

Origins of Islam: Abraham & the Ka'bah

Islam is the youngest of the Semitic religions. It was founded by the prophet Muhammad, who was born in 570 CE. By 630 CE, Islam was an established faith spreading throughout Arabia. Followers of Islam are called **Muslims**, which means "one who submits to Allah." Allah is the Arabic name for God. Islam means "submission to God."

The roots of Islam, however, go all the way back to Abraham around 2000 BCE. You may remember Abraham as the father of the Jewish religion. Interestingly, Muslims also regard Abraham as the forefather of their religion.

According to the **Koran**, the Islamic holy book (scripture,) Abraham had fathered a son before the birth of Isaac. The boy was **Ishmael**, whose mother was Abraham's servant, Hagar. Abraham's wife, Sarah, was childless & became jealous, so God told Abraham to bless the child & send him & his mother south into the desert.

They wandered the desert until they ran out of water. Hagar rested Ishmael on the sand & then searched desperately between 2 high rocks. She ran back & forth 7 times. Finally, resting on one of the rocks, she heard an angel's voice tell her not to be afraid. Miraculously, water sprouted from where Ishmael's heels touched the sand. This became the famous well, **Zamzam**, where the city of **Mecca** was born!

Toward the end of his life, Abraham traveled into Arabia to visit Ishmael. Muslims believe that God told Abraham to build a holy sanctuary at Zamzam. This site was called the **Ka'bah**, meaning "cube." It is also known as the House of God. The Ka'bah is about 40 ft. (12 m) in height, width & length. The door is 7 ft. (2.1 m) from the ground & must be entered by a moveable staircase. Curtains & carpets cover most of the outside of the Ka'bah.

"Age of" Semitic religions:

oldest: _____

middle: Christianity

youngest: _____

_____ are the **followers of Islam**, & _____ is the name Muslims give to **God**.



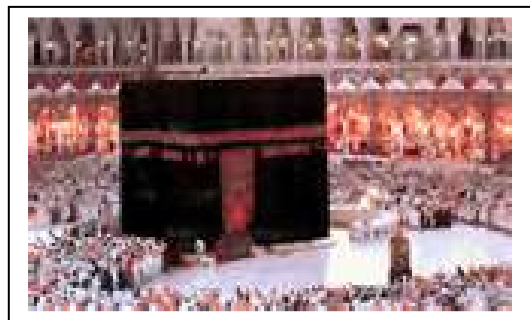
Islam & Judaism share _____ (who?) **as a forefather** to each of their religions.

Making analogies:

Judaism : Torah :: _____ : Koran



Zamzam ↑, the famous well, in the city of _____.



The _____ ↗ in Mecca.

Inside the sanctuary are some silver & gold lamps. But the most important object is an oval black stone about seven inches (18 cm) in size. Muslims believe that this stone was given to Abraham by an angel. They say the stone was white but turned black with the kisses of worshippers seeking forgiveness. According to the Koran, God instructed Abraham to tell all worshippers of Allah to make a pilgrimage to the Ka'bah. As you will see, the Ka'bah plays a central role in the history of Islam.

The Life of Muhammad & the Birth of Islam Early Years

Muhammad ibn Abd Allah, known to most as **Muhammad**, was born in the city of Mecca in 570 CE. At the time, Mecca was a busy marketplace crowded with residents & nomads buying & selling goods. Not a great deal is known of Muhammad's early life, but both of his parents were dead by the time he turned six. He was first cared for by his grandfather, but when he passed away, Muhammad's uncle, Abu Talib, adopted him. Abu Talib was the head of the Hashim clan, one of many clans making up separate Arabic tribes.

It is believed that as a young adult Muhammad worked as a camel driver →. He traveled the Arabian Peninsula with his uncle, making contact with various cultures & religions, including Judaism & Christianity. Because idol worship had come to dominate Mecca, this contact was important. The Ka'bah itself housed many idols, including those representing 3 main goddesses.

At the age of 24, Muhammad was working for a widow named Khadijah who was a wealthy merchant. Though he was much younger, she admired his intelligence & maturity so much that she proposed to him. They married, & in the 15 years which followed, Muhammad lived in affluence. He continued traveling, encountering different faiths & customs.

