

Christianity, Cults & Religions

The Religion of the Muslim

1. The Establishment of Islam

- Founded by Muhammad (570-632) in Mecca, Arabia, in 610. Muhammad is a transliteration of his Arabic name and literally means “The Most Praised One”. Islam considers Muhammad to be the “last Prophet”, as well as the last of more than 124,000 messengers sent by Allah (God). He united the Arab tribes and turned them away from idolatry and to the religion of Islam.

2. Distinctive Islamic Beliefs

- **The Six Articles of Faith in Islam:**
 - **Belief in Allah** (*al Ilah*: “the God”): The Islamic God. The Muslims believe he is the ONE GOD.
 - **Belief in His Angels:** The angels are spiritual beings created by Allah from light. They are innumerable and are Allah’s slaves and worshippers. There are **archangels**: Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, the bearers of the Throne of Allah and the angel of death (*Azrael*); and **lower angels**: *Ridwan* (guardian of paradise), *Malik* & 19 other angels (guardians of hell), two honorable recorders (*Kiraman Katibin*) of good choices and bad decisions, and guardian angels.
 - **Belief in His Books:** The Quran (“recitation”) is the errorless record of the angel Gabriel’s revelations to Muhammad from 610 until his death in 632. The Quran affirms the Torah, Psalms and Gospels, but they are not authentic, because they have been distorted and altered.
 - **Belief in His Messengers:** Islamic Prophets and Messengers are sent by Allah to all nations. A **Prophet** presents new “scripture and wisdom” and **Messengers** “confirm existing scripture”. The most important Messengers have been: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.
 - **Belief in the Last Day:** The afterlife is very important to the Islamic worldview. Muslims believe in the continued existence of the soul and a transformed physical existence after death. Islam teaches that there will be a day of judgement when all humans will be divided between the eternal destinations of Paradise (obedient worshippers of Allah) and Hell (the disobedient). The “obedient” seems to be defined as: believers whose good deeds outweigh their bad deeds.

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- **Belief in *al-qadhaa'* (the Devine Will) and *al-qadar* (the Devine Decree):** These two terms seem to be overlapping, and the meaning encompassed within the “four aspects of *al-qadar*”. Using Christian terms, Allah is: (1) eternal/omniscient, (2) omnipotent, (3) sovereign, (4) creator.
- **The Five Pillars of Islam:** Although beliefs are important to the Muslims, the substance of the Islamic religion is the accomplishment of the following five pillars:
 - **Confessing the Faith (*Shahada*)** is a public statement meaning: “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger.” Confessing this is the first step in becoming a Muslim. Islam requires that everyone say this confession in Arabic.
 - **Prayer (*Salat*)** is a set ritual to be done five specific times every day (sometimes combined in three sessions), memorized in Arabic, with ritual washings before each sequence. The head is required to be covered, the body pointed in the direction of Mecca, and the appropriate motions and prostrations must be followed for the prayers to be valid.
 - **Fasting (*Sawm*)** is an annual event for all Muslims (except children, pregnant women and travelers). The fast lasts the entire lunar month known as Ramadan, and involves abstinence from all food, water and sex during daylight hours. At sunset, when the daily fast ends, there is a special meal (*iftar*) and another one just before sunrise. In Muslim dominated countries there is often a more nocturnal schedule, with more sleep during the daytime and feasting at night.
 - **Giving of Alms (*Zakat*)** is obligatory giving of 2.5% of a Muslim’s wealth, primarily to the poor, to support religious or educational institutions or for the self-defense of the Islamic community.
 - **Pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*)** is to be carried out at least once in a Muslim’s lifetime, providing they can afford it. Uniformity is enforced. Reflecting purity (*ihram*), men must wear a specific type of white garment and sandals, and women usually wear a non-specified white garment. While in the state of purity, pilgrims must not cut their nails or hair, engage in sexual relations, argue, fight or hunt. The objective is to strengthen Arabic-Abrahamic identity by recalling the story of Hagar and Ishmael and the union of all Muslims by circling 7 times the ancient Arabic-Abrahamic religious center (*Kaaba*). Claims are made for the gaining of great credit and the removing of sins in preparation of the coming Judgement Day.

