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UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL CALVIN H. SYDNOR III, CH

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UNDERSTANDING ISLAM
AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Lieutenant Colonel Calvin H. Sydnor III, CH

Dr. William Stockton
Project Advisor

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Islam is the predominant religious faith in the Middle East and North Africa and one of the major religions in the world, comprising approximately one-fifth of the world's population with about 800 million adherents. The word, Islam means "surrender" or "reconciliation." Islam had its beginning with the visions revealed to the Prophet Muhammed between 610 and 632 A.D. Muslims believe that he was the last Messenger of God. It is one of the fastest growing religions in the world, whose adherents are made up of many races and cultures.

There is great misunderstanding of the followers of the Islamic faith because most non-Muslims know little about their religious beliefs. Members of the United States Armed Forces are in contact with followers of Islam throughout the Middle East and in other parts of the world. They need to know about Islam because they will be interacting more frequently with persons of that religion. They include the Navy in the Persian Gulf; the Army on peacekeeping duties in the Sinai; the Air Force on training missions in the Middle East; and commanders of all branches who command American soldiers who are adherents of the Islamic faith.

The purpose of this paper is to present the religion of Islam in a clear, concise way in readable English to assist those who would like to have a better understanding of Islam. It is hoped that uninformed attitudes will disappear and that the

reader will develop a deeper appreciation for Islam, its rich history, and its traditions. Muslims are as diverse as Christians and Jews in respect to where they live, how intensely they practice their faith and their ethnic and cultural background. In their diversity, they are unified by a common faith, Islam, often referred to as Dar al-Islam, the House of Islam.

Historical Overview

The history of Islam begins with the life of the Prophet Muhammed in the Seventh Century. He was born according to tradition in 570 A.D. in the "Year of the Elephant," in Mecca. He traced his lineage to Ishamel and Abraham.

He was born in Mecca in the Hashemite clan of the Quraysh tribe. Though the Hashemite clan was one of the ruling clans, Muhammed's immediate family was poor. He was born and grew up in the midst of a nomadic society. (A more detailed account of Muhammed's life is given in Chapter III).

Arabia was significant at the time because of the caravan trade routes which passed through the area and the diversity of its religious traditions. Although a commercial trade center for caravan trade which transported goods overland from India and further east to the Mediterranean, Mecca had been a religious center for centuries before the advent of Islam. The people there followed indigenous tribal religions, Judaism, and Christianity. Mecca was an established religious pilgrimage site before Islam. Merchants controlled access to its shrines and gained profits from the pilgrimage trade.

As in most trading centers of the world, Mecca was rich with a variety of religious, ethnic and cultural traditions. The religious pilgrimage shrine in Mecca, the Kaaba, had 360 dieties. The Meccans worshiped a variety of gods and goddesses and presented them with sacrifices. Christians and Jews also lived in the area along with those people who followed traditional religious practices.

Violence was frequent and life was uncertain in the desert. The violence and uncertainty of life may have contributed to an Arab tendency toward excess in almost every activity. There were excesses in drinking, gambling and attitudes toward women. They valued having large numerous flocks and many sons.

It was into this highly volatile world that Muhammed received his prophetic call. His message to the Meccans, which was revealed to him in visions, centered on the idea of one God, who created the world. Muhammed taught that he, Muhammed, was the Messenger of God.

The Meccans at first rejected Muhammed's message. He, and his small band of followers fled Mecca after they were invited to Medina, an agricultural community, to mediate a long standing conflict between two tribes in the area. The people of Medina accepted him as their leader and he continued to proclaim his message. He consolidated his position in Medina and the neighboring areas, and attacked the caravans that were the source of the wealth to the Meccans. Muhammed and his followers attacked Mecca and finally defeated that city in about 630 A.D.

With the defeat of Mecca, Muhammed became the most powerful

man in Arabia. He succeeded in doing what no one before him had done. He united the tribes under a single authority. Along with this, he was accepted by the Arabs as the "Messenger of God."

Islam became a way of life based on a faith in one God and obedience to His Prophet. Islam spread by persuasion and "by the sword." Within a century Islam was the predominate religion in all of the Middle East.

Islam in the World Today

The religion of Islam originated in Arabia in the Seventh Century and spread rapidly across the world from Africa to the Pacific rim and to central Asia. In modern times it can be found on every continent on the globe. In the course of this expansion, it assimilated many different peoples, as diverse as the Persians, the Berbers of North Africa, the Turks and Mongols of western Asia, and a large proportion of the peoples of India, Africa and southeastern Europe.¹

Islam embraces about 800 million people of every race, from Senegal to China, from Nigeria to the Soviet Union, and some two million Americans.² Muslims throughout the world may behave differently but they share a common religious belief, who say as the foundation of their faith, "There is no god but God; Muhammed is the Messenger of God."

