

◀ The beliefs and practices of Islam are a way of life for Muslims.

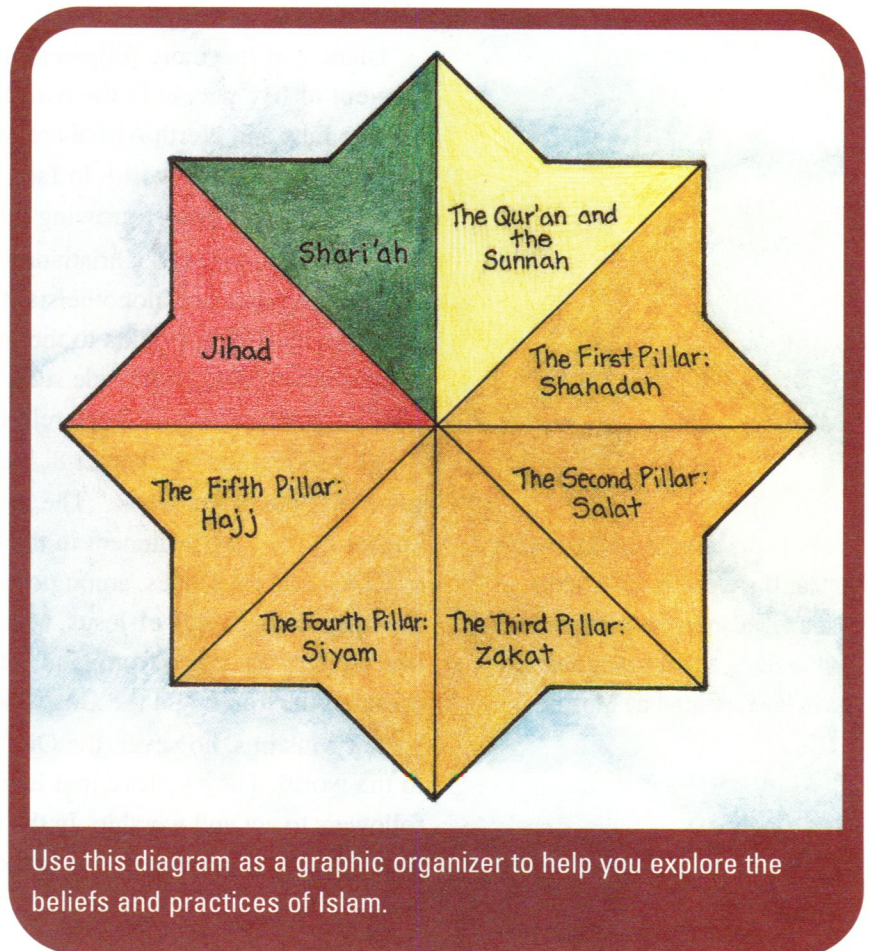
The Teachings of Islam

9.1 Introduction

In Chapter 8, you learned about the prophet Muhammad and the early spread of Islam. Now you will take a closer look at the Islamic faith.

If you visited any city in a Muslim country today, you would notice many things that reflect the teachings of Islam. Five times a day, you would hear a call to prayer throughout the city. While some people hurry to houses of worship, called *mosques*, others simply remain where they are to pray, even in the street. You would see people dressed modestly and many women wearing a head scarf. You would find that Muslims do not drink alcohol or eat pork. You might learn how Muslims give money to support their houses of worship and many charitable works. Soon you would come to understand that Islam is practiced as a complete way of life.

In this chapter, you will explore the basic beliefs and practices of Islam. You will learn more about the holy book called the **Qur'an**. Together with the **Sunnah** (the example of Muhammad), this book guides Muslims in the **Five Pillars of Faith**. The Five Pillars are faith, prayer, charity, fasting, and making a pilgrimage to Makkah. You will also study the idea of **jihad**. Jihad represents Muslims' struggle with internal and external challenges as they strive to please God. Finally, you will examine **shari'ah**, or Islamic law.





The Islamic community has spread throughout the world. These Muslims in Cairo, Egypt, prepare to pray on a sidewalk by facing toward Makkah.

9.2 Background on Islam

Since the time of Muhammad, Islam has had a huge impact on world history. From Arabia, Islam spread rapidly throughout the Middle East, across North Africa to Spain, and across central Asia nearly to China. In addition to sharing a common faith, Muslims also belonged to a single Islamic community, called the *ummah*. The Islamic community blended many peoples and cultures.

