

# American Muslims

## 1. Who are American Muslims?

There are over 8 million Muslims who live in the United States, representing every race, ethnicity and culture. They come from all social demographics, and contribute to American society as entrepreneurs, engineers, industrialists, physicians, scientists and teachers. Many were born in the United States; others migrated to America seeking a better life.

The first Muslims in America were West Africans who traded with Native American tribes prior to Columbus. Later, large numbers of African Muslims were forcibly brought to the US to work on plantations as slaves. Very few retained their Islamic identity.

Today, many African Americans are rediscovering their Islamic heritage. From the 1930's onward, the Nation of Islam (a different faith, not related to Islam) played a major role in bringing African Americans to mainstream Islam. Many who joined the Nation, such as Malcolm X, left it after realizing that the true teachings of Islam were universal and not restricted to a chosen race of people.

Like their fellow contrymen, American Muslims were shocked and saddened when terrorists attacked their homeland on September 11th, 2001. In today's post 9-11 America, Muslims have taken on a new role - bridging the gap between the Muslim world and America, and educating the rest of America about the true and peaceful nature of Islam.

## 2. What do Muslims think about Jesus?

Muslims love and respect Jesus. They consider him one of the greatest of God's prophets and messengers to humankind. A Muslim never refers to him simply as "Jesus," but always adds the phrase "may the peace and blessing of God be upon him." The Qur'an confirms his virgin birth, and a special chapter of the Qur'an is entitled "Mary." The Qur'an describes the Annunciation as follows:

"The Angels said, 'O Mary! God has chosen you, and purified you, and chosen you above all the women of all nations&hellip;'

'O Mary, God gives you good news of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, honored in this world and in the Hereafter, and one of those brought near to God. He shall speak to the people in infancy and in old age, and shall be of the righteous.'

She said: 'O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?' He said: 'Even so; God creates what he wills. When He decrees a thing, he says to it, "Be!" and it is.'" (Qur'an 3:42, 45-7)

Just as God created Adam without a mother or a father, He caused Jesus to be conceived without a father:

"Truly the example of Jesus in relation to God is as the example of Adam. He created him from dust and then said to him, "Be!" and he was." (Qur'an 3:59)

During his prophetic mission, Jesus performed many miracles. The Qur'an tells us that he said: "I have come to you with a sign from your Lord: I make for you out of clay, as it were, a figure of a bird, and breathe into it and it becomes a bird by God's leave. And I heal the blind, and the lepers, and I raise the dead by God's leave." (Qur'an 3:49)

Jesus, like Muhammad, came to confirm and renew the basic doctrine of the belief in One God brought by earlier prophets. In the Qur'an, Jesus is reported as saying that he came: "To attest the Torah that was before me. And to make lawful to you part of what was forbidden to you; I have come to you with a sign from your Lord; so be conscious of God and obey me." (Qur'an 3:50)

The Prophet Muhammad said: "Whoever believes that there is no deity except God, alone without partner, that Muhammad is his messenger, that Jesus is the servant and messenger of God; His word which he bestowed on Mary and a spirit proceeding from Him, and that Paradise and Hell are true, shall be received by God into Heaven."

### 3. How are Islam and America related?

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endorsed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

These ideals are very much part of the Islamic faith. Muslims believe that all humans are created equal and are blessed by their Creator with certain rights - the right to life, the right to pursue eternal happiness and the right to liberty. Liberty, as Muslims see it, is not just defined as freedom of religion, assembly, and speech, but freedom from subservience to any creation of the Creator. It is the freedom to serve the Creator, God Almighty, alone.

While many so-called Muslim nations are not, Islam is democratic in spirit. Islam advocates the right to vote, the right to self-governance and the right to self-determination. The Qur'an enjoins Muslims to rule themselves through consultation and consensus. Muslims believe that each person is responsible for his or her own deeds; and that all stand equal before God. This independent spirit on one hand, coupled with an egalitarian worldview on the other, are both uniquely American.

