

CIS BULLETIN: SUNNI ISLAM

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Introduction

Statistics:

Worldwide: 1-1,200,000,000
United States: 5,800,000 – 6,000,000

Muslims claim one billion or more followers worldwide and 6-7 million in the United States. There were approximately 1,200 mosques (*masjids*) and Islamic centers in the United States in 2000, up from 211 in 1970. One survey found that only one-third of Muslims in the U.S. attend prayer gatherings on Islam's two most holy days and join in at least one Friday prayer a year at mosques.

Nearly 40 percent of the American mosques are affiliated with the Islamic Society of North America, based in Plainfield, Indiana. Thirty percent of the mosques are independent and 20 percent are affiliated with Imam W. Deen Mohammed of Chicago. W. Deen Muhammed announced his retirement in 2003. Thirty percent of American Muslims are African-Americans.

Louis Farrakhan and his Nation of Islam, with fewer than 100,000 followers (figures have never been released), are not considered orthodox by the worldwide Islamic community. Farrakhan announced his retirement in 2006 because of poor health.

Countries with the largest Muslim populations:

Indonesia:	145,100,000	Turkey:	58,600,000
India:	106,400,000	Iran:	56,500,000
Bangladesh:	103,700,000	Egypt:	47,300,000
Pakistan:	101,700,000	Nigeria:	44,400,000

Sixty-four nations have Muslim populations of ten percent or more. Ninety percent of all Muslims are Sunni.

Terms

1) Islam: Islam, meaning "surrender" or "submission," comes from an Arabic word (*slm*) associated with "peace" (*salaam*). Islam is both a religion and a way of life.

2) Muslim: Muslim, means "a submitted one" and is the proper term for a person who follows the religion of Islam. A Muslim is one who completely submits to the will of God. According to the Qur'an, the Muslim holy book, Adam was the first Muslim. Moslem is the Anglicized spelling of Muslim. Muhammadan is an improper term because it implies Muslims worship Muhammad, which they do not.

3) Mecca: Mecca, or Makkah, is the most holy city in the Islamic faith. All Muslims face toward this city in Saudi Arabia when offering their daily prayers. Medina and Jerusalem are two other holy cities in the Islamic faith.

Many Muslims believe Adam found his wife in the vicinity of Mecca, that Abraham established the settlement that is now Mecca and built the Ka'ba (a black cube structure containing what is believed to be a meteorite), and that Hagar and Ishmael settled there. None of these teachings are found in the Bible.

4) Qur'an: The Qur'an (literally "the recitation"), or Koran, is the Muslim holy book. Portions of the Old Testament and Jesus' Gospel (not the Gospels) are also authoritative.

It is considered an especially meritorious achievement to memorize the entire Qur'an, which is about 4/5 the size of the New Testament. It is divided into 114 chapters or *suras*.

In some countries, Muslims write verses from the Qur'an in chalk, mix the chalk in water and drink the mixture, believing it has magical power to heal.

7) Allah: Allah is the Arabic word for God. It is not the name of the Muslim God, although it is often used as such. Allah is a contraction of the Arabic definite article *al*, "the," and *ilah*, "god," thus Allah means "the God."

The Arabic word for "god," *ilah*, is related to the Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*. Arab Christians have used "Allah" as the word for God since the 9th century.

8) Muhammad: Muhammad (570-632) was born in Mecca in Saudi Arabia. At about age 40, he reported an experience of a call from God which commanded him to "recite." This was his first revelation from God which would continue for 22 years and become the Qur'an.

Beginning in A.D. 622, he led his followers to Medina, an event commemorated as year 1 of the Islamic calendar. He returned to Mecca in A.D. 630, destroyed all of the idols (said to have numbered 360), except the Ka'ba, which was rededicated to Allah.

Muhammad was buried in Medina.

Essential Beliefs Of Islam

1) The unity or singularity of God: This essential belief is stated in the *Shahada* or confession of faith.

