

ISLAM

Muhammad, Qur'an, and Islamic Civilization

Lecture 19

Islam is the second largest religious tradition in the world today. It has around 1.5 billion followers (between 20–25 percent of the world's population). It is also one of the fastest growing religions in the world and in the United States. Many Westerners study Islam because of a concern with geopolitical matters, but this is only a tiny fraction of the many reasons to study this religion.

Muslims and Islam

- The largest Muslim-majority country in the world is Indonesia. There have been Muslims in Africa since the time of Muhammad in the 7th century. No region of the world has more Muslims than South Asia.
- If you add the Muslim populations of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, you would get approximately 460 million Muslims, or nearly one-third of the world's Muslims. There are certain elements that are shared by virtually all observant Muslims.
- A "Muslim" is "one who submits," so it refers to people while "Islam" refers to the tradition. But there is a difference between saying something is Muslim and saying that it is Islamic.
- For example, Turkey is a Muslim country, as almost all Turks are Muslims. But it would be misleading to call Turkey in the mid-20th century Islamic, as it was (and to a large degree still is) a secular country. However, we can certainly call Iran "Islamic" because its leaders claim to govern in accordance with Islam.

The Story of Muhammad

- In the 6th century, when Muhammad was born, the Arabian Peninsula was primarily a way to transport goods from one part

of the world to the other. Much of the population consisted of Bedouins, nomadic tribes that traveled in camel caravans.

- There was no unifying ideology that brought all of the tribes together. There were frequent raids, and people lived by a code of revenge and honor, where an offense had to be avenged.
- Another important feature of pre-Islamic Arabia was the emphasis on the spoken word and the value of eloquence. Poetry was highly valued, and bards sang of the history of the tribe, preserving the tradition through poetry.
- The religion of the time was largely polytheistic, and various deities were associated with natural forces, localities, and tribes.
- It was into this world that Muhammad was born in 570, in Mecca, and was orphaned at an early age. In his 20s, he began work in the caravan business for the widow Khadija.
- According to tradition, Muhammad was illiterate, but possessed excellent judgment and good people skills. Muhammad and Khadija fell in love, and when he was 25 and she was 40, they married. They had sons who died in infancy, and several daughters, including Fatima, who would become an important figure. He had a monogamous marriage with Khadija for 24 years until her death.
- Muhammad would frequently meditate in the caves around Mecca. In 610 in the month of Ramadan, when Muhammad was 40, his life changed. While in a cave, he was visited by the Angel Gabriel. He was told to "recite"—*Iqra!*
- He responded, "I cannot. I am unlettered." And then, the words started to pour out of him. This was the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an—which itself means "recitation" or "reading." The revelations would continue over the next 22 years.

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- When he received these revelations, Muhammad would sweat heavily, would sometimes hear bells ringing, and would enter into a trance state. Muhammad would dictate the revelations to others. Only later would all of the fragments be assembled and compiled into the text we now know as the Qur'an.
- Muhammad began to deliver the message of the one God, where he met tremendous resistance. He even faced assassination attempts. In 619, he lost both his beloved wife Khadija and his uncle, who had acted as his protector after his parents died.
- At this moment in his life, the beleaguered Muhammad had a profound spiritual experience that would lift him up—his Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem. According to the tradition, he traveled on a flying steed from Mecca to Jerusalem in one night (a journey that usually took around a month). While there, he met earlier prophets, prayed with them, and then ascended into the heavens where he had an encounter with God.
- This encounter both educated him and inspired him. Some Muslims see this as a literal, physical journey; others see it as an inward, spiritual journey that took place “outside of time.”
- Muhammad's reputation for integrity and fairness reached the city of Yathrib, where he was invited to help settle a tribal dispute. Muhammad and his followers moved to Yathrib—which would become known as the “city of the prophet”—or Medina. This journey, in 622, is known as the Hijra, the emigration. It is from this moment that the Islamic calendar is dated. This year cannot simply be calculated by subtracting 622 from the Western year, however, the Islamic calendar is lunar, not solar.
- The period after Muhammad's arrival in Medina was the golden age of Islam. In 630, Muhammad and his followers bloodlessly took Mecca. Muhammad went to the ritual center known as the Ka'bah and smashed the idols, rededicating the Ka'bah to God.

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- By the time of Muhammad's death in 632, nearly all of Arabia followed Islam. The Qur'an emphasizes that Muhammad, like all prophets, is just a human being and must not be worshipped. All worship must be directed to God alone. Muhammad was buried in Medina, with a mosque built around his grave. Medina is the second most important pilgrimage site in Islam after Mecca.
- Muhammad is seen as the ideal person, the living expression of God's will. He is sometimes called "The Living Qur'an," as his life exemplifies what it is to be a true Muslim.

The Qur'an

- For Muslims, God's words were in Arabic, and they can only be fully experienced in Arabic. While most Muslims in the world are not native Arabic speakers and cannot speak conversational Arabic, they learn to pray in Arabic and hear the call to prayer and Qur'anic chanting in Arabic.



For Muslims, the Qur'an can only truly be experienced in the original Arabic. Even the best translations can only approximate the word of God.

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- The Qur'an consists of 114 chapters, which are called suras. Each sura is divided into passages called *ayas*.
- The Qur'an contains theological passages, laws, narratives, and poetic imagery. There is one theme that emerges strongly—*tawhid*, the oneness of God. Muslims are profoundly monotheistic. The oneness of God means the oneness of creation; all of us are related to each other. For many Muslims, life cannot be divided into secular and sacred spheres.
- In Islam, God must not be represented. In some forms of Islam, even human figures, especially prophets, should not be represented. The greatest, and the only unforgiveable, sin is *shirk*, which means putting something else on the level with God. This does not just mean a tribal deity or natural spirit. It can also mean money, or power, or fame.
- The Qur'an emphasizes that God can forgive anything if a person genuinely repents and seeks mercy—except for *shirk*. There is a Judgment Day in Islam, when each person will stand before God.
- Another Qur'anic theme is that the God of Islam is the same God worshipped by Jews and Christians. Muslims use the name "Allah" to refer to God. Allah simply means "the God," the one God.