The three biggest Muslim nations are Indonesia, with about 135 million Muslims; Pakistan with 80 million; and Bangladesh, with 75 million.³ All countries in the Arabian Peninsula have a Muslim majority. Muslims form nearly the total population (90 percent or more) in approximately twenty-five countries and a

majority (50 percent or more) in another ten.⁴ Mali, Afghanistan, Malaysia, Albania and Iran are non-Arab countries with a Muslim majority. There are large Muslim minorities in other countries including 75 million in India, 42 million in the U.S.S.R, 35 million in Nigeria, 16 million in China, 5.6 million in South Africa, 2.6 million in Yugoslavia as well as 2 million in Britain and 2 million in the United States.⁵ The religion of Islam is the second largest religion in the world. Only Christianity with almost two billion adherents is larger.

Islam is spreading quickly because it has a strong appeal to the "grass roots" level because of its monotheistic simplicity, emphasis on brotherhood, and its strong missionary effort. It has its fastest growth and highest concentration in the Third World.

Islam Permeates all Aspects of Life

The religion of Islam is more than a belief system and an ideology. Islam is legalistic and permeates all of life. When one reads of political, economic or legal issues in Islamic countries the issues are almost always tied to the religion of Islam, and to Islamic Law. When Middle East terrorist activities are reported some aspect of Islamic religion is almost always an integral part of the story. The religion of Islam permeates the lives of the followers because the faithful, in keeping with the definition of the term Islam, are in submission to it. It controls all aspects of their daily life. To submit, and to follow its prescribed practices, is to be in complete obedience to the tenets of the faith.

The sociopolitical manifestation of Islamic fundamentalism cannot be separated from the religion itself, since Islam in practice penetrates, influences and dictates all aspects of a Muslim's life.⁶ Islam, like orthodox Judaism, affects its followers in all that they do. The religion is present in what they eat, and what is considered unclean or clean, such as pork and alcoholic beverages which are forbidden for Muslims. It affects their periods of prayer and their relations with others. Islam is legalistic and that in itself causes the religion to be all encompassing. Except for its more highly fundamentalist groups, Christianity is not as legalistic.

When capital punishment, conduct of behavior or the dress of women is commented upon by writers in Muslim countries, it is almost always done with a strong emphasis upon religious customs. Because of its legalistic nature, Islam is a total way of life, a complete system governing all aspects of man's existence both individual and collective.⁷ It permeates worship, government, education, dress, work, money and possessions, food and eating, family life, relations between sexes, and all of human relationships. The religion of Islam is present with its followers every waking moment.

There is technically no distinction between religion and the state in Islam. Islam holds itself out not just as a religion but as a source of law, guide to statecraft, and arbiter of social behavior for its adherents.⁸

Islam has been an enigma to some in the West because since its beginning it has been a source of conflict, violence, and

fanaticism. On the other hand it has been a source of beauty, generosity and inspiration to those who have studied it. The Quran 4:8 states, "And when kinsfolk and orphans and the needy are present...bestow on them therefrom and speak kindly unto them." It teaches its adherents to love and care for weary travelers and to avoid violence, but on the other hand it unequivocally encourages violence in defense of the faith. In the Quran 4:65 it states that those who fight unbelievers are assured that God is with them: "If there be of you twenty steadfast they shall overcome two hundred, and if there be of you a hundred steadfast they shall overcome a thousand of those who disbelieve, because they (the disbelievers) are a folk without intelligence." Many Muslims consider it their duty to subdue the enemies of Islam by means of jihad (holy war).

What Muslims Believe

Islam is a monotheistic belief system. The word, Islam means "submission" or "surrender" to God (Allah) and he who submits is a Muslim. The true name of the religion is Islam and those who follow it are called Muslims. A believing Muslim says as an article of faith, "There is no god, but God, and Mohammed is the Messenger of God." As a religion it places less emphasis on elaborating a systematic theology than on understanding divine law; the concern is with ethics and doctrine.⁹ Devout Muslims believe that faith include good deeds.