What is the **significance of the black stone in the Ka'bah?** _____

BONUS!!

Applying past knowledge in an analogy:

Mecca : **marketplace** :: Rome : _____



But riches did not satisfy Muhammad. In Mecca, powerful merchants controlled both the flow of goods & the religious life. As the gap between the rich & the poor widened, Muhammad began to question his life & the world around him.

Muhammad's Revelation

By the time he was 40, Muhammad had begun to spend time in solitude, preoccupied with the questions that troubled him...

He spent some nights alone in a small cave near Mecca. During one such night, Muslims believe that the **angel Gabriel** appeared before him. Gabriel grabbed hold of Muhammad & ordered him to recite some words. He did so, & as he fled the cave in fear, he heard the angel say, "Oh, Muhammad, you are the messenger of God, & I am Gabriel."

At first, Muhammad thought he was going insane. But Khadijah, his wife, believed the vision to be true. And as similar encounters continued, Muhammad slowly began to accept his role as a **prophet** of God. He started to preach in Mecca, though it took him some time to overcome doubts. But after a few years, he gained conviction that he was one of a lineage of prophets that included Abraham, Moses & Jesus. According to historians, Muhammad continued to receive revelations for the next 20 years.

Muhammad openly declared that there was only one God. He called on Meccans to reject their idols. Though **monotheism** was shared by Jews & Christians, its introduction into Mecca troubled the ruling class. As Muhammad's followers increased, so did the unease among his opposition.

Flight to Medina

Opposition to Muhammad increased. The ruling families insulted him & threatened violence. Soon Muhammad knew that he & his followers must leave Mecca.

Making connections: The **angel** _____ is credited with **making an appearance** before which important figure in Christianity?

Applying dictionary skills: Define **prophet**: _____

Prophets in Islam include:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Recalling past knowledge (over & over again...):

Monotheism is the **worship of** _____ while **polytheism** is the **worship of** _____.

(Don't remember?...look back at your Egypt readings! Go look! ☺)

In 619 CE, they moved for a short while to Ta'if, a nearby town. But they were not allowed to stay, & so they returned to Mecca.

Things got worse for Muhammad when death claimed both his wife, Khadijah, & his uncle, Abu Talib. They had represented support & protection for the young Muslim community. However, it was also during this period, in 619 CE, that Muhammad was believed to have experienced his famous journey to heaven.

With Gabriel guiding him, they journeyed first to a rock in Jerusalem, & from there Muhammad rode his faithful horse into heaven. It is claimed that he met other prophets, including Abraham, Moses, & Jesus. Finally, he stood in the presence of **Allah**.

The course of history changed in 620 CE when some pilgrims from the northern town of Medina came through Mecca. At the time, Medina was being torn apart by the violence of two rival tribes. The pilgrims were moved by Muhammad's teachings & hoped he might settle the raging dispute.

For the next two years, groups of people from Medina came to Mecca & converted to Islam. This inspired Muhammad, who instructed all Muslims to settle in Medina. In 622, Muhammad fled Mecca after hearing of a plot to assassinate him. Legend has it that he & a friend, Abu Bakr, hid in a cave. When his enemies rode by, a giant spider's web covered the mouth of the cave, & seeing the web, they assumed no one could have entered.

From there Muhammad & Abu Bakr traveled safely to Medina. This journey is known as the **Hijrah**, & it holds special significance to Muslims. Muhammad's arrival into Medina marked the birth of a united Islamic community. The Hijrah signifies the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

Recalling important terminology: **Allah** is the Islamic term for (God / Jesus / Moses ← circle 1).

What *clever* way did **Muhammad** hide himself from those who were determined to assassinate him?