Connections with Judaism and Christianity

- Muslims believe that earlier prophets—including Adam, Abraham, Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus—were prophets of God. Those prophets who brought with them a scripture—Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad—are considered messengers of God.
- Muslims see the revelations of Judaism and Christianity as authentic reminders from God, along with the Qur'an. For Muslims, the Qur'an is the only perfect revelation, as human involvement over time brought errors into the Bible and Torah.

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- Judaism and Islam share a common ancestor: Abraham. Whereas the Jewish line goes through Isaac (Abraham-Isaac-Jacob), the Muslim line goes through Abraham's first son, the one he had with Hagar, Ishmael.
- Muslims believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, that he healed and worked miracles, and that he will return at the end times. However, Muslims do not believe that Jesus is divine, nor do they believe in the Trinity, for they believe that it compromises the unity of God. Muslims consider Jews and Christians to be fellow "Peoples of the Book" who have the potential to receive God's favor and attain Paradise at death.

Rules

- The Qur'an sometimes lays out specific rules that must be followed. Some deal with diet. Halal food simply means "permitted"; the opposite is haram, or "forbidden." The Qur'an forbids the consumption of alcohol, pork, and any meat that is not slaughtered in a ritually required way.
- There are also specific rules regarding women. In many ways, this 7th-century text empowered women in its time (and in some cases, in ways that were not equaled in Europe for centuries afterward).
- Women gained the right to a share of inheritance, to initiate a divorce proceeding, to retain their own property in marriage, and to testify in a legal proceeding. The number of wives a man could have was limited to four (before this, it was unlimited), and multiple wives would only be allowed if equal treatment was assured. Most Muslims today are monogamous.
- The Qur'an provides no details on appropriate attire for women; it just emphasizes the need for modesty. In the vast majority of Muslim countries, covering is not mandatory; it is a woman's choice. Only in more conservative countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran is covering required.

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The Hadith

- While the Qur'an is the most important source of guidance and authority in Islam, there is another important source: the actions and words of the prophet Muhammad, known as the Sunna, meaning a "path" or "road." The majority branch of Islam, Sunni, takes its name from the Sunna (i.e., they are those who follow this path).
- The Hadith reports about Muhammad's words and deeds. Hadith were remembered by people who were with Muhammad and then passed down stories orally before writing them down. After Muhammad's death, the number of Hadith exceeded 100,000, so scholars developed a science of Hadith authentication.

Muslim Contributions to the World

- At its height, the Muslims would create the most advanced culture in the world. From the 8th to the 13th centuries, Baghdad became a center of culture, scholarship, and science. Muslim Spain, Andalusia, has been described as "a culture where there was extensive cooperation ... among Muslims, Jews, and Christians, and where civilization touched a point hardly surpassed since 5th-century Athens."
- In Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate, Muslim scholars preserved and translated ancient Greek and Roman texts, thus enabling classical philosophy to survive (paving the way for the European Renaissance). We own an invaluable debt to the thinkers of this time and place: Arabic numerals; algebra; developments in medicine; gains in optics and hygiene; the creation of teaching hospitals; and during this period, the Islamic law schools developed.

Suggested Reading

Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation.

Armstrong, Muhammad.

Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States.*

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Questions to Consider

1. Why was Muhammad so successful in spreading the message of Islam? What role was played by the content and form of the Qur'anic revelations?
2. How is the concept of unity significant in Islam? What is *shirk*, and why is it so strongly condemned?
3. What connections does Islam have with Christianity and Judaism?

"There Is No God but al-Lah"

Lecture 30

"O you who believe! Believe in Allah and His Messenger, and the scripture He sent to His Messenger, and the scripture He sent to those before. Any who deny Allah, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Day of Judgment [has] gone far, far astray." —Sura 4:136

Within a few years of Muhammad's resettlement in Madinah, the salient features of Islam had been defined by revelation and experience. The Qur'an makes clear that God, angels, prophets, revealed books, and a forthcoming day of judgment are the central beliefs of the faith. Muhammad was not introducing a new deity to the Arabs, but he was making a particular assertion about the nature of the ultimate reality. For his time and place, it was a radical statement, and it nearly got him killed.

Muhammad's provocative contention was that the fundamental character of ultimate reality is *tawhid*, or "unity." The very first words of the *shahadah* proclaim: "There is no god but al-Lah" or "There is no god but God"; on the face of it, this seems a straightforward declaration of monotheism. But the claim is not just singleness but singularity: al-Lah is incomparable, utterly unlike anything else in human experience. al-Lah alone is eternal. al-Lah alone has no progenitor. al-Lah relies on no one or nothing else. al-Lah is the only one of his kind. al-Lah alone is indivisible. al-Lah infinitely exceeds human understanding. These statements about the nature of al-Lah help clarify why Islam can tolerate no other gods or goddesses. To suggest that al-Lah is a deity like Hubal or al-Uzza would imply that God can be imagined, envisioned, or understood like these others, and that would diminish the majesty and mystery of the ultimate reality.

To Muhammad, the doctrine of divine oneness was readily apparent: Reason itself dictates that there can be only one supreme being, otherwise the universe would be in complete chaos. The singularity and inscrutability of al-Lah, furthermore, entail certain claims about that ultimate reality that simply cannot be grasped or explained. Al-Lah exists without place, and he alone caused all things to exist. God needs the creation for nothing at all.

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Everything that happens—good and evil—occurs because al-Lah wills it; yet al-Lah is never unjust. He never makes mistakes and is fully cognizant of the whole of reality.

Islamic theology distinguishes between the divine essence, which is beyond comprehension, and the divine attributes, which name certain qualities that assist in appropriately orienting the mind toward God. This distinction between a god's essence and his attributes is a common one in the history of world religions.

Muhammad was the "seal of the prophets," the final and most important emissary of God, sent not just to a nation but to all humankind.

A well-known list of al-Lah's unique characteristics is known as the 99 Most Beautiful Names of God. Two of them appear at the start of every sura (except Sura 9) as the **bismillah**: "In the name of God, the all-compassionate, the all-merciful." The other beautiful

names complement and supplement these attributes. The bismillah is recited as part of Muslim daily prayers, and it is often spoken as one undertakes a new task. Some Muslims think the bismillah contains the very essence of the Qur'an.