The followers of Islam recognize other prophets, including Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Moses and Jesus. Muslims, however, believe Mohammed to be the last Prophet. He was not only a

prophet but also a political and military leader. He carried his message to Medina, Mecca, and throughout Arabia where Islam rapidly grew. By the time he died in 632 A.D., Islam dominated all of the Arabian peninsula.¹⁰

The Quran

The Quran is the holy book of Muslims. The Quran is the primary source of doctrine in Islam. It is followed by the Hadith, or traditions of the Prophet, and the Sunnah, or the Prophet's example. (The Hadith and the Sunnah are explained on pages 10-11)

The word, al-qur'an, from which we get the word Quran, in Arabic means "the reading" or the "recitation." Muslims believe that it is the last and final word of God. They believe that the physical Quran is a part of a celestial Quran that is preserved in Heaven. Muslims believe that the Quran reveals His will and that His will is preserved in Arabic. They believe that the only correct reading of the Quran is done in Arabic. In worship, the Quran is always recited in Arabic, the language in which it was revealed to the Prophet -- never in translation. Whenever it is read or interpreted in another language, Muslims believe that the words are no longer those spoken by God. Educated Muslims will normally have a working knowledge of Arabic and the less educated will normally memorize parts of the Quran.

The Quran was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed over a period of twenty-three years and is about the size of the Christian New Testament. He received his first revelation in 610 A.D. when he was meditating in a cave near Mecca during the month

of Ramadan. He continued to receive revelations until shortly before his death in 632 A.D.

Muslims believe that the Quran lays down the moral and ethical principles that govern all aspects of human life. They believe that the Quran is the perfection of all human knowledge of the past, the present and the future. A devout Muslim attempts to address present day problems by using the Quran as a guide to contemporary living because it is the foremost authority in all matters of faith and practice.

The Quran states what is permitted and what is forbidden. The Bible often leaves room for interpretation. For example, in the Bible one could justify abstinence from alcohol or one could justify that the use of alcohol is permitted. The issue of unclean foods is another example. If one reads the Old Testament, one would conclude that pork is unclean, but if one reads the Pauline Epistles in the New Testament one could conclude that all foods are clean. In the Gospels it is recorded that Jesus said, "It is not what goes into a man that makes him unclean, but what comes out of a man that makes him unclean." In the Quran there appears to be no such latitude. It is specific about matters which are prohibited as well as about those which are obligatory.

The Quran is not written in a sequential or chronological order. It is arranged roughly in order of length with the longer chapters listed first. The exception is the first chapter which constitutes a short prayer. The Quran can be opened and approached from any portion or page. For Christian and Jews it

would be like reading Proverbs or the Psalms.

Muslims believe that the Quran was not written by Muhammed, but was transmitted through him. They believe that Muhammed orally passed on the messages he received from the Archangel Gabriel to his followers who then memorized them.

The Quran is divided into verses called aya and chapters called surahs. The Quran has 114 surahs. The verses of the Quran are identified as to whether they were given in Medina or Mecca. The ones from Medina are more poetic and have an apocalyptic theme, and the ones from Mecca, being later, deal more with laws.

The Quran deals with legislation, the early Muslim community, relations with those who are not followers of the faith, the history of earlier Biblical prophets and various other subjects such as social or political situations. It also contains descriptions about Paradise and Hell.

Upon the Prophet's instructions some of the messages were recorded during his lifetime. They were often recorded in a haphazard manner, on palm leaves, flat stones, the shoulder blades of camels and on scraps of parchment.¹¹ The Quran was finally compiled in its present form in 651 A.D., nineteen years after the Prophet's death.¹² It was compiled and edited under the leadership of ibn 'Affan 'Uthman, the third caliph.

Hadith

The Hadith are the traditions relating to the deeds and utterances of the Prophet as recounted by his companions. Each Hadith had to originate with Muhammed. Another type of Hadith is

that which God Himself is speaking.

The Hadith deals with the Law, religious dogma and the smallest points of religious practice. The Hadith covers numerous subjects, large and small. The narrations preserved in the books of Hadith deal with all facets of his life, from the most personal, for example how to tie sandals, to the affairs of state.

After the death of Muhammed, the traditions were collected and preserved for the use of judges and others in authority.

Sunnah

Sunnah, the Prophet's "example," refers to the collected words and practices of the Prophet not the revelations given to him. The Sunnah is used as a basis for law in Islam. It means "custom" or "usage." It includes what the Prophet approved, allowed or condoned, and what he refrained from and disapproved.

Islamic Sects

From the beginning Islam split up into a large number of sects. Various factions divided the Islamic community beginning the day Muhammed died in 632 A.D. The division of Islam occurred because there was no central doctrinal authority and because Islam spread to regions where there were different social, cultural, philosophical and ethnic traditions. The two major divisions of Islam are Sunnites and Shiites. Most Muslims are Sunnites. Shiites form the predominant religion in Iran, and are also found in other places including Iraq, Lebanon and along the Persian Gulf coast of Arabia.

