic word which means "to strive" or "to struggle," especially toward a praiseworthy goal. In a broader Islamic context, it can refer to almost any effort to make personal and social life conform to God's will, such as to struggle against one's evil inclinations, or to undertake religious proselytizing (i.e., the spreading of the faith), or to work toward the moral betterment of the "ummah," which refers to the entirety of the Muslim community. Despite the multiple and many benevolent applications of this idea, today it is often narrowly associated with a form of holy war, or with sacrificing one's life for the sake of God.

Al-Qaeda (the "base" or "foundation") is a terrorist network of Islamic extremists and Salafist jihadists (a splinter group from Sunni Islam). Islamic extremism is not the same thing as Islam—remember that Islam, by definition, is peaceful. Al-Qaeda formed during the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989) and has had a strong presence at various times in different regions throughout the Middle East. It is connected with ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or the Islamic State (IS)), which recently controlled large areas in Iraq and Syria, but lost nearly all of its significant territory by March 2019. ISIS claimed responsibility for the Easter suicide bombings in Sri Lanka, which killed over 250 people at churches and hotels, and has also been connected with terrorist activities in Congo, the Philippines, Nigeria, Libya, and parts of Egypt. It's important to note that Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups or splinter sects are not representative of Islam overall, just as extremist Christian terrorists such as the Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh are not representative of mainstream Christian beliefs.

Watch It

Watch this short video to learn more about the beliefs and practices of Islam.



[See this interactive in the course material.](#)

Try It

_____ is a religious tradition based on the Five Pillars, which are: profession of faith in god; daily prayer (five times); almsgiving (charity); periodic ritual fasting; and a pilgrimage, to be undertaken at least once during a believer's lifetime, to the holy city of the religion's beginnings.

☐ Christianity

[See this interactive in the course material.](#)

-
1. The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050 Why Muslims Are Rising Fastest and the Unaffiliated Are Shrinking as a Share of the World's Population (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>. __
 2. Hackett, Conrad and David McClenden. 2018. "Christians Remain World's Largest Religious Group." <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/>. __

3. "Muslim Holy Days," BBC.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/holydays/holydays.shtml>. __

Licenses and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- Modification, adaptation, and original content. **Authored by:** Sarah Hoiland for Lumen Learning. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](#)

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- World Religions. **Authored by:** OpenStax CNX. **Located at:** <https://cnx.org/contents/AgQDEnLI@12.3:k-vms25Q@8/15-2-World-Religions>. **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#). **License Terms:** Download for free at <http://cnx.org/contents/02040312-72c8-441e-a685-20e9333f3e1d@3.49>
- Jihad. **Provided by:** Wikipedia. **Located at:** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jihad#Muslim_public_opinion. **License:** [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](#)
- Islam. **Provided by:** Wikipedia. **Located at:** <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam>. **License:** [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](#)
- Five Pillars of Islam. **Provided by:** Wikipedia. **Located at:** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Pillars_of_Islam. **License:** [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](#)

All rights reserved content

- Introduction to Islam | Belief | Oprah Winfrey Show. **Provided by:** OWN. **Located at:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgP_OSOS3IA. **License:** Other. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License

</div