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| a. fled Mecca | d. all the above |
| b. hid in cave | e. only b & c |
| c. giant spider wove web covering entrance to the cave | f. only a & b |

Why does the **Hijrah** hold *special* importance for Muslims? _____

Life in Medina & the Growth of Islam

Muhammad arrived in Medina as the new leader, bearing tremendous responsibilities. While receiving communication from God & teaching his devotees, he had to protect Islam from opposition & find a peaceful solution to the local feuds. Though he was able to unite the feuding clans through his teachings (Jews & Muslims prayed together, for example,) when Muhammad instructed his followers to pray towards Mecca instead of Jerusalem, tensions grew, & the groups separated completely. Violence erupted, ending in the expulsion of some Jewish tribes from Medina.

With his community established, Muhammad began raiding caravans bound for Mecca. These kinds of raids were not uncommon at the time, & they provided provisions for the Muslims. This angered the Meccans, & a series of battles followed. Despite a few setbacks, the Muslims gained power & recognition. After destroying or converting his trial enemies, Muhammad all but controlled the **Arabian Peninsula**.

Finally, in 629 CE, Mecca submitted to the Muslims. Muhammad entered the city & headed directly to the **Ka'bah** →.

After circling it 7 times, he smashed the stone idols. He spoke of the oneness of God, or **Allah**, & proclaimed himself a prophet. From that moment until the present, the Ka'bah became *the* principal holy place for Muslims.

Muhammad's Last Years

By 630 CE, Islam was the dominant religion in Mecca. Muhammad then set out to conquer the Arabian Peninsula. Some tribes were easily converted while others were met by force. The crusade was successful, & Islam spread to the Arabian Sea to as far north as Syria.

In 632 CE, Muhammad made his last pilgrimage to Mecca. First, he ordered that only Muslims could worship at the Ka'bah. Then, he delivered his last sermon, asking for Islamic unity.

List Muhammad's "duties" while living *in Medina*:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

(There are more than 3; you pick any 3.)



The primary holy place for Muslims is now the (Arabian Peninsula /Ka'bah / stone idol ← circle 1).



He ended with his final revelation from God:

"The unbelievers have this day abandoned all hope of vanquishing your religion. Have no fear of them: fear Me. This day I have perfected your religion for you & completed My favor to you. I have chosen Islam to be our faith."

(Koran 5.3)

On his way back from this pilgrimage, Muhammad fell ill. He died in Medina on June 8th, 632 CE, at the age of 61 (the 12th day of Rabi I in the Islamic calendar). Although he had married 2 wives since the death of Khadijah, he had yet to father a son, leaving the question of successor in the hands of his followers.

The Five Pillars of Islam

The Five Pillars of Islam represent the duties of a Muslim. Like the Ten Commandments, they provide a spiritual foundation & function.

The First Pillar: Shahada

The first Pillar of Islam is called **shahada**. It is a brief prayer proclaiming the oneness of God & faith in Islam. Children memorize the shahada, an action which introduces them into the Islamic community. The shahada simply states: "There is no God but Allah, & Muhammad is the messenger of Allah."

To the right is the shahada written in Arabic. (Like Hebrew, Arabic is written from right to left. →).

Arabic was Muhammad's native tongue, the language in which he claimed to have received the **Koran**. Many devout Muslims from outside Arabic-speaking countries will learn the language in order to read the **Koran** in its original form. In fact, some Muslims consider any other translation of the scripture totally unacceptable.

The Second Pillar: Salat

The second pillar is called **salat**. It requires Muslims to pray 5 times a day, facing Mecca. They must pray at sunset, in the evening, at dawn, at noon & in the afternoon. In Muslim countries, the call to prayer is announced from a minaret atop a **mosque**. A mosque is where Muslims gather to pray, although it is acceptable to pray alone.



Making religious analogies:

Laws of Torah: Judaism :: _____ : Islam

Shahada means _____



Sacred text analogies:

_____ : Christians :: **Koran** : Muslims

More religious analogies:

_____ : synagogue :: **Islam** : mosque

In many Islamic countries, women pray at home. If they pray with the men, they do so from behind them or in a separate group. The leader of a mosque is called an **imam**, which means "one who walks before." The imam leads the prayer & give sermons. However, unlike a priest or rabbi, the imam does not hold special authority. Instead he is chosen by virtue of his dedication & sincerity.