Lecture 30: "There Is No God but al-Lah"

Misappropriating the divine attributes is part of what Islam considers to be the most heinous of sins: *shirk*—that is, connecting with al-Lah something that is less than ultimate or giving to something less than ultimate what belongs to al-Lah alone. *Shirk* is the only sin al-Lah cannot forgive, although only if one dies in this state of unbelief. *Shirk* is idolatry in its broadest sense—not just images of the divine, but whatever finite object becomes the locus of our highest values—money, country, self, religion.

Angels and prophets are the servants and messengers of al-Lah. Angels are beings created of light that can assume any form and travel great distances in an instant. Although sentient, they lack free will. They serve al-Lah in various ways. Angels are also the custodians of paradise and hell and the recorders of a person's good and bad deeds. Satan, or *Iblis*, is important in Islam, but he is not a fallen angel. Rather, he is a jinni who was created

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from fire and was fervently devoted to worshiping al-Lah. Possessing free will, Iblīs's great misdeed, according to the Qur'an, was disobeying God's command for all creatures to prostrate themselves before Adam.

Angels and prophets both function as envoys of God, but prophets are human rather than celestial. Muhammad taught that al-Lah had sent prophets to every nation in the world at various points in history. There were slight variations in their proclamations because their words were directed to different audiences, but all taught the oneness of God and submission to divine will. About two dozen prophets are named in the Qur'an, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Joseph, Job, Moses, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, and Jesus. Although not named in the Qur'an, some modern Muslim communities regard Confucius and the Buddha as prophets as well. Muhammad was the "seal of the prophets," the final and most important emissary of God, sent not just to a nation but to all humankind.

Jesus is known in the Qur'an as Īsa, the son of Mārīam. He was not only a messenger; he was among the greatest of all human beings. His mission was to bear witness to the oneness of God and the necessity of submitting to the divine will. The Qur'an affirms his Virgin Birth and the miracles, yet—the Qur'an is emphatic about this—Jesus was not, and could not be, the son or incarnation of God.

The Qur'an frequently uses the phrase "People of the Book," which refers to pre-Islamic nations who received revelations from al-Lah in the form of a text—Jews, Christians, and sometimes the Sabians and Zoroastrians. The four pre-Qur'anic revealed books are the Scrolls of Abraham, the Torah, the Psalms, and the Gospel. For Islam, the Qur'an has an ontological status as the word of God. Some revelations allude to a written Qur'an existing in the divine presence even before it was sent down to the Prophet.

Like Jesus, Muhammad anticipated an end to the world as we know it. On the day of requital, the dead will rise, persons will be judged by their deeds, and they will be rewarded or punished accordingly. The time of this eschatological event is known only to al-Lah. But there will be certain signs preceding the Final Days, particularly natural disasters and the rapid erosion of human morality—harbingers of the end times found in eschatological

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visions throughout the world. The sins that merit condemnation include lying and dishonesty, the denial of the tawhid and God's revelations, refusal to help the poor and hungry, usury, economic exploitation, and social oppression. Yet the mercy of al-Lah is so great that he directs his angels and prophets to rescue those who have done some good, and those who have done just a little good, and even those in whose hearts there is a single atom of goodness. ■

Important Terms

bismillah: The words that begin all but one of the Qur'an's suras: "In the name of God, the all-compassionate, the all-merciful."

Iblis: The Arabic name for Satan; in Islam, a jinni who was cast out of heaven by al-Lah for refusing to bow to Adam.

Īsa: The Arabic name for Jesus, who is an important (but not divine) prophet in Islam.

shirk: Connecting with al-Lah something that is less than ultimate or giving to something less than ultimate what belongs to al-Lah alone. According to Islam, persisting in *shirk* is the only unpardonable sin.

tawhid: Often translated as "unity"; the Muslim doctrine that al-Lah is not simply one but is unique and incomparable.

Questions to Consider

1. In Islam, tawhid is the source of the prohibition of images of the Prophet and of al-Lah. Do you agree that religious art or iconography diminishes what it represents in some way? Why or why not?
2. In your own mind, can you reconcile the tension (in Islam or in any religion) between an all-merciful god and an unpardonable sin? If so, how?

Lecture 30: "There Is No God but al-Lah"

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The Ethics of Islam

Lecture 31

Adam and Eve chose wrongly and had to bear the consequences of their choice. But the Qur'anic story offers some slightly different details from the Bible. ... When al-Lah confronts the pair with their error, they confess, "Our Lord, we have wronged our own selves," then immediately they beg for forgiveness. In Genesis, on the other hand, Adam instantly blames Eve, Eve points the finger at the serpent, and no one says they're sorry.

From the start of the revelations, Gabriel made it clear that al-Lah had moral expectations of humanity. The ethical precepts of Islam are intrinsically related to its fundamental understanding of the nature and purpose of humanity. This understanding begins with the Qur'an's version of the story of Adam and Eve. The narrative echoes many details and themes of the biblical account but has several significant differences: Paradise was located in heaven, not on earth; when Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, they and their descendants were exiled until the last day. The eating of the fruit is regarded as a mistake made in a state of forgetfulness brought about by the ploys of Iblīs. This forgetfulness is, in Islam, the fundamental human fault.

For Muhammad, the descent of all humanity from the same ancestors entailed two important principles: First, all human beings are prone to the same heedlessness that led to the banishment from Paradise, and second, all human beings are fundamentally equal before God. The only difference of any significance is whether or not one surrenders to al-Lah and acts with justice and humility. This is not a distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims; to surrender to the will of al-Lah did not mean that one had to use that specific name.

What did it mean to submit to the will of al-Lah? Throughout the Qur'an and Hadith, Muhammad enjoins all humans to worship only God, to be good to one's parents, and to refrain from murder and adultery. He makes several statements concerning economic justice and living frugally. Sura 17 makes

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special mention of the necessity of caring for the poor, the orphaned, and the sojourner; a specific prohibition of killing children was also necessitated by Muhammad's historical context. The clear tenor of Sura 17 is the obligation to care for society's weakest and most vulnerable members.