The American ideals of independence, liberty, democracy, equality, and especially monotheism "- one nation under God," are all found within Islam.

Verily, this nation of yours is one nation and I am your Lord, so worship Me." (Qur'an 21:92)

### 4. Why is Islam often misunderstood

In today's turbulent world, Islam is often on the front page - mostly for the wrong reasons. Islam means peace; yet some have taken this peaceful way of life and hijacked it into a violent way, and distorted their ideology for personal and political gains. Seeing a faith through explosive world events, and judging it by the actions of a misguided few, is the primary reasons why Islam is often misunderstood.

Islam is sometimes, intentionally misrepresented. Some politicians, religious leaders and media have found an ideal scapegoat in Islam. By associating Islam with the inhumane acts of a handful, they have been successful in driving larger numbers of people to vote for them; to donate towards their ministries; and to read their newspapers, watch their television programs and listen to their radio shows.

However, with an increasing number of Muslims speaking out against this falsehood; the true and peaceful nature of Islam is becoming more evident. Muslims are standing up against terrorism, against the persecution and killing of innocent people, and against those who perpetrate such injustice in the name of any faith.

The very word "Islam" means peace. A fifth of the world's population is reclaiming this peace as their chosen way of life.

#### 5. What does Islam say about war?

Islam permits fighting in self-defense, in defense of one's faith, or on the part of those whose basic rights have been violated. It lays down strict rules of combat that include prohibitions against harming civilians and against destroying crops, trees, and livestock. As Muslims see it, injustice would be triumphant in the world if good people were not prepared to fight for a righteous cause.

God says in the Qur'an: "Permission (to defend) has been granted to those who are being fought against; that they have been oppressed. Verily, God has the power to help them. Those who were unjustly expelled from their homes for no other reason than their saying: 'God is our Lord.' If God were not to repel some human beings through others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein the name of God is mentioned, would have certainly been destroyed. God will definably help those who will help Him. Verily, God is Immensely Strong, Mighty." (Qur'an 22:39-40)

War is the last resort, and is subject to the rigorous conditions laid down by the sacred law. The often misunderstood and overused term jihad literally means "struggle" and not "holy war" (a term not found anywhere in the Qur'an). Jihad, as Islamic concept, can be on a personal level - inner struggle against evil within oneself; struggle for decency and goodness on the social level; and struggle on the battlefield, if and when necessary.

#### 6. How does Islam guarantee human rights?

According to the Qur'an, God has created all of humankind equal, and has given each the right to pursue their own destiny. The life, honor and property of all people in a Muslim society are considered sacred, whether the person is Muslim or not. Racism, sexism and prejudice of any sort are unacceptable in Islam. The Qur'an speaks of human equality in the following terms:

"O humankind! We created you from a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Truly, the most honored of you in God's sight is the greatest of you in piety. God is All-Knowing, All-Aware." (Qur'an 49:13)

The right to life is the most basic of human rights; the Qur'an equates the unjust killing of a single person to killing all of humankind: "And whoever kills a soul&hellip;, should be as though he has killed all of humankind." (Qur'an 5:32)

Dealing equitably and protecting the rights of every individual is the cornerstone of a Muslim society. God further states in the Qur'an: "O you who believe! Stand up firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not hatred of a people invite you to act inequitably; act justly, that is nearer to piety, and be conscious of (your duty to) God, surely God is aware of all that you do." (Qur'an 5:8).

#### 7. How did the spread of Islam affect the World?

The Muslim community constituted to grow after Prophet Muhammad's death. Within a few decades, vast numbers of people across three continents - Africa, Asia, and Europe - had chosen Islam as their way of life.

One of the reasons for the rapid and peaceful spread of Islam was the purity of its doctrine - Islam calls for faith in only one God. This, coupled with the Islamic concepts of equality, justice and freedom, resulted in a united and peaceful community. People were free to travel from Spain to China without fear, and without crossing any borders.