Islam now has more followers than any religion except Christianity. One out of five people in the world are Muslims. Most people in the Middle East and North Africa are Muslim, but Muslims live in nearly every country of the world. In fact, the majority of Muslims are Asian. And Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the United States.

Islam, Judaism, and Christianity have much in common. Members of all three faiths are monotheists (they believe in one God). All three religions trace their origins to the prophet Abraham. Their scriptures, or sacred writings, all include such figures as Adam, Noah, and Moses. Muslims believe that all three religions worship the same God.

As you learned in Chapter 8, Muslims consider Jews and Christians to be “People of the Book.” The Jewish Bible, called the **Torah**, is known as the Old Testament in the Christian Bible. The New Testament of Christianity includes, among other writings, the gospels that tell of the life and teachings of Jesus. Muslims believe that these holy books, like the Qur’an, came from God. The Qur’an states that God “earlier revealed the Torah and the Gospel as a source of guidance for people.”

For Muslims, however, the Qur’an contains God’s final revelations to the world. They believe that its messages reveal how God wants his followers to act and worship. In the rest of this chapter, you’ll learn more about the ideas that have shaped the Muslim faith.

Torah the Jewish scriptures, or Bible. The word Torah is often used to mean to the first five books of the Bible, traditionally said to have been written by Moses.

9.3 The Qur'an and the Sunnah

Two foundations of Islam are the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Through the Qur'an, God describes his laws and moral teachings, or the "straight path." The Qur'an holds a central position for Muslims everywhere, guiding them in all aspects of their lives.

The Qur'an contains passages that Muhammad is believed to have received from the angel Gabriel. Muhammad and his followers recited and memorized these verses. As Muhammad could apparently not read or write, scribes wrote down these passages. The Arabic of the Qur'an is notable for its great beauty.

In about 651 C.E., Caliph Uthman established an official edition of the Qur'an. He destroyed other versions. The Qur'an used today has remained largely unchanged since then.

Muhammad called the Qur'an Allah's "standing miracle." Muslims honor the spoken and written Qur'an. They do not let copies of the sacred book touch the ground or get dirty. Most Muslims memorize all or part of the Qur'an in Arabic. Its verses accompany Muslims through their lives, from birth to death.

The Sunnah ("practice") is the example that Muhammad set for Muslims during his lifetime. What Muhammad did or said in a certain situation has set a precedent, or guide, for all Muslims. For instance, Muhammad told his followers to make sure their guests never left a table hungry. He also reminded children to honor their parents when he said, "God forbids all of you to disobey your mothers." For Muslims, the Sunnah is second only to the Qur'an in religious authority.

Within 200 years after Muhammad's death, thousands of reports about the prophet had traveled throughout Muslim lands. Scholars looked into each story. They placed the stories they could verify into collections. Called **hadith** (tradition), these accounts provided written evidence of Muhammad's Sunnah as seen in his words and deeds. They continue to have this role today.

The most basic acts of worship for Muslims are called the Five Pillars of Faith. The Qur'an provides general commands to perform these five duties. The Sunnah explains how to perform them using Muhammad's example. Let's look next at each of the five pillars.

hadith accounts of Muhammad's words or actions that are accepted as having authority for Muslims

These girls in Bangladesh are reading the Qur'an to learn how to perform the basic acts of Muslim worship, called the Five Pillars of Faith.



9.4 The First Pillar: Shahadah

The first Pillar of Faith is *shahadah*, the profession (declaration) of faith. To show belief in one God and in Muhammad's prophethood, a Muslim says, "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God."

The first part of the shahadah affirms monotheism. Like Christians and Jews, Muslims believe that one all-powerful God, whom they call Allah, created the universe. They believe that the truth of one God was revealed to humankind through many prophets. These prophets include Adam, Noah, Moses, and Jesus, who appear in Jewish and Christian scriptures. The Qur'an honors all these prophets.