Each prayer involves different bowing positions, or **rakahs**. In the morning prayer, for example, after laying out his prayer mat, the devotee raises his hands, touches his earlobes, & proclaims, "Allahu akbar!" meaning "God is great!" Next, he rests his hands at his waist & recites the first verse of the Koran. The prayer continues when the worshipper bows, prostrates (level to the ground) himself, & sits back ~ each time declaring faith in Muhammad & Allah. If the person is in a mosque, he will turn to either side & wish another person peace & blessings.

The Third Pillar: Zakat

Almsgiving, or **zakat**, is the 3rd pillar & requirement of Islam. Muslims are expected to give to the poor & infirm (sick.) Although the zakat is not regulated by the government, sincere Muslims regard it as an important religious duty. In fact, the **Koran** addresses almsgiving as an essential quality of an honest Muslim ~ a gateway into heaven.

The Fourth Pillar: Sawm

Sawm is perhaps the *most demanding* of the 5 Pillars. It requires that Muslims **fast** (not eat) during the month of **Ramadan**. Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic calendar. During this period, food & drink are not allowed between dawn & sunset. After sunset, only light snacks are allowed.

The fast represents a special time of religious devotion & purification. Stronger ties are made with family & community. Alcohol & tobacco are *prohibited* the entire month. Both the elderly & children are *exempt from* fasting.

...and *still more analogies*:

minister : Christianity :: _____ : Islam



Zakat is another word for ____.

- tax
- charity
- impede
- infirm

Of all Islamic celebrations, or holidays, you would probably conclude that _____ is one of the most important.

Drawing conclusions: Why would the elderly as well as children (& pregnant women) be exempt from fasting? _____

When the month of Ramadan ends, the **Festival of Eid-Al-Fitr** is celebrated. Rejoicing begins on the 1st day of the 10th month of the Islamic calendar. Although the month of Ramadan is spent fasting, families begin preparing for the celebration far in advance, sending cards to relatives & preparing gifts.

When the day finally arrives, Muslims attend special morning prayers in the local courtyard or park. In western countries, the faithful usually take the day off from work or school. In Muslim countries, Eid-al-fitr is considered a 3-day national holiday! Throughout the celebration, presents are shared & families gather to rejoice. It is also a time to share food & money with those less fortunate.

The Fifth Pillar: Hajj

Exhort all men to make the pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot & on the backs of swift camels from every distant quarter...

Then let the pilgrims spruce themselves, make their vows, & circle the Ancient House. Such is Allah's commandment. (~ Koran, Surah 22, The Pilgrimage)

Hajj is the pilgrimage to Mecca which every Muslim is expected to make at least once in their lifetime. A pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place or shrine. *Unlike the other pillars*, the Hajj *can be skipped* if it involves great hardship for the individual.

However, over 2 million Muslims journey to Mecca each year, & each worshipper must follow certain guidelines. First, the men are expected to shave their heads & wear a piece of white garment around the waist & over the shoulder. Women wear the clothing of their native countries, though they must keep their heads covered at all times.

First, the pilgrims walk counter-clockwise 7 times around the Ka'bah, either kissing or touching the stone. Next, they run 7 times between the hills of As-Safa & AlMarwah. This action is symbolic of Hagar's search for water & the miracle of the well, Zamzam.



In summary, **Hajj** is a _____ to _____ that **Muslims** are **expected to make** ____ (#) time(s) in their life.



After spending the night at the village of Mina, pilgrims take the next step, the wukuf, together. They meet at the plain of **Arafat**, about 6 miles from Mecca. From noon to sunset, they pray quietly. Next, they climb a small mountain called the Mount of Mercy, & they ask God's forgiveness for their sins. Then they spend the night at Muzdalifah.

Afterwards, they return to the village of Mina where the ritual of "stoning the devil" takes place. Followers gather pebbles which they throw at 3 pillars. This is symbolic of Abraham throwing stones at the Devil who had disturbed his prayers. On the 10th day, animals sacrifices (sheep or goat) are carried out. Finally, the pilgrimage again goes 7 times around the Ka'bah.