As millions of people embraced Islam, they brought with them the heritage of ancient civilizations like Egypt, Greece, India, Persia, and Rome. Muslims cherished these cultures' knowledge and took great pains to preserve their libraries and honor and the scholars residing in their cities.

Many Muslim scholars traveled to these cities seeking knowledge. They translated into Arabic volumes of philosophical and scientific works from Greek and Syriac languages (the languages of Eastern Christian scholars), from Pahlavi (the scholarly language of Pre-Islamic Persia), and from Sanskrit (an ancient Indian language). As a result, Arabic became the language of worldly scholarship, and people migrated from all over the world to study in the Muslim Universities.

By 850, most of the philosophical and scientific works of Aristotle; much of Plato and Pythagorean school; and the major works of Greek astronomy, mathematics and medicine such as the Almagest of Ptolemy, the Elements of Euclid, and the works of Hippocrates and Galen, were all rendered into Arabic. Furthermore, important works of astronomy, mathematics and medicine were translated from Pahlavi and Sanskrit. For the next 700 years, Arabic became the most important scientific language of the world and the repository of much of the wisdom and the sciences of antiquity.

The achievement of scholars working in the Islamic tradition went far beyond translation and preservation of ancient learning. These scholars built upon the ancient heritage with their own scientific advances. These advancements were a direct cause of the Renaissance in Europe.

Muslims excelled in art, architecture, astronomy, geography, history, language, literature, medicine, mathematics, and physics. Many crucial systems such as algebra, the Arabic numerals, and the very concept of zero (vital to the advancement of mathematics), were formulated by Muslim scholars and shared with medieval Europe. Muslims invented sophisticated instruments that made future European voyages of discovery possible: the astrolabe, the quadrant, and detailed navigational maps and charts.

8. Is Islam respectful of other beliefs?

Yes. The Qur'an states unequivocally:

"There is no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clearly from falsehood&hellip;" (Qur'an 2:256)

Freedom of conscience is an essential tenant of Islam. Truth can only be seen if it is not clouded by coercion. Protection of the rights of non-Muslims is an intrinsic part of Islamic law. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said:

"He who hurts a non-Muslim citizen of a Muslim State - I am his adversary and I shall be his adversary on the Day of Judgment."

"Beware on the Day of Judgment, I shall, myself, be the accuser against him who wrongs a non-Muslim citizen (of a Muslim State) or Lays on him a responsibility greater than he can bear, or deprives him of anything that belongs to him."

History provides many examples of Muslims' respect towards other faiths. For instance, prior to the Spanish Inquisition, Jews and Christians lived and prospered in Spain for centuries under Muslim rule. Another well known example is when Omar, the second successor to Prophet Muhammad, entered Jerusalem. He refused to pray inside the Church of the

Holy Sepulcher. He was concerned that some overzealous Muslim in the future might destroy the Church and build a Mosque in his honor.

#### 9. Do Islam, Christianity, and Judaism have different Origins?

No. Muslims believe that the original, unchanged message given to Muhammad, Jesus, Moses and all other prophets came from the One same God. This common origin explains their similarities in many beliefs and values.

"Say: We Believe in God and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus and to the prophets from their Lord; we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him (God) do we wholly give ourselves." (Qur'an 3:84)

Jews, Christians and Muslims all consider Abraham their Patriarch. Abraham is mentioned in the Qur'an as one of the great prophets. He was blessed by God to be the father of many nations. From his second son, Isaac, descended the tribes of Israel, and through them, Moses and Jesus; and from his first son, Ishmael, came Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon all of His messengers).

Abraham was commanded by God to rebuild the place of worship that Adam first built - the Ka'bah, in Makkah (Mecca). The Ka'bah is a simple stone structure, erected as a sanctuary for the worship of the One God. Muslims do not worship the Ka'bah; the cubical building is simply the unified direction toward which all Muslims face in Prayer to God, Almighty.

#### 10. Discover Islam

<http://discoverislam.com/gallery.asp?page=1>