One area of Islamic ethics that has received special attention in recent years is the role and status of women. The position of women in Islamic cultures throughout history has varied greatly, and the Qur'anic view of women and gender relations is the subject of divergent opinion among both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. But scholars agree on a few fundamental issues. Muhammad regarded women and men as equal souls before al-Lah. Despite the highly patriarchal structure of pre-Islamic Arabia, Muhammad's teaching was only influenced—not determined—by traditional thinking about gender. Muhammad did believe, however, that men and women served different roles in society and had distinct rights and responsibilities. Whether these different social functions amount to social equality or inequality is a matter of debate.

Muhammad considered marriage a contract in which the woman's consent was essential. In pre-Islamic times, marriage was a virtual trade of property, usually transacted without the woman's permission. The Qur'an mandated that the bride was to receive and keep her dowry, and her personal property remained hers, not her husband's. Muhammad envisioned marriage as a relationship of mutual rights and responsibilities.

Although the Qur'an permits men to take up to four wives, it stipulates that he must be able to treat them all equally and fairly. Islamic polygyny has been the subject of much criticism throughout Western history, but the custom had a practical and humane purpose: Women significantly outnumbered men, and without male protection and support, their lives could be miserable. Muhammad recognized, however, that not all marriages were made in heaven, and so stipulated certain conditions under which divorce is possible. The couple must attempt reconciliation by all reasonable means; if reconciliation fails, both partners have the right to end the marriage.

Under Islam, females were given inheritance rights that had been restricted to males during the pre-Islamic period. The Qur'an requires that parents

bequeath their property to their daughters as well as their sons, albeit unequally. Men were required to support their parents, wives, children, and sisters, and to pay dowries, while women had no comparable responsibility.

For many in the contemporary Western world, the clothing of Muslim women, particularly the hijāb, or veil, symbolizes their religiously sanctioned subjugation by men. But that interpretation is simplistic and, according to many Islamic scholars, misleading.

It would be an anachronism to suggest that Muhammad was a 7th-century feminist. But it is not inaccurate to say that his teachings greatly improved the situation of women in his time.

Both women and men are enjoined to dress modestly; Muhammad considered modesty in dress to reflect modesty of the heart. The tradition of veiling, according to many Islamic scholars, is not mandated in the Qur'an. Wearing the veil was a pre-Islamic custom and was practiced by some Jewish and Christian women as well. Veiling was most likely adopted because of its association with the Prophet's wives.

Today, many Muslim women defend the veil because they find it a deterrent to unwanted sexual attention from men, and they have resisted efforts in some Western countries to force them to remove it in public.

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No matter how one might judge the subsequent history of the religion of Islam, it is hard to see how the spirit of Muhammad's own teachings, as reflected in the Qur'an and Hadith, point to anything other than an ethical vision based on the fundamental spiritual equality and dignity of all human beings, without exception. ■

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Important Terms

hijab: The veil worn by many Muslim women as a gesture of modesty. Wearing the veil was a pre-Islamic tradition in the Middle East and is not mandated by the Qur'an.

polygyny: A marriage of one man to more than one woman; the Qur'an permits men to have up to four wives at one time, but only if he can treat each of them fairly.

Questions to Consider

1. What do you think of the varying claims made by Muslims and non-Muslims about the hijab? Consider how your religious and/or cultural background influences your opinion. Does the "other side" have any good points?
2. Concern for society's vulnerable is a major theme in Muslim ethics and the ethics of many other faiths. How do you see this core belief played out in the world today by those of various faiths and those who do not subscribe to any faith tradition?

The Greater Jihad

Lecture 32

"In the name of God, the all-compassionate, the all-merciful. Praise is proper to God, Lord of the Universe, the all-compassionate, the all-merciful, Ruler of the Day of Requital. It is You we serve, to You we turn for help. Show us the straight path, the path of those You have favored, not of those who are objects of anger, nor of those who wander astray."—Sura 1

After the Battle of Badr, Muhammad reportedly said, "We have returned from the lesser jihād to the greater jihād." The word "jihād" is often translated as "holy war," but in its basic sense, it simply means "struggle." Muhammad was commenting on the greater difficulty and significance of the internal struggle of the soul versus the external battle with the sword. In the West, much more attention has been given to the lesser than to the greater jihād. In this lecture, we will try to redress that imbalance.

Long before the revelations began, prayer and contemplative retreats were regular observances for Muhammad. The Hadith say Gabriel taught the Prophet the proper forms of prayer, including a set of intricate movements and gestures. Today, the forms and prayers vary somewhat according to context and tradition, but all Muslim rituals contain similar elements, such as making ablutions (to create ritual purity); facing the Ka'ba, standing with open arms, kneeling, and prostration (to embody the act of submission); and specific recitations. Each *raka'ah*, or unit of prayer, for example, begins with an Arabic recitation of the first sura of the Qur'an. Words and gestures, mind and body thus coordinate to create a state of spiritual surrender.

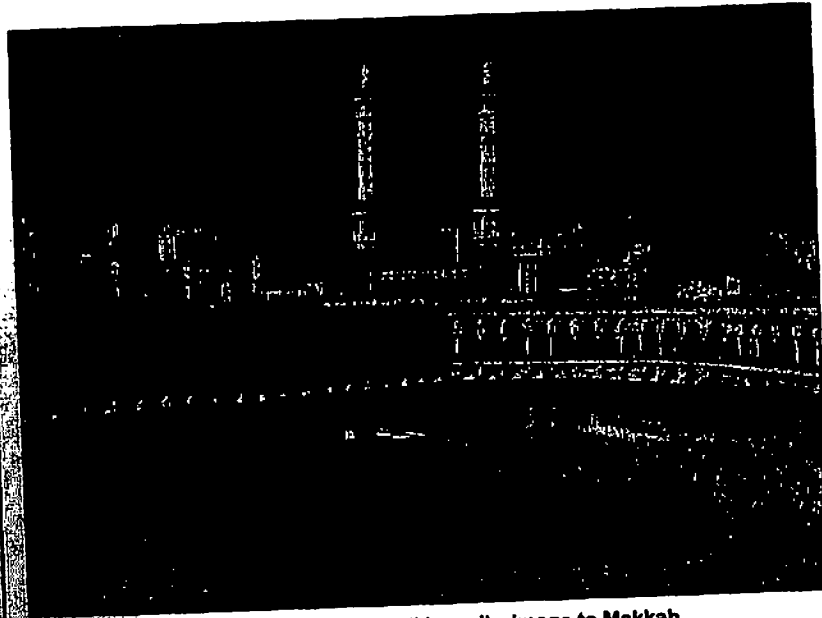
Initially, Muhammad taught that ritual prayer should be practiced twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, the same pattern that Jesus and other Jews observed. Eventually, Gabriel revealed that twice a day was not sufficient. Muhammad learned on his Night Journey to heaven that al-Lah expected prayer five times a day as a regular reminder to the faithful to reorient their lives to him. One may pray alone or with others—although communal prayer