Muslims conduct a 4-day celebration upon returning home from Mecca. The Eid al-Adha, or Festival of Sacrifice, marks the end of the pilgrimage & acknowledges the great accomplishment. Now, the male pilgrim has the right to call himself a **hajji**, while the woman is called a **hajjiah**.

The Shi'ah & Sunni Sects of Islam

Like most religions, there are different sects within Islam. The 2 biggest are called Sunni and Shi'ah. During the life of Muhammad, Islam existed as one unified religion. After his death, his followers split into 2 groups based upon who they believed should follow as leader. Sunni Muslims began as followers of Abu Bakr. He was a close friend of Muhammad and Sunni Muslims believe he was the right man to lead Islam after his death. Today, Sunni Muslims do not recognize any one person as the leader of their faith.

On the other hand, Shi'ah Muslims believe leadership of Islam should belong to descendents of Muhammad. When Muhammad died, they believe that he passed his authority to his son-in-law, Ali. Most Shi'ah Muslims recognize 12 Imams (or leaders) that followed in the footsteps of Muhammad.

Summarizing & Following the Route of Hajj:

After reading this entire section on the 5th Pillar, complete the 7 stages of the Hajj ~

- 1) walk _____ - _____ (how?)
around the _____
- 2) run 7 times *between* _____ of
As-Safa & Al-Marwah
- 3) stay overnight in the village of _____
- 4) hold all day prayer at the Plain of _____
- 5) spend the night at _____
- 6) return to Mina for the ritual of
" _____ the _____ "
- 7) complete 7 more circuits around the _____

Recalling past history: Think back to the great dynasties of Ancient Egypt...**Ramses, Tutmose, Ptolemy...what determines a dynasty?**

- a. Individuals must all be male.
- b. Individuals must be blood-related.
- c. Individuals must have all the same father.
- d. all the above
- e. only a & c
- f. only b & c

To the Shi'ah, what is an Imam? What is special about him? _____

Throughout history, there has been both cooperation and conflict in relations between Shi'ah and Sunni Muslims. While many Shi'ahs and Sunnis get along well, others remain convinced that only their group provides the "true" version of Islam.

In many cases conflicts between Shi'ahs and Sunnis have little to do with their religious beliefs. For example, since the beginning of the war in Iraq, there has been growing conflict between the 2 groups there. Their conflict is more related to political and regional differences than to religious ones.

T or F: Religious differences are the *main* reason for the violence between Shi'ahs and Sunnis in Iraq.

Describe what **religious issue** the **Sunni & Shi'ah** are **disagreement about:**

Islam & Stereotypes

Of the major Semitic religions, Westerners know about Islam. Very few people, for example, understand the connections between Judaism, Christianity, & Islam. Why is this? First of all, many Westerners have never personally known a Muslim. Though there are millions of Muslims living in the West today, the majority live in the Middle East, Africa, & Indonesia.

The gulf of ignorance surrounding Islam, unfortunately, has led to a great deal of prejudice & stereotypes. The dictionary defines a **stereotype** as "a conventional & usually oversimplified conception or belief."

Here are **2 of the most widespread misconceptions:**

- 1) **All Muslims are Arabs**
This is **NOT** true. The Arab-speaking population is made of the countries in the Arabian Peninsula ~ including Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Egypt, & most of North Africa.

Their populations are at least 90% Muslim!

But, there are many other countries that are homes to major Muslim populations. These countries include several of the former Soviet Republic (USSR) as well as India, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, & especially Indonesia.

With the increasing Muslim population in the United States & throughout the world, you can see that the international Muslim community is rich in cultures & nationalities.



2) **Muslims are violent & promote terrorism**

Although there are certain fundamentalist sects which promote terrorism, & even though some countries of the West have had several military conflicts with Muslim groups, the vast majority of Muslims are peaceful & consider Islam a religion of peace.

One of the factors contributing to this stereotype is the media. Violence receives extensive media coverage, causing people to identify Islam solely with terrorism.

Sidebar: Can you think of any **other group** of individuals who are also "**stereotyped**"?

Please list them below:
