

HELPFUL INFORMATION



WHAT BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT ISLAM DO I NEED TO KNOW?

The word Islam simply means 'submission to the will of Allah'. Allah is the God of Islam, and the Qur'an stresses that he is only one person. Islam is a monotheistic religion that arose in the seventh century under the leadership of Mohammad. Mohammad is considered to be the 'ideal man', but is not considered divine. Members of Islam are called Muslims meaning 'those who submit'. Islam involves both beliefs ('The Five Doctrines of Islam') and obligations ('The Five Pillars of Islam').

WHY IS RAMADAN IMPORTANT IN THE ISLAMIC FAITH?

Ramadan celebrates the first revelations that Mohammad received. The purpose of Ramadan is to take Muslims away from their normal lifestyle and make them re-examine their life in the context of a higher ideal. For example, experiencing hunger makes you more aware of the poor; and going through real, but limited suffering, may prepare you for tougher ordeals. The feeling of community is very strong during Ramadan.

WHAT ARE MUSLIMS EXPECTED TO DO DURING RAMADAN?

All Muslims, except children under the age of 12, pregnant or nursing mothers, the frail, aged and ill, must abstain from eating food, smoking and drinking (even water), among other restrictions, during daylight hours.

HOW ARE THE DATES FOR RAMADAN DETERMINED? WHY DO THESE DATES CHANGE?

The dates of Ramadan are established according to the Islamic lunar calendar which has 354 days. The months are divided into lunar months which have 29 to 30 days each. Each day begins at sunset (not midnight). The fasting period normally begins and ends with the sighting of the crescent moon which is different each year.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN SECTS OF ISLAM?

Sunnis, the majority of Muslims, are followers of Abu Bakr as Mohammad's successor. Sunnis feel that no man or holy man need come between a person and his God.

Shiites are followers of the Prophet Mohammad's cousin and son-in-law, Ali. An imam (holy man) acts as an intermediary between Muslims and God.

Sufis are a small group of Muslims who seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience with God.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

- Recite the creed, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammad is his prophet" (Shahada).
- Daily prayers (Salat) five times a day, at specific times.
- Give to the poor (Zakat).
- Fast, especially during the holy month of Ramadan (Sawim).
- Make the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia at least once in a lifetime (Hajj).

THE FIVE DOCTRINES OF ISLAM

- One God, the creator of all things (no trinity).
- Belief in angels and evil spirits.
- Prophets including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jonah, Jesus and Mohammad (note: they consider Jesus a prophet).
- Holy books including the Torah, Zabur (Psalms), Injil (Gospel) and the Qur'an (Koran).
- The Day of Judgment for all people.

WHAT ARE SOME MUSLIM IDEAS ABOUT JESUS?

- Jesus is only a prophet, He is not divine (not the Son of God, not God in the flesh).
- Jesus did not die on the cross. He instead went directly to heaven.
- Jesus was conceived miraculously by God in the womb of the virgin Mary.

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