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was preferred—at specified times of the day that depend on the position of the sun. Muhammad was known to pray in other ways and at other times, holding himself to a higher standard of discipline. He found praying in the quiet of the night especially meaningful because “truly the rising by night is a time when impression is more keen and speech more certain” (Sura 73).

Like daily ritual prayer, fasting during the month of **Ramadān** is compulsory for all Muslims beyond the age of puberty. During this month, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, sexual activity, and smoking from dawn to sundown. The fast can also be practiced voluntarily at almost any time, except on a few days when it is specifically forbidden. Muhammad fasted, according to tradition, each Monday and Thursday. (It is worth noting that Confucius, the Buddha, and Jesus also fasted at particular times in their lives.)

Fasting takes many forms and serves many purposes. Its principal purpose, I believe, regardless of tradition, is sharpening awareness. Refraining from certain items in our routine experience can make us more conscious of



One of the Five Pillars of Islam, the Hajj is a pilgrimage to Makkah.

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ourselves and our world. Fasting also serves to arouse a sense of compassion by enabling the practitioner to feel, even if only for a short while, the pangs of those who hunger and thirst, thereby cultivating greater awareness of

Today, nearly two million Muslims perform the Hajj each year.

those in need. While fasting is only required during Ramadan, Muhammad encouraged his community to practice it more frequently, a minimum of three times each month, but no more than

every other day. (Muhammad exempted those who were sick or enduring hardship from the Ramadan fast; he often tempered the letter of the law with the compassionate spirit he believed was characteristic of al-Lah.)

The *zakāh*, sometimes translated as “generosity,” is the practice of charity. Its purpose is twofold: to support the poor and dispossessed of the community and to purify the soul of materialism and greed. Because the *zakāh* is an obligation on every Muslim who is able to pay it, in Islamic countries it is usually levied as a tax.

Pilgrimage to Makkah, or the Hajj, was an ancient practice even in the time of the Prophet; some sources suggest it was little more than a pan-Arabian carnival. But the Ka’ba and the pilgrimage were deeply sacred to Muhammad. His final Hajj, a few months before his death, provided many elements of the ritual still practiced today. All Muslims are required to perform the Hajj at least once in a lifetime, if they can afford it. Today, nearly two million Muslims perform the Hajj each year.

What makes pilgrimage such a powerful and popular spiritual exercise, not just in Islam but in virtually all religions? The five basic stages of any pilgrimage are intention, separation, struggle, transformation, and return. A pilgrimage engages the body and the mind. It is an enactment, not merely the intellectual assent to beliefs and doctrines. It fully involves the senses in ways that other dimensions of religion do not and makes the abstractions of faith more real. To complete a pilgrimage is also to connect oneself to those who have walked the path before—a return to the origins of the faith and the self, but now the place is different because the pilgrim is different, transformed by the experience. ▣

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Questions to Consider

1. If your personal spiritual discipline includes prayer, do you prefer to pray alone or communally? Do you prefer formal ritual or spontaneous practice?
2. Have you ever participated in a pilgrimage, whether one formally part of your faith tradition or of a more personal nature (i.e., to a location significant to your ancestors or to a site associated with a historical figure or event)? Was there a transformative aspect to your experience?

Unity in Islam—The Five Pillars

Lecture 20

The unifying factors for observant Muslims are a set of beliefs and practices that are obligatory: the Five Pillars of Islam. The grouping is found in Hadith, particularly in a famous Hadith featuring the angel Gabriel (*Jibril* in Arabic) explaining the essence of Islam.

The First and Second Pillars—The Shahada and the Call to Prayer

- The First Pillar of Islam is a statement, the *shahadah*, and proclaims, “There is no God but God”—a statement of Tawhid. The second part states, “and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” The *shahadah* is written on the flag of Saudi Arabia, and this statement is a central part of the Call to Prayer.
- Prayer (*salat*) is the Second Pillar and the pillar that is most deeply woven into the daily lives of Muslims. The ideal is to pray five times a day, at daybreak, noon, midafternoon, sunset, and evening. The exact times are now available on most mosques’ websites, so Muslims can set an alarm to remind them to pray.
- The pillar of prayer is the way that Muslims follow a sacred rhythm amidst the other rhythms of their lives.
- The first words are *Allahu Akbar*, meaning “God is great,” or “God is greater.” After four repetitions of this, the next part of the call is the expression of the *shahadah*. *Ashadhu An* means “I bear witness” that there is no God but God, and Muhammad is his messenger.
- Next, there is the literal call—Come to Prayer (said twice), followed by Come to Flourishing, a reminder of how important prayer is. For morning prayers, a phrase is added—“Prayer is better than sleep.”