Sunnites

Most of the world's Muslims are Sunnites or members of the Sunni branch of Islam. They have approximately 360,000,000 adherents. Sunnites are followers of one of the four Sunni Schools of Law. They are those who historically accepted the authority of the four successors after Muhammed, known as the caliphate, or whoever held it and however he attained it, as opposed to Shiites who believed that the office should be hereditary.¹⁴ The Sunnites comprise eighty to ninety percent of all Muslims and adhere to the basic beliefs and practices of Islam. They are referred to as orthodox Muslims. They follow the traditions and recognize the first four caliphs and attribute no special religious or political function to the Prophet's descendants or present religious leaders.

The Schools of Law

Within the Sunnite branch of Islam there are four Schools of Law: the Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, and Shafi'i. The Schools of Law arose because there was a need to interpret the provisions of the Quran and traditions of the Prophet. When Muhammed was alive he was the chief judge of the community and resolved legal problems by interpreting the Quran. His interpretations became the Hadith. After his death, an organized judiciary evolved with the appointment of judges to the widespread provinces and districts. The judges were called qadis. The early qadis interpreted the law using their best knowledge of the Quran. Pious scholars began to debate whether the law was being equally interpreted in accordance with the proper Quranic intent. They

established an Islamic code as a result of their studies.

The Sunnites recognize the four Schools of Law and on all matters of vital importance they are in agreement, and all recognize the other systems as orthodox.¹⁵ A Sunni Muslim is expected to adhere to one of the four Schools of Law.

The Hanafi school or rite is named after Abu Hanifah who died in 767 A.D. It is dominant in most countries that were formally part of the Turkish Empire (Western Asia, excluding Arabia and lower Egypt) and India.¹⁶

The Malikite, named after Malik ibn Anas who died in 795 A.D., is dominant in Southern Egypt and North and West Africa.¹⁷

The Shafi'ite school is named for Muhammed ibn Idris ash-Shafi'i who died in 820 A.D. He was an outstanding figure and forceful thinker in Islamic jurisprudence. The Shafi'i school is dominant in Indonesia, Malaya, the Philippines, Egypt, Central Asia and the Caucasus.¹⁸

The fourth school called Hanbalites is named for Ahmad ibn Hanbal who died in 855 A.D. He was intensely conservative in the matter of the Hadith, and in general it may be said that he was responsible for the most intolerant and fanatical view of the Muslims' duties and responsibilities.¹⁸ The Hanbalite school is only observed in Saudi Arabia and Qatar.¹⁹

The Shiites

The Shiites comprise 10-15 percent, or approximately 60,000,000 to 80,000,000 followers, of the Islamic faith, with doctrines significantly different from those of the orthodox

Sunni majority. Shiites are made up of a number of different sects who differ from one another as well as from the Sunnites. The name Shia means a "partisan" and comes from Shi'at 'Ali (the party of Ali). 21

The origin of the split between the Sunnites and the Shiites was political more than religious. The Sunnis hold that Muhammed did not designate anyone to succeed him and they believe that the first four Caliphs (successors) were rightfully chosen from among the people. The Shiites believe that the Prophet designated Ali, who was his cousin and son-in-law, as the successor and that the leader should be among the Prophet's descendants through him.

When Muhammed died without a designating a successor, Muslims gathered to elect a caliph (successor). All of the prospective successors were related to Muhammed by marriage and one, Ali ibn Abu Talib, his cousin was related by blood. Many of those gathered supported Ali because he was married to the Prophet's favorite daughter, Fatima. One of those who opposed Ali was the Prophet's young widow, Aisha, who persuaded the Muslims to elect her father, Abu Bakr as the first caliph.

Abu Bakr, a good friend of Muhammed, succeeded in holding the young community together and saw Islam expand throughout Arabia. When Abu Bakr died, he was succeeded by another of Muhammed's fathers-in-law, Omar ibn al-Khattab. Omar was a strong leader, who directed the Muslim invasion of Syria and Egypt, established the judiciary system and changed the simple

patriarchy of Islam into something resembling an imperial government.²²

The third caliph was 'Uthman ibn Affan who at different times married two daughters of the Prophet. During his caliphate revolts began in Iraq and Egypt. It was 'Uthman who ordered the compilation of the Quran from the memories of the companions and such written records as existed, after which it was then edited and a definitive recension which bears his name, was copied and sent to the four corners of the Islamic empire.²³

Ali ibn Abi Talib was elected the fourth caliph in 656 A.D., but Aisha did not accept his election and joined forces of Meccans to oppose him. There was an armed conflict and Ali defeated his opponents at the Battle of the Camel. Ali had to endure other conflicts and was eventually assassinated. Ali's elder son, Hasan was elected caliph, but he was threatened by Mu'awiya and ceded the caliphate to him. Mu'awiya was proclaimed caliph in Jerusalem.