Muslims reject the Christian doctrine of the trinity because, Muslims insist, it attributes "companions or partners to Allah," which is an unforgivable sin according to the Qur'an. Muhammad believed the trinity was God the Father, Mary the Mother and Jesus the Son, because of the emphasis given to Mary during his lifetime.

Muslims believe God has 3,000 names, but only 999 have been revealed to mankind in the Torah, Psalms, New Testament, and Qur'an. The 99 names of God in the Qur'an are memorized and regularly recited by Muslims. Each name is said to have special power to answer specific prayer requests.

2) Angels: Angels are created beings, who serve as divine messengers. Gabriel, called the Holy Spirit by some Muslims, is said to have brought the words of the Qur'an to Muhammad.

Satan seeks to lead people away from the worship of the one true God. Satan is not, according to Islam, a "fallen angel," but is one of the *jinn* or invisible spirits created by Allah. Some *jinn* are good, others evil.

3) Prophets: There have been about 125,000 prophets or special messengers of God, but the Qur'an mentions only 25. The most prominent are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Prophets are infallible and without sin.

Jesus is mentioned 97 times in 93 verses in the Qur'an. All references to Jesus in the Qur'an are positive, but not all agree with the New Testament. His virgin birth is accepted (Mary is the only woman mentioned in the Qur'an.) and he did many miracles, called "signs" by Muslims. He is called the Word of God, Messiah, Prophet and Son of Mary, but not the Son of God. Jesus did not die on the cross; a substitute was provided by God. Jesus will return at the end of time to destroy all "unbelievers," meaning non-Muslims.

Muhammad is said to have been the last and greatest prophet because he received a universal mission from God, while earlier prophets, including Jesus, were sent to particular people groups. John 14:16 is said to have prophesied his birth.

4) Sharia: *Sharia* is Islamic religious law, a complex code of ethics, morality, and religious duties designed to lead one to God. *Sharia* pressures Muslim women to wear the veil and dress, called the *chador* or *burqa*. Some Muslim countries have abolished *sharia*, others (Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran) strictly enforce it. Much of the struggle in Islamic countries is an attempt to install *sharia* as law.

Religious police, called the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Saudi Arabia, have again declared Barbie dolls a threat to morality, complaining that the revealing clothes of the "Jewish" dolls are offensive to Islam. Barbie has been banned in Saudi Arabia for more than ten years, but she is still available for sale on the black market. Shops found selling Barbies are fined and the dolls confiscated. Religious police have also listed as violations: Valentine's Day gifts, perfume bottles in the shape of women's bodies, and clothing with logos that include a cross.

4) Last days: Muslim teachings emphasize end-time troubles, the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment of God on all "unbelievers" who will be sent to hell, but faithful Muslims will enjoy a Paradise with God.

Five Pillars (Fundamental Duties)

1) Shahada: The *Shahada*, or confession of faith, states that "I bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God." A devout Muslim will always repeat the *Shahada* upon rising and at bedtime. It is whispered into the ear of a newborn and into the ear of a person at the point of death.

2) Salat: The *Salat*, or ritual prayer, is spoken 5 times each day: dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, sunset, and 2 hours after sunset. These prayers can be said anywhere. On Friday, the Muslim holy day, prayers are said in a mosque, or *masjid*, where a sermon follows. Muslims prepare themselves by ceremonial washing and removal of shoes. Special postures, while facing Mecca, are prescribed. Men and women pray in divided or separate rooms.

Mosques are sacred places so no talking occurs as in Christian churches. Worshippers sit on prayer mats. The only piece of furniture normally in a mosque is a wooden pulpit. Music is never played in a mosque.

3) Sawm: Fasting during the Islamic month of Ramadan is required of all faithful Muslims, with a number of persons temporarily exempted: certain travelers, the sick and elderly, pregnant women, and young children. No food, water, or sexual relations are allowed during daylight hours during the fast. The fast reminds Muslims all gifts come from God.

The month of Ramadan rotates throughout the year because the Islamic lunar calendar is 11 days shorter than our Gregorian calendar).