3. Major Islamic Denominations

- **Sunni** (“people of tradition”): After Muhammad’s death, Sunni Islam rapidly spread from Arabia under the leadership of the first four “rightly guided” rulers (*caliphs*), companions of Muhammad.
- **Shi’a** (“party of Ali”): Shia Islam also began to spread rapidly after Muhammad’s death, but they were led by the teachings of the “infallible” Imams, who were from the bloodline of Muhammad.
- **Sufi** (“mystics”): Sufi Islam arose ~50-100 years after the death of Muhammad. This movement was started, because many Muslims observed their faith becoming too worldly, and the Sufis wanted to return to the basics of their faith: strict obedience to Islamic scripture, tradition, prayer.

4. Significant Islamic Terms and Notes

- **'aslama**: Arabic word meaning “submit to God” and the origin of the English word “Islam”.
- The Islamic faith embraces the correct belief that the soul of every person will exist forever.
- **Sunnah** (“tradition”): commentaries on Muhammad’s life (Hadith: “report” and Sirah: “journey”)
- **Jihad** (“struggle, effort”): The word Jihad appears frequently in the Quran, often in the idiomatic expression “striving in the way of God” (*al-jihad fi sabil Allah*), which refers to the act of striving to serve the purposes of Allah on this earth. However, Muslims and scholars do not all agree on how to define it. The “struggle” could be an internal effort to obey Allah (“moderates”) or an external literal warfare against attackers of the Islamic religion or of the individual Muslims (“radicals”).
- **Sharia** (“way or path”) (Islamic Law): The Islamic legal framework, based on the Quran, Hadith and centuries of debate, interpretation and precedent. Sharia deals with all aspects of day-to-day life, including politics, economics, banking, business law, contract law, sexuality and social issues.
- **Black Stone of Mecca** or **Kaaba Stone**: A Muslim relic that, according to Islamic tradition, dates back to the time of Adam & Eve. It is in the eastern corner of the Kaaba, the ancient sacred stone building toward which Muslims pray, in the center of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. .
- **Jinn**: Supernatural creatures in early Arabian and later Islamic mythology and theology (genie).
- Muslims who convert to Christianity or other religions face persecution and possible death.

7 BE LOVING

It's not just what you say, it's how you say it!

Sharing your faith isn't just about strong answers from the Bible; it's about being sold out to Jesus Christ. If a person knows all the right answers but is arrogant, prideful, and has an "in your face" attitude, this isn't the kind of person who is going to draw people to the real Jesus.

So, unless the situation calls for it, try to avoid a highly confrontational approach. For example, you could say to a Mormon: "My friend, you worship a false god proclaimed by a false prophet and a false book called the Book of Mormon and a false gospel based upon works." And you'd be technically correct! But that approach may turn the Mormon off to the true message you are trying to communicate. You may win the argument, but lose the Mormon.

Consider a gentler approach in which you say, "My friend, I really care about you, and I'm afraid you might get deceived into believing a lie. I'm afraid you might die and go into eternity believing something that isn't true. Can we talk about this? Can I share with you why I believe the Bible is true?" Focus on keeping a loving attitude in your heart.

Let your love be genuine and embracing. People can sense if you truly care about them, as opposed to merely acting like you care only because you want to convert them. Pray that the Holy Spirit would fill your heart with love that shows itself in meaningful ways to your cultic acquaintances. This kind of love is sacrificial and self-giving, and involves

showing hospitality to people (Ephesians 5:2; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Corinthians 16:14).

You'll be amazed at what God will do through a person who is sold out to Jesus Christ, allowing Jesus' grace and love to flow through him or her when approaching someone in a cult. Strong answers from that kind of person mean a lot. Let Jesus' love shine through you!

If the cultist becomes a Christian, the love has to continue. There's a good chance that his cult will expel him, and nearly everyone in his life will shun him. He may also lose his family, so he will need to be brought into a new family. As his new brothers and sisters in Christ, you must make sure that he feels at home in his new church and that discipleship is an ongoing priority. Part of being loving means that you don't drop the ball at conversion but help him to become a true, lifelong disciple of Christ.