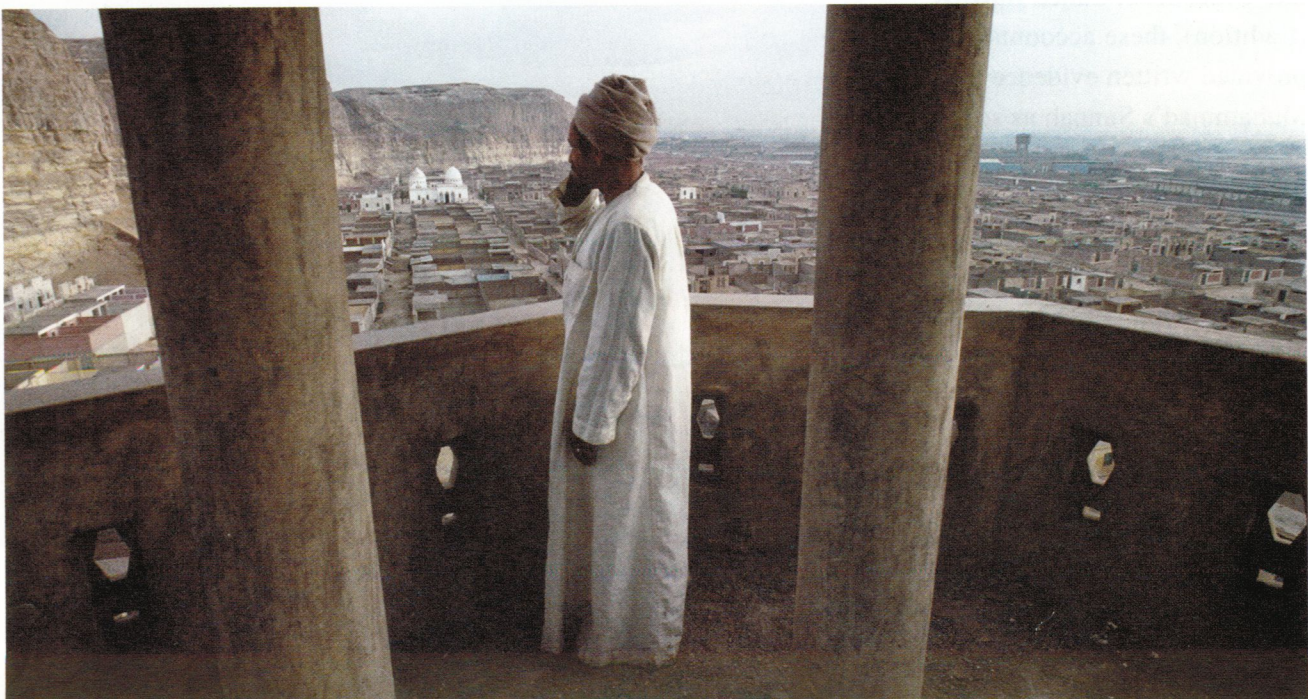
The second part of the shahadah identifies Muhammad as God's messenger. According to this statement, Muhammad announced the message of Islam, which was God's final word to humankind.

The meaning of shahadah is that people not only believe in God, but also pledge their submission to Him. For Muslims, God is the center of life. The shahadah follows Muslims through everyday life, not just prayers. Parents whisper it into their babies' ears. Muslims strive to utter the shahadah as their last words before death. Students taking a difficult test say the shahadah to help them through the ordeal.

In addition to the reality and oneness of God, Muslims accept the idea of an unseen world of angels and other beings. According to their faith, God created angels to do His work throughout the universe. Some angels revealed themselves to prophets, as Gabriel did to Muhammad. Other angels observe and record the deeds of each human being.

Muslims also believe that all souls will face a day of judgment. On that day, God will weigh each person's actions. Those who have lived according to God's rules will be rewarded and allowed to enter paradise. Those who have disbelieved or done evil will be punished by falling into hell.

A muezzin is a person who calls Muslim people to prayer from a mosque's tower, or minaret.



9.5 The Second Pillar: Salat

The second Pillar of Faith is *salat*, daily ritual prayer. Muhammad said that “prayer is the proof” of Islam. Salat emphasizes religious discipline, spirituality, and closeness to God.