Id [or *Eid*] *Al-Fitr* ("the Feast of the Breaking of the Ramadan Fast"), held the day after Ramadan ends, is a major celebration with exchanging of gifts and donations of a day's worth of food. Another feast, the "Feast of Sacrifice" or *Id al-Adha* commemorates the ransom with a ram of Abraham's son, who according to Muslims was Ishmael, not Isaac. The U. S. Postal Service issued a stamp honoring the two Muslim holidays in 2001.

4) Zakat: The *zakat* is a religious tax amounting to 2½ percent of a person's annual wealth. Some elect to give 10 percent of their earnings. The funds are used for building mosques, relief for the poor, and missionary programs. The United States government believes some of this religious tax is used by groups deemed terrorists.

5) Hajj: The *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca, is required of every faithful Muslim, who is physically and financially able, at least once in a lifetime. As many as two million pilgrims gather annually for seven days to circle the Ka'ba and perform

other prescribed rituals during the *hajj*.

6) Jihad: *Jihad*, meaning exertion on behalf of God, is sometimes listed as a sixth pillar, although technically it is not. *Jihad* can refer to anything from spiritual warfare or an inner struggle a Muslim may feel, to a "holy war" to avenge God's honor due to some sacrilege. It can refer to preaching, writing, or making war against enemies. *Jihad* includes the high quality, multi-colored literature produced to present Islam favorably to American readers.

Other Muslim Beliefs And Customs

1) Dietary regulations: The Qur'an prohibits drinking alcoholic beverages and eating pork. To do so is blasphemy against God.

2) Women: Many Muslim marriages are arranged. The Qur'an allows men to marry four women. Muslim men may marry Christian women, but not vice versa. In some Muslim countries, women are not allowed to drive cars or ride in cars unless a close male relative accompanies her.

3) Death and burial: A person approaching death is reminded of God's goodness and forgiveness. His body is turned toward Mecca (as it is in the grave). The dying person's last words should be: "I confess there is no God but Allah." A body is bathed, wrapped in linen, and placed in a simple grave. Caskets are seldom used, unless required by law. Embalming is not used and burial is required within 24 hours.

Major Sects of Islam

While there are thousands of Muslim people groups, a strong sense of unity exists among Muslims. Cultural and political differences are sometimes confused with religious differences. Two major sects of Islam exist:

1) Sunni Muslims make up about 90 percent of the worldwide Muslim community. They contend Muhammad did not name a successor; consensus of the community determines Islamic tradition and law for the community.

2) Shi'a or Shi'ite Muslims insist Muhammad named his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, as his successor (*Imam*). Twelve *Imams*, the last born in 870, were representative of Muhammad. The 12th Imam disappeared at age eight. Shi'a Muslims believe he will reappear in the future. Until then, Shi'a Muslims are led by legal specialists and scholars called *Ayatollahs*. (Shi'a Imams should not be confused with Muslim imams who lead communal prayers.)

The disagreement over whom or whether anyone should lead Muslims after Muhammad's death quickly widened into a deep theological/political split within the Muslim world, a conflict which has continued for 1,300 years. Much of the conflict in Iraq can be traced to the conflict between these two sects.

Tribal rivalries have opened other major divisions within the Islamic world, as is seen in not only Iraq, but also in Afghanistan and Somalia, where tribal leaders are referred to as "war lords."

Sufi Muslims are a small sect of Islam. Sufis received their name from the wool garment worn by early Muslim mystics who emphasized a direct communion with God. Their practice of dancing, known as "whirling dervish," started by 13th century Sufi poet Rumi to express love to God, sets them apart from other Muslims. In the United States, Sufism is distorted by New Age teachings.

Within these sects are found several categories of Muslims. Orthodox Muslims take the Qur'an literally and follow Islamic tradition closely. Conservatives accept some modern ideas. Secular Muslims have abandoned most practices. Popular Islam blends non-Muslim superstitions (astrology, charms, curses, etc.) with Islamic practices.