Lecture 20: Unity in Islam—The Five Pillars

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- At the end, *Allahu Akbar* is once again proclaimed, followed by the first part of the *shahadah*, the affirmation of the oneness of God—*La Illaha Illa Allah*.
- Muslims can pray with other Muslims or alone. All mosques separate the sexes in some way. The issue of male/female separation is something that is being discussed by Muslim feminists.
- When entering a mosque, shoes are always taken off before going into the prayer room. Women will cover their heads, often with a scarf, and men may cover their heads with a cap or hat. Before taking part in prayer, Muslims clean themselves ritually, washing their hands, mouth and nose, face, arms, head, ears, and feet.
- The prayer room itself has no pews. Worshippers sit on the floor.
- In most mosques, there are basically two parts to the ritual: a khutbah, or sermon, from the imam, and the actual prayer itself.
- During the khutbah, people will be sitting on the floor around the prayer room, listening. The imam will usually discuss passages from the Qur'an and from the Hadith and will apply these passages to the lives of this congregation and present day concerns.
- At the moment of prayer itself, everyone stands shoulder to shoulder and faces the mihrab, a niche in the wall that indicates the direction of prayer toward Mecca. The imam then chants from the Qur'an and the worshippers go through repeated cycles of postures. At the end, everyone turns their head to the right and then to the left, wishing each other peace.
- In the posture of full prostration, worshippers get on their knees and put their foreheads on the ground. This is a posture of complete submission and dependence.

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The Third and Fourth Pillars—Zakat and Ramadan

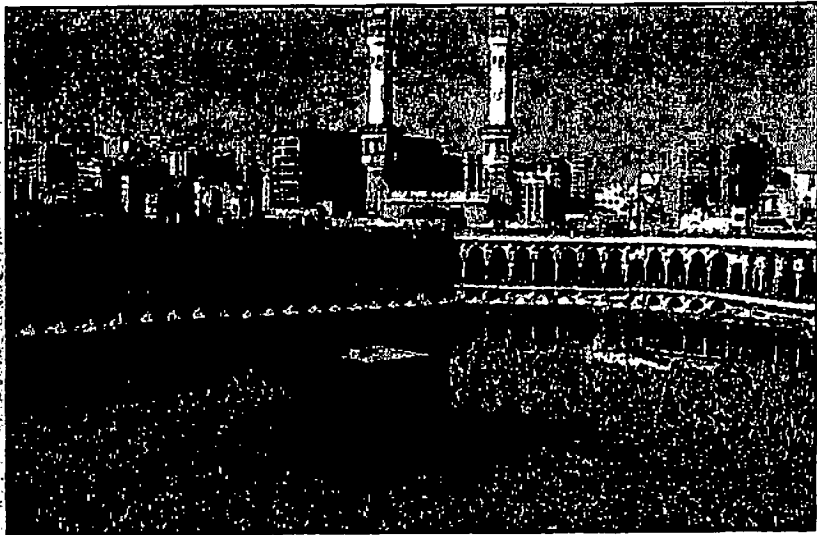
- The Third Pillar is zakat, or alms-giving. Muslims are expected to give a certain percentage of their wealth (around 2.5 percent) to support the poor, orphans and widows, and Islam.
- The Fourth Pillar of Islam is the fast during the month of Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslims abstain from food, drink, smoking, and sex from dawn to sunset.
- Each day, after the sun goes down, the fast is broken with a meal called the *iftar* meal. During Ramadan, Muslims are committed to undertaking greater acts of piety, such as giving more to the poor.
- Ramadan is a time to cultivate self-discipline, to refrain from automatically seeking desire satisfaction so that our attention can be turned to matters of eternal importance rather than momentary pleasure, to obligation rather than appetite, to God rather than self.
- After the end of the month-long fast of Ramadan comes the biggest holiday of the Islamic year: Eid al-Fitr. There is a special prayer done in the morning (in addition to the usual five obligatory prayers) in community. The holiday period of Eid al-Fitr, from one to three days long, is a time when the family gathers, feasts, and exchanges gifts. The common greeting given at this time is "*Eid mubarak*," or "Blessed Eid."

The Fifth Pillar—The Hajj

- The Fifth Pillar of Islam is the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia that all Muslims who are physically and financially able are expected to make at least once during their lives. The Hajj takes place from the 8th to the 12th day of the last month of the Islamic calendar.
- The Hajj is the largest annual pilgrimage on earth, with between 2 and 3 million people attending each year. Only Muslims are allowed into the sacred city of Mecca. It connects Muslims in three ways: it connects them with God, with their history, and with each other.

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- When on the Hajj, pilgrims wear white ritual clothing. For many, the clothing they wear on the Hajj is saved and used as a funeral shroud when they die. On the Hajj, each pilgrim is simply a human being standing before God.
- Thousands upon thousands of Muslims will circumambulate the Ka'bah together. The crowd walks around the Ka'bah seven times counterclockwise, the direction symbolizing that this takes place outside of ordinary time.
- The Ka'bah is the black, cube-shaped structure in the center of the mosque in Mecca. Pilgrims try to touch or kiss the sacred stone, but given the size of the crowd, many are able to only gesture toward it.
- During the Hajj, Muslims perform many ritual actions that are symbolic of, or re-create, important historical events, where Muhammad gave his final sermon, standing before God in humility and repentance.



The Ka'bah at Mecca is the destination of the Hajj, or pilgrimage, which all Muslims must make once in their lifetimes if physically and financially possible.

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- Toward the end of the pilgrimage is the second major Islamic holiday, Eid al-Adha, the festival of sacrifice. Muslims sacrifice an animal, such as a sheep or cow, to commemorate God's substitution of a ram for sacrifice instead of Abraham's son Ishmael. Some Muslims also see this as symbolizing the sacrifice of one's ego before God.
- A Muslim who completes the Hajj is given the honorific title "Hajji." Most Muslims who perform the Hajj are deeply affected by it. In many cases, Muslims get a firsthand experience of the tremendous diversity of Islam, as they pray alongside Muslims from every part of the world.

The Concept of Jihad

- In some discussions of Islam, there is talk about a sixth pillar, the concept of jihad. The actual meaning of jihad is "effort" or "struggle." It is the effort necessary to walk the straight path, to live in accordance with what God wills.
- Some people equate the term with holy war. Part of the struggle necessary for Muslims may take the form of battle against those who threaten them, as occurred in the early years of the tradition. However, there are strict rules of engagement that govern this type of jihad, and they are spelled out in the Qur'an and Hadith.
- There is an Islamic just war doctrine, and there are many limitations on how warfare can be conducted. Among them, warfare must be defensive and must not involve targeting civilians, women, or children. The Qur'an states, "Fight those in the way of God who fight you, but do not be aggressive; God does not like aggressors. ... If they desist, then cease to be hostile."
- Ultimately, however, the kind of jihad that involves fighting is considered the "lesser jihad." The highest jihad is the inner jihad, the struggle to keep our worst impulses at bay so that we can follow the straight path.