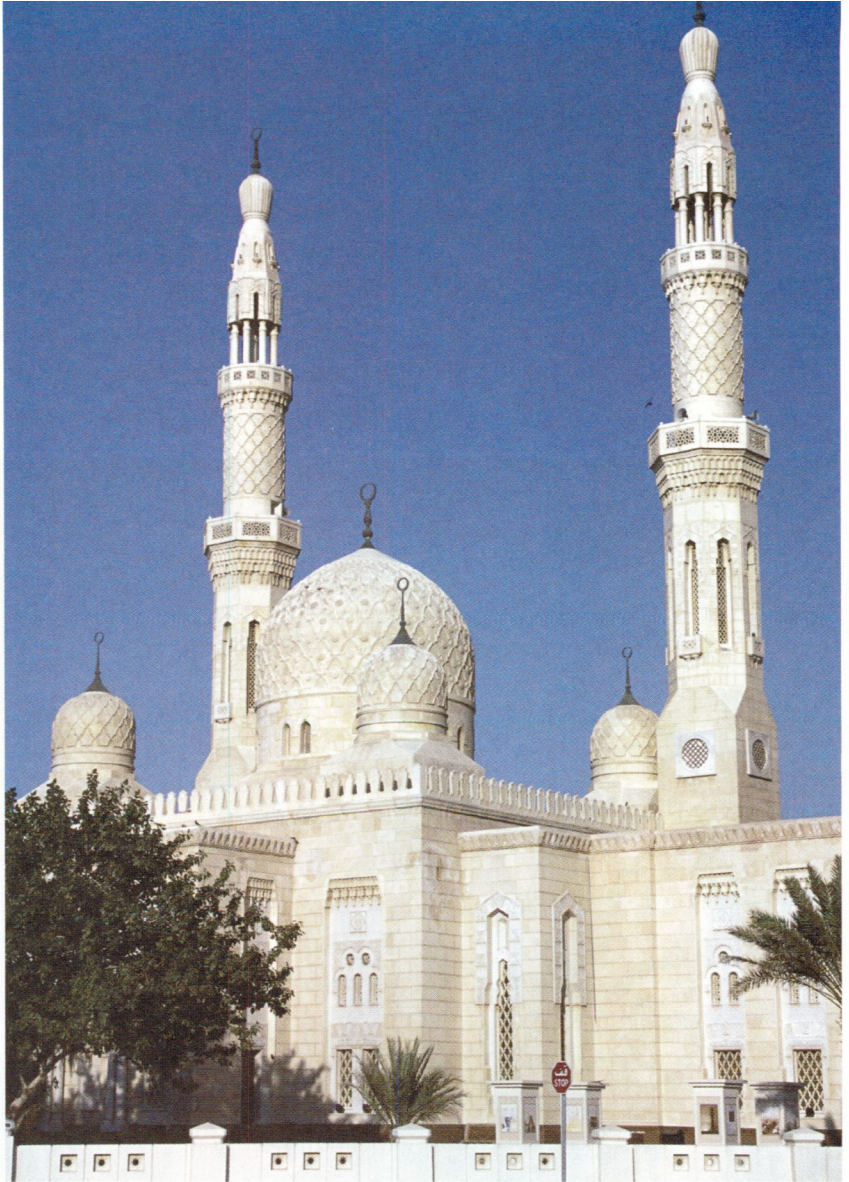
Throughout Muslim communities, people are called to prayer five times a day: at dawn, noon, midday, sunset, and after nightfall. A crier, called a *muezzin* (or *mu’addin*), chants the call to prayer from the tall minaret (tower) of the mosque.

Before praying, Muslims must perform ritual washings. All mosques have fountains where worshipers wash their hands, face, arms, and feet. With a sense of being purified, Muslims enter the prayer area. There they form lines behind a prayer leader called an **imam**. The worshipers face the *qibla*, the direction of Makkah. A niche in a wall marks the qibla. People of all classes stand shoulder to shoulder, but men stand in separate rows from women.

The imam begins the prayer cycle by proclaiming “Allahu akbar!” (“God is most great!”). The worshipers then recite verses from the Qur’an and kneel before God.

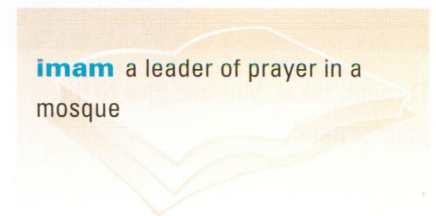
While praying at a mosque is preferable, Muslims may worship anywhere. In groups or by themselves, they may perform their prayers at home, at work, in airports, in parks, or on sidewalks. A qibla compass may help them locate the direction of Makkah. Some Muslims carry a prayer rug to have a clean spot to pray. Some make additional prayers by using prayer beads and reciting words describing God’s many characteristics.