The question of succession of the caliphate was the source of deep philosophical differences within Islam. The Sunnites believe leaders can be selected by consensus in the Islamic community. They believe such selection reveals the will of God. The Shiites on the other hand restricted eligibility for the caliphate to the descendants of the Prophet through Ali and Fatima.²⁴ They believed that their religious leaders, called imams, only came through the divine lineage of Ali and Fatima. In the more extreme Shiite sects this stance became elaborated in to a theory that the imam inherits a divine light by virtue of

his descent, not only from Muhammed and Ali, but from all the prophets beginning with Adam.²⁵ The Shiites intensely believe that Muhammed designated Ali as his successor.

The formal acts of the religion such as prayer and observances practiced by the Shiites differ little from the Sunnites. One major distinction is the Shiites' admiration and desire for martyrdom. The violent deaths of Ali and his sons, Hasan and Husain created the adoration of martyrdom. Hasan died in Medina, allegedly poisoned by his wife. Husain was martyred during a battle at Kerbala in Iraq. His death is enacted in a martyrdom play which is performed in the days preceding the anniversary of Kerbala according to the lunar calendar.

The dramatic martyrdom of the kin of the Prophet, and the wave of anguish and penitence of the faithful that followed it, infused a new religious fervor in the Shia, now inspired by the potent themes of suffering, passion and expiation.²⁶

Shia Islam has had so many followers who died martyrs' death that the faithful commemorate martyrdom with passion plays and self-laceration, i.e. self-flagellation with chains with hooks on them and cutting the forehead with swords. In addition to their devotion to martyrdom, Shiite Islam is characterized by its belief in saints, pilgrimages to worship at the tombs of Shiite holy men, and a belief in the eventual reappearance of the Twelfth Imam, "the hidden imam" designated by God who will establish justice and peace on earth. "The hidden imam" will reappear on earth as the Mahdi or "the guided one."

Another distinction between the Shiites and the Sunnites is

the view held of religious leaders. The Sunnites select their leaders and important decisions are reached by the consensus of the community. The Shiites reject the principle of the community. They believe the imam is an infallible spiritual leader whose decisions are divinely inspired. His duty is to guide the believers in all matters of faith and tell them what to do.

Other Shiite Sects

The Twelvers

The largest Shiite sect is the Ithna Ashariya or "Twelvers." They are called "Twelvers" because they recognize a line of successors down to the Twelfth Imam, who were all descendants of Ali and Fatima and ends with Muhammed al-Mahdi. He disappeared around 873 A.D., and is still the "awaited imam" or Mahdi for the great majority of the Shia today.²⁷ The "Twelvers" believe that he still lives and will return to rule the world as the Mahdi, "the guided one." The "Twelvers" are the dominant branch of Islam in present day Iran. This Shia group makes up 60 percent of the population in Iraq and have a sizeable minority in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Morocco, India, Pakistan, Syria as well as parts of Saudi Arabia and some of the Gulf States. They add the name of Ali to the profession of faith and petition the Holy Family to intercede for them with Allah. They believe the twelve imams are their protectors and direct their destiny. They make pilgrimages to their tombs located in Saudi Arabia.

The Seveners or Ismailis

The group within Shia Islam that accepts the line of

succession down to the Seventh Imam are known as "Seveners." In opposition to the rest of Shias, they regard Ismail as the seventh imam. They maintain that when the Sixth Imam died, his son Ismail was wrongly passed over for the caliphate in favor of another son, Musa al-Kazim.

The Ismailis or "Seveners" follow Ismail and his descendants. For about 150 years following his death, the Ismaili imams remained hidden and the group worked in secret. They appealed to the pious, the intellectual and the spiritual. To the discontented, they offered the attraction of a well-organized, widespread and powerful opposition movement, which seemed to provide a real possibility of overthrowing the existing order, and establishing in its place a new and just society, headed by the imam -- the heir of the Prophet, the chosen of God, and the sole rightful leader of mankind.²⁸ The Ismailis believed that they had a design for a new world order. In the 11th Century, the Ismailis spread their