Notes

Islamic Law

- Islamic law is often used as a translation for the Arabic word Shari'a, but that isn't quite right. Muslims who say that they want to live in accordance with Shari'a often mean that they want to live in accordance with God's will. The notion of law, in terms of jurisprudence, is conveyed by the word *fiqh*.
- There are four commonly accepted sources of Shari'a, although these are understood and applied differently. The first source is the Qur'an. The second source is the Sunna, which is known through the Hadith.
- The thousands of Hadith provide a great deal of material, but since the Qur'an and the Hadith cannot directly address the countless developments that have arisen since the 7th century, there are two other sources consulted.
- The third source is *ijma*, or consensus of the community. Concepts like *ijma* can contribute to a system of Islamic democracy. The final source is *qiyas*, or analogical reasoning. In Islam, not only are the texts and the community given authority, but there is also a place for individual reasoning.
- As you look around the Islamic world, you can see dramatic differences in how the law develops. The process of striving to interpret and apply the teachings of Islam is called *ijtihad*, which is etymologically related to the term jihad—it is a kind of "intellectual effort."
- After law schools were established, some Muslims believed that the "doors of *ijtihad*" were closed. However, many Muslim thinkers advocate "reopening the doors of *ijtihad*," taking a new look at the sources with the eyes of modern individuals.

How Legal Opinions Are Issued

- Qualified Muslim scholars and jurists can issue legal opinions, known as fatwas, on issues of interest to Muslims. If you have

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a question regarding whether or not a particular practice is in accord with Islam, you can ask a scholar, who will issue a fatwa giving you the opinion along with his reasoning (which will almost certainly include passages from the Qur'an and Hadith, along with other precedents from Islamic legal rulings and analogical argumentation).

- There is no centralized authority in Islam—nothing equivalent to a pope—so many Muslims seek guidance from authorities whom they respect and with whom they have a relationship.

Suggested Reading

Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*.

Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*.

———, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*.

Esposito and Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?*

Matlins and Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*.

Nasr, *The Heart of Islam*.

Sharma, *Our Religions*.

Smith, *The World's Religions*.

Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the significance of fasting during Ramadan for Muslims? How does Ramadan in Islam compare with Lent in Christianity?
2. How do you think Muslims who go on the Hajj are changed by the experience?
3. Explain the terms "jihad" and "Shari'a" in the larger context of Islam.

Forms of Islam—Diversity among Muslims

Lecture 21

A central concept in Islam is Tawhid, unity. There is certainly a sense that Muslims think of themselves as a worldwide community, an *ummah*. Still, conflicts among Muslims have been occurring since the earliest period of the tradition, and Muslim-on-Muslim violence is occurring throughout the world at a disturbing rate today. What has caused the rifts within the Muslim community?

Sunnis, Shi'ites, and Sufis

- Within Islam, the most significant doctrinal division is between Sunnis and Shi'ites. This division has its origin in a dispute over who would succeed Muhammad as leader of the Muslim community after his death.
- There were two primary positions on this. One group believed that the successor should be Muhammad's most loyal companion, Abu Bakr. The other group believed that the successor should come from Muhammad's family line, namely his cousin and son-in-law, Ali.
- When Abu Bakr became the khalifa (or caliph), many of the loyal supporters of Ali, known as *shia-tu-Ali*, or "partisans of Ali," were unhappy. This form of Islam became known as "Shia," and its followers are often called "Shi'ites" in English.
- While the Sunni notion of Muhammad's successor was focused on the office of caliph, the Shia believed in a line of imams. Here "imam" refers to an authoritative religious leader who in some cases is understood to be a divinely inspired, infallible interpreter of God's will.
- The difference between Sunni and Shia is not just about Muhammad's successor but about the nature of leadership itself. Shia imams were far more than temporal leaders; rather, they

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were direct bloodline descendants of Muhammad with significant religious authority.

- There are many branches of Shia, and the distinctions in these branches are primarily related to who they believe were the legitimate successors of Ali and Husayn. The most populous branch is known as the Twelvers.
- While the conflict over the succession of Muhammad and the different conceptions of authority explain much about the difference between Sunni and Shia, much of the tension and suspicions between these two groups today comes more from past mistreatment and grievances.
- Sufism is the mystical branch of Islam. Mysticism can be a tricky word to define, but it points to the path that leads to a direct experience of ultimate reality, which here would mean a direct encounter with God.
- There are three primary Sufi streams: ascetic, contemplative, and devotional. Sufi asceticism did not take the form of severe austerities or world-denying renunciation. Rather, it was an emphasis on simplicity, inwardness, and piety.
- This leads to the second strain: the contemplative. Sufism employs a range of techniques to connect the seeker to God. Such techniques can include meditation, prayer, and chanting. Finally, there is the devotional strand, which is perhaps the most powerful.
- Sufis are organized into orders, which are known as brotherhoods or sisterhoods. Most Sufis are not celibate, and they do not live with the order full time. They usually have jobs and families, as Islam has generally rejected celibacy and monasticism.
- Sufi brotherhoods engage in a range of activities, the most important being the rituals known as dhikr, which means "remembrance." These often involve rhythmic, repetitive chanting and recitation

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that bring about a deep state of awareness of, or even absorption in, God.

- The ultimate goal of the Sufi is to get the ego or self out of the way so that the practitioner can fully experience union with God.
- We cannot leave our discussion of Sufism without an example of Sufi devotional poetry. The best known is by Jalal ad-Din Rumi, a 13th-century writer. Many of the Sufi themes we have been discussing, such as the need to dissolve the boundaries around the self and the pursuit of an intimate, direct connection with God, can be found in his poems.



The whirling dance of the dervish is a form of Sufi Muslim worship, designed to clear the mind for God.