Unlike Christians and Jews, Muslims do not observe a sabbath, or day of rest. On Fridays, however, Muslims gather at a mosque for midday congregational prayer. The worshipers listen to a Qur’an reading and the imam’s sermon. After saying prayers together, some return to their regular business. For others, Friday is a special day when people meet with family and friends.



This mosque has two minarets. Muezzins climb up into them to chant their calls to prayer out over the town.

imam a leader of prayer in a mosque



almsgiving the giving of money, food, or other things of value to the needy

9.6 The Third Pillar: Zakat

The third Pillar of Faith is *zakat*, or **almsgiving** (giving to those in need). In Chapter 8, you learned that Muhammad told wealthy people to share their riches with the less fortunate. This practice remains a basic part of Islam.

The word *zakat* means “purification.” Muslims believe that wealth becomes pure by giving some of it away and that sharing wealth helps control greed. Zakat also reminds people of God’s great gifts to them.

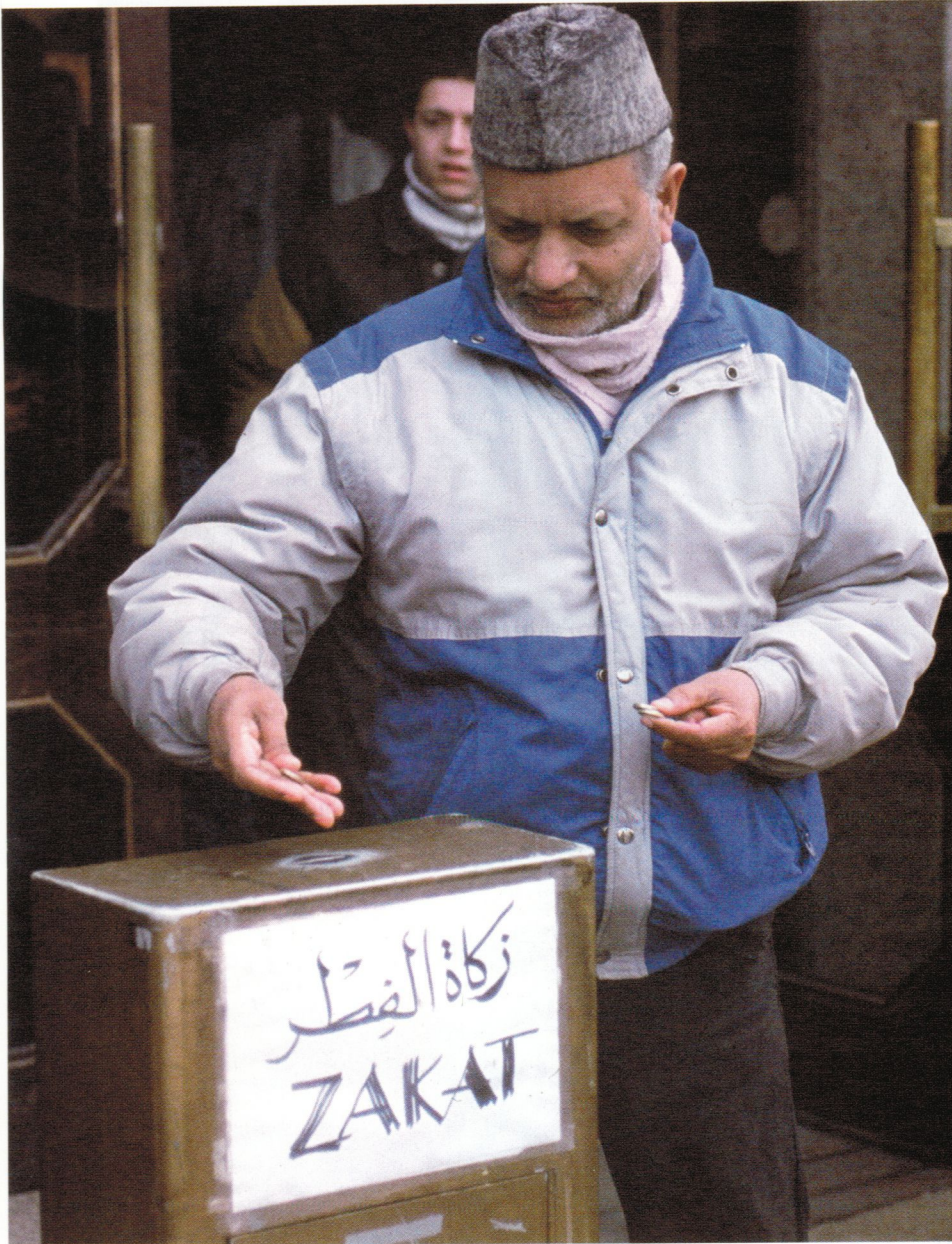
According to the teachings of Islam, Muslims must share about one fortieth (2.5 percent) of their income and possessions with their poorer neighbors. They are encouraged to give even more. Individuals decide the proper amount to pay. Then they either give this sum to a religious official or distribute it themselves.

