

Islam

Islam is a religion based on the teachings of the prophet Muhammad (570–632). Followers of Islam, known as Muslims, live throughout the world. They are concentrated from Southwest to Central Asia, in parts of Africa, and in parts of Southeast Asia.

The main teachings of Islam are in the Qu'ran (KUR•an). The central belief of Islam is that there is only one God, called *Allah*. All other beliefs and practices follow from this teaching. Islam teaches that there is good and evil, and that each individual is responsible for the actions of his or her life. Muslim believers have to carry out five duties, called the Five Pillars of Islam.

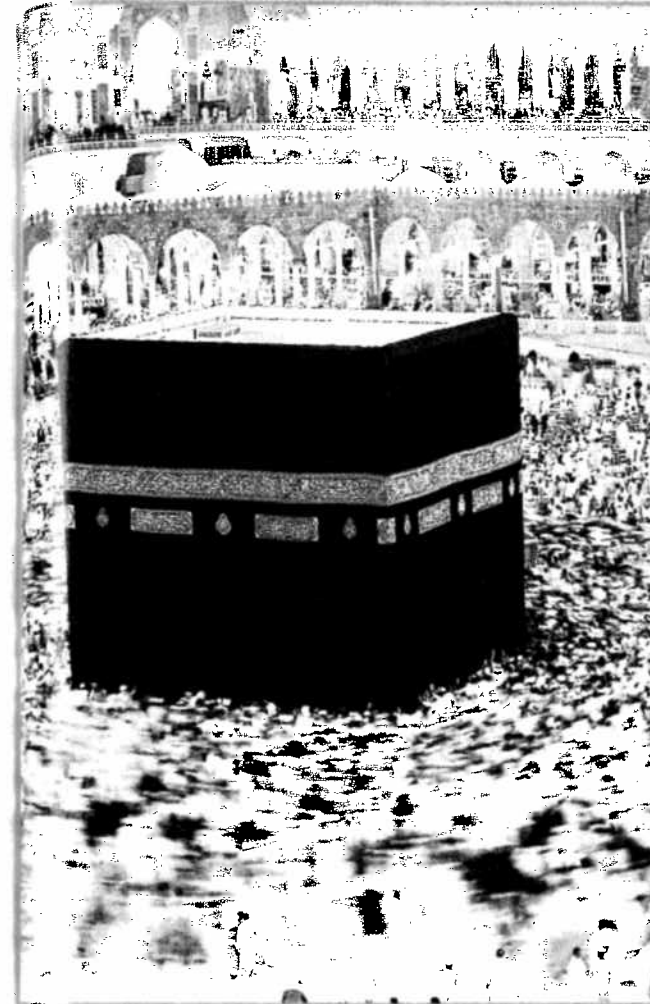
The Five Pillars are:

- **Faith**—A believer must make the following statement of faith: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah."
- **Prayer**—Five times a day, Muslims face toward the holy city of Mecca to pray.
- **Alms**—Muslims must give alms, or money for the poor.
- **Fasting**—During the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, Muslims must fast.
- **Pilgrimage**—All Muslims perform the hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, once in a lifetime.

Celebration

During the sacred month known as Ramadan, Muslims fast, or abstain from food and drink, from dawn to sunset. They do this as a sign of obedience, humility, and self-control. The fasting traditionally ends with eating a few dates and milk or water, followed by the sunset prayer. These foods accompany the other dishes that families, such as the one shown here, eat each night during the month.

The most important night of Ramadan is called the Night of Power (Laylat al-Qadr). This is believed to be the night the angel Gabriel, the messenger of God, first spoke to Muhammad.



Worship

At least once in their lifetime, all Muslims who are physically and financially able, go on hajj, or pilgrimage, to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. There, pilgrims perform several rites, or acts of worship. One rite, shown here, is walking seven times around the Ka'bah—the house of worship that Muslims face in prayer.

The climax of the hajj is the day when millions of believers stand at a place named Arafat. There, they ask forgiveness of God on the same spot where Muhammad gave a farewell sermon.



Five times a day Muslims throughout the world face Mecca and pray to Allah. This prayer ritual, known as Salat, occurs at dawn, noon, late afternoon, sunset, and evening. Muslims recite these prayers at work, or school, or wherever they happen to be. Pictured here are Muslims praying at an intersection in Alexandria, Egypt.



Prayer Rug

Muslims often pray by kneeling on a rug. The design of the rug includes a pointed or arch-shaped pattern. The rug must be placed so that the arch points toward Mecca.

Crescent Moon

The crescent moon has become a familiar symbol for Islam. It may be related to the new moon that begins each month in the Islamic lunar calendar, which orders religious life for Muslims.

ICONS, TEXTS & SYMBOLS

Major Islamic Sects