Colonization and Reactions

- In the 18th and 19th centuries, almost every part of the Muslim world was colonized by European powers. Muslims felt disempowered and humiliated.
- The range of responses to colonization tended to cluster in three categories. The first argued that the decline in the Muslim world was due to a departure from the straight path of Islam. The answer, therefore, was to return to true Islam and to reject the West.
- On the opposite side of the spectrum was the second response—imitate the West. Focus on modernization through secularization and Westernization. The third position posed a middle alternative. Modernize, but in an Islamic way.

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- This Islamic modernism emerged largely during the 19th century and argued that Islam would be its essence but Western ideas and technology could be selectively adapted as long as they did not conflict with Islam. Social equality, the sovereignty of the people, and science were not Western innovations, modernists argued, but were actually part of the Islamic tradition all along.
- A radically different approach was seen in Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi movement, founded by Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab in the 18th century. Wahhabis focus on doctrinal orthodoxy, and condemn (and often repress) Shi'ites and Sufis. They advocate a literalist approach to interpretation and a strict application of the law.
- Wahhabism became the official religious ideology of Saudi Arabia and, due to Saudi oil wealth, has been exported throughout the Muslim world.
- There is a diverse modern movement that advocates a greater role for Islam in the lives of individual Muslims as well as the state. A general characteristic of this movement is the need to return to Islam. Islam must apply to all areas of life: politics, economics, family life, et cetera. The terms that scholars use to capture this view include Islamic revivalism, Islamic resurgence, Islamism, and political Islam.
- Within the category of Islamic revivalism are many groups with differing agendas, goals, and methods. They range from groups committed to peaceful change and democracy to militant organizations that advocate the violent overthrow of any governments that are not truly Islamic in their eyes.

The Muslim Brotherhood

- The most important and influential revivalist organization is the Society of Muslim Brothers, or the Muslim Brotherhood. It was formed in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, who was angered by British economic and military domination in Egypt.

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- Branches of the Muslim Brotherhood are found throughout the Muslim world, and their goal is to establish an Islamic society peacefully, through social organizations, the press, and, where they can, participating in elections (although some offshoots of the group have advocated and carried out violent action).
- One of the groups that has its origins in the Muslim Brotherhood is Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist group governing the Gaza Strip. Founded in 1987, Hamas, which is an acronym for the Arabic term for "Islamic Resistance Movement," brought Islamism into the movement for Palestinian statehood. Whereas the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its affiliated political party, Fatah, is largely secular, Hamas wants the Palestinian state to be an Islamic one.

Progressive Islam

- There is a side of Islam that most Westerners never see—what is often called progressive Islam. Progressive Islam tends to feature prominent themes including democracy, human rights, and individual liberties; that individuals should be free to interpret the Qur'an with their reason and conscience; equality of men and women; a commitment to interfaith dialogue; and a commitment to nonviolence wherever possible.

American Islam

- Islam is one of America's fastest growing religions. This is not simply due to immigration. Americans have been converting to Islam at the rate of around 20,000 per year in recent years. However, nobody knows how many Muslims live in America, and the estimates vary dramatically. The lowest estimates are around 3 million, and the highest are around 7 million.
- Muslims have been in America for centuries, and American Muslims are a very diverse group, coming from every part of the Muslim world.

Notes

- There is a wide range of levels of observance among American Muslims. Generally speaking, American Muslims are better integrated into American society than Muslims in many European countries, like France or England, are into their societies.
- At the same time, many Muslims feel that despite the fact that they consider themselves faithful Muslims and loyal Americans, non-Muslim Americans do not fully accept them and often portray them unfairly.
- In late 2011, the reality show *All-American Muslim* premiered. The show centers on Arab-American Muslim families in Dearborn, Michigan, and it features ordinary American Muslims with diverse levels of religious commitment and worldviews.
- Between 25–30 percent of all American Muslims are African-American. Scholars estimate that up to 20 percent of African slaves brought to America were Muslim. It is difficult to know the number with any certainty, because Christianity was forced on them, so Muslims had to practice in secret. The historical record does contain evidence that some slaves would not eat pork and prayed to Allah.
- Many African-American Muslims are drawn to Islam because there is a sense that they are returning to a tradition that was taken from them. African-American converts often relinquish their given names, which are considered names forced on their ancestors by slave owners, and embrace Muslim names (Cassius Clay becoming Muhammad Ali; Lew Alcindor becoming Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, etc.).

The Nation of Islam and the American Society of Islam

- The organization responsible for bringing many African-Americans into Islam, especially during the 1950s–1970s, is the Nation of Islam. The Nation began when a man named Wallace D. Fard began to preach in the black community in Detroit in 1930.

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- Fard's most important follower was Elijah Muhammad. Elijah Muhammad taught that Fard was a manifestation of Allah and thus divine. Elijah Muhammad himself claimed to be a prophet, and taught that blacks, but not whites, were creations of God. The Nation of Islam was literally seen as a separate nation, and its members would have no obligation to the United States.
- Elijah Muhammad's most famous follower was Malcolm X, who would rise to become the public face of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X was drawn to the Nation of Islam while in prison. In recent decades, many inmates have been drawn to Islam, and Muslim prayer groups can be found at most major prisons.
- Elijah Muhammad's son, Warith Deen Muhammad, and Malcolm X ultimately repudiated the racist teachings of the Nation of Islam and brought most African-American Muslims to mainstream Sunni Islam.
- At this point, there was a split that continues to this day. The vast majority of African-American Muslims ultimately followed Warith Deen Muhammad into his new organization, the American Society of Muslims. The Nation of Islam continued under Louis Farrakhan. In recent years, Farrakhan has softened some of his rhetoric and established more positive relations with mainstream Muslims.

Suggested Reading

- Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street*.
- Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*.
- Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*.
- Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*.
- , *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*.
- Esposito and Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?*
- Fadiman and Frager, *Essential Sufism*.

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Questions to Consider

1. Aside from being a spiritual and political/military leader, Muhammad was a devoted and involved family man. How do you think Islamic belief affects Muslim domestic life, and vice versa?
2. While wars have been fought in the names of all four of our sages, Muhammad was the only one among them to take up arms directly. How do you think this affects non-Muslims' perception of him versus the others? How does it affect your opinion of him?