Zakat helps provide for many needs. In medieval times, zakat often went to constructing public fountains so everyone had clean water to drink or to inns so pilgrims and travelers had a place to sleep. If you walk down a busy street in any Muslim town today, you will see the fruits of zakat spending everywhere. Zakat pays for soup kitchens, clothing, and shelter for the poor. Orphanages and hospitals are built and supported through zakat. Poorer Muslims may receive funds to pay off their debts. Zakat provides aid to stranded travelers.

Zakat also helps other good causes that serve the Muslim community. For instance, zakat can cover the school fees of children whose parents cannot

afford to send them to Muslim schools. It can be used to pay teachers.

Zakat is similar to charitable giving in other faiths. For instance, Jews and Christians also ask for donations to support their houses of worship and charitable activities.



Through zakat, Muslims give to the poor or needy.

9.7 The Fourth Pillar: Siyam

The fourth Pillar of Faith is *siyam*, or fasting (going without food). Muslims were not the first people to fast as a way of worshiping God. Both the Old and New Testaments praise the act. But the Qur'an instructs Muslims to fast for an entire month during **Ramadan**, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar.

According to Islamic teachings, Ramadan was the month that God first revealed His message to Muhammad. Muslims use a lunar calendar (one based on the phases of the moon). A year on this calendar is shorter than a 365-day year. Over time, as a result, Ramadan cycles through all the seasons of the year.

During Ramadan, Muslims fast from the break of dawn to the setting of the sun. Pregnant women, travelers, the sick, the elderly, and young children do not have to fast.

During the daylight hours on each day of Ramadan, Muslims do not eat any food or drink any liquid, including water. It is considered time to begin fasting when a person standing outside can tell a white thread from a black thread. Muslims then break their fast, often with dates and other food and beverages—as Muhammad did—and perform the sunset prayer. After a meal shared with family or friends, Muslims attend special prayer sessions. Each night a portion of the Qur'an is read aloud. By the end of Ramadan, Muslims have heard the entire holy book.

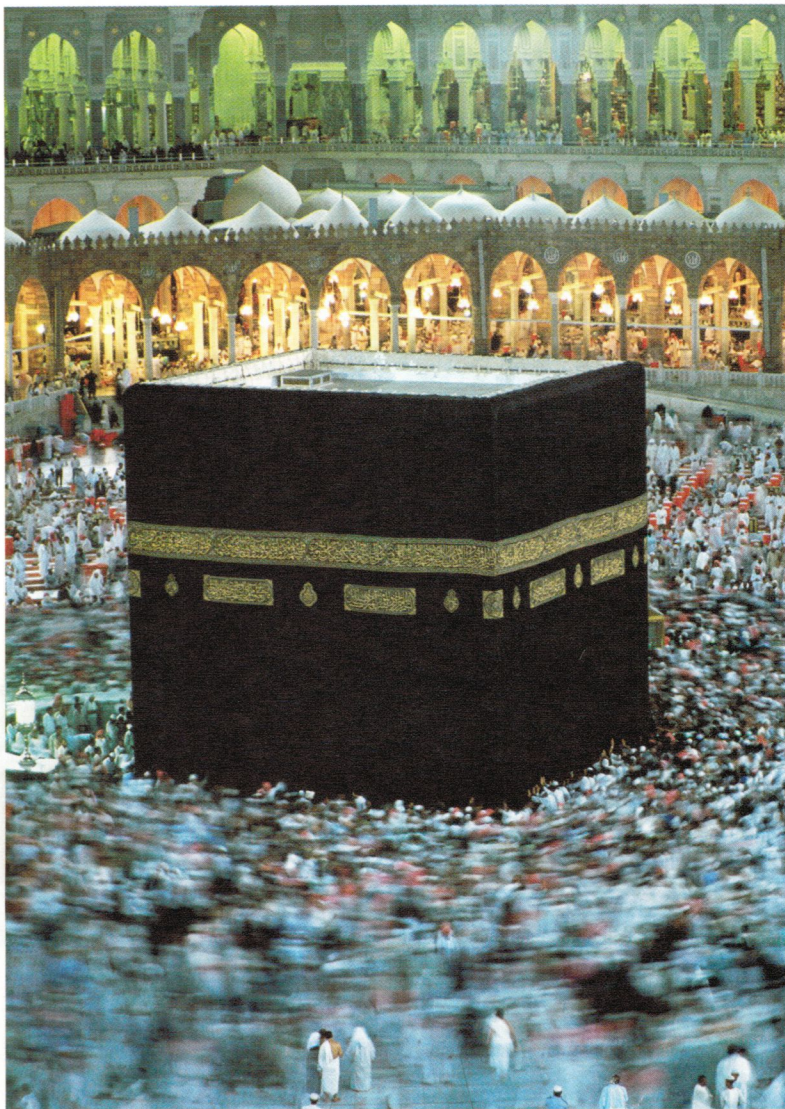
The holy month of Ramadan encourages generosity, equality, and charity within the Muslim community. Fasting teaches Muslims self-control and makes them realize what it would be like to be poor and hungry. Well-off Muslims and mosques often provide food for others. During Ramadan, Muslims also strive to forgive people, give thanks, and avoid arguments and bad deeds.

At the end of Ramadan, Muslims remember Gabriel's first visit to Muhammad. A celebration called Eid al-Fitr takes place when Ramadan ends. People attend prayers. They wear new clothes, decorate their homes, and prepare special foods. They exchange gifts and give to the poor.

Ramadan the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, during which Muslims are required to fast



The holy month of Ramadan ends with a celebration that includes a feast of special foods.



Pilgrims to the holy city of Makkah circle the Ka'ba seven times as directed in the Qur'an.

9.8 The Fifth Pillar: Hajj

The fifth Pillar of Faith is *hajj*, the pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah. In the Islamic year's 12th month, millions of believers from all over the world come together at Makkah. All adult Muslims who can do so are expected to make the hajj once during their lifetime. By bringing Muslims from many places and cultures together, the hajj promotes fellowship and equality.

In Makkah, pilgrims follow what Muslims believe are the footsteps of Abraham and Muhammad, and so draw closer to God. For five days, they dress in simple white clothing and perform a series of rituals, moving from one sacred site to another.

Upon arrival, Muslims announce their presence with these words: "Here I am, O God, at thy command!" They go straight to the Great Mosque, which houses the Ka'ba. As you learned in Chapter 8, Muslims believe that Abraham built the Ka'ba as a shrine to honor God. The pilgrims circle the Ka'ba seven times, which is a ritual mentioned in the Qur'an. Next, they run

along a passage between two small hills, as did Hagar, Abraham's wife, when she searched for water for her baby Ishmael. As you may remember, Muslims believe that a spring called Zamzam miraculously appeared at Hagar's feet. The pilgrims drink from the Zamzam well.

Later, pilgrims leave Makkah to sleep in tents at a place called Mina. In the morning they move to the Plain of Arafat to pray until sunset, asking God's forgiveness. Some climb Mount Arafat, where Muhammad preached his Last Sermon. After spending another night camped in the desert, they reject evil by casting stones at pillars representing Satan.

Afterward, pilgrims may celebrate with a four-day feast. In honor of Abraham's ancient sacrifice, as recounted in religious Scriptures, they sacrifice animals, usually sheep or goats, and share the meat with family, friends, and the poor. Then, having completed the hajj, they don their own clothes again. Before leaving Makkah, each pilgrim circles the Ka'ba seven more times. Muslims around the world celebrate this "farewell" day as Eid al-Adha.

9.9 Jihad

The word *jihad* means “to strive.” Originally in Islam, it meant physical struggle with spiritual significance. The Qur’an tells Muslims to fight to protect themselves from those who would do them harm or to right a terrible wrong. Early Muslims considered their efforts to protect their territory and extend their rule over other regions to be a form of jihad. However, the Qur’an forbade Muslims to force others to convert to Islam. So, non-Muslims who came under Muslim rule were usually allowed to continue practicing their faiths.

Although the Qur’an allows war, it sets specific terms for fighting. Muhammad told his followers to honor agreements made with foes. Muslim fighters must not mutilate (remove or destroy) the dead bodies of enemies or harm women, children, old people, and civilians. Nor should they destroy property, orchards, crops, sacred objects, or houses of worship.

Jihad represents the human struggle to overcome difficulties and do things that would be pleasing to God. Muslims strive to respond positively to personal difficulties as well as worldly challenges. For instance, they might work to become better people, reform society, or correct injustice.

Jihad has always been an important Islamic concept. One hadith, or account of Muhammad, tells about the prophet’s return from a battle. He declared that he and his men had carried out the “lesser jihad,” the external struggle against oppression. The “greater jihad,” he said, was the fight against evil within oneself. Examples of the greater jihad include working hard for a goal, giving up a bad habit, getting an education, or obeying your parents when you may not want to.

Another hadith says that Muslims should fulfill jihad with the heart, tongue, and hand. Muslims use the heart in their struggle to resist evil. The tongue may convince others to take up worthy causes, such as funding medical research. Hands may perform good works and correct wrongs.

Jihad originally meant a physical struggle against enemies while striving to please God. Sometimes it may be a struggle within an individual to overcome spiritually significant difficulties.



9.10 Shari'ah: Islamic Law

The body, or collection, of Islamic law is called *shari'ah*, the “path to be followed.” It is based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Shari'ah

covers Muslims' duties toward God. It guides them in their personal behavior and relationships with others. Shari'ah promotes obedience to the Qur'an and respect for others.

In Madinah's Muslim community, Muhammad explained the Qur'an and served as a judge. After his death, the caliphs used the Qur'an and the Sunnah to solve problems as they arose. As the Muslim empire expanded, leaders faced new situations. Gradually, scholars developed a body of Islamic law. By the 12th century, several schools of Islamic law had emerged.

Islamic law guides Muslim life by placing actions into one of five categories: forbidden, discouraged, allowed, recommended, and obligatory (required). Sometimes the

law is quite specific. Muslims, for instance, are forbidden to eat pork, drink alcohol, or gamble. But other matters are mentioned in general terms. For example, the Qur'an tells women to “not display their beauty.” For this reason, Muslim women usually wear different forms of modest dress. Most women cover their arms and legs. Many also wear scarves over the hair.

Shari'ah also covers Muslims' duties toward other people. These duties can be broadly grouped into criminal, commercial, family, and inheritance law.

In a shari'ah court, a *qadi* (judge) hears a case, including witnesses and evidence. Then the *qadi* makes a ruling. Sometimes the *qadi* consults a *mufti*, or scholar of law, for an opinion.

Islamic law helped Muslims live by the rules of the Qur'an. By the 19th century, however, many Muslim regions had come under European rule. Western codes of law soon replaced the shari'ah except in matters of family law. Today, most Muslim countries apply only some parts of Islamic law. But shari'ah continues to develop in response to modern ways of life and its challenges.



A shari'ah court is shown on this page from an illuminated manuscript dated 1334 C.E.

9.11 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you learned about the basic beliefs and practices of Islam. One of the world's major religions, Islam has more followers today than any faith except Christianity.

Islam, Judaism, and Christianity share many similarities. People of these faiths believe in one God and possess holy books. Muslims accept the Jewish and Christian scriptures as earlier revelations by God. For Muslims, however, the Qur'an contains God's final messages to humanity.

The Qur'an guides Muslims on how to live their lives. Additional guidance comes from the Sunnah, the example of Muhammad. The hadith (tradition) provides a written record of sayings and deeds of the prophet.

Islam is a way of life as well as a set of beliefs. Muslims follow the Five Pillars of Faith. The five pillars are shahadah (profession of faith), salat (daily worship), zakat (almsgiving), siyam (fasting), and hajj (the pilgrimage to Makkah).

Muslims also have the duty of jihad, or striving militarily or personally to please God. Shari'ah, or Islamic law, helps Muslims live by the teachings of the Qur'an. It includes practices of daily life as well as the duty to respect others.

Islam expanded rapidly in the century following the death of Muhammad. In the next chapter, you will learn about some of the great accomplishments of Islamic civilization.

Mosques are centers of worship for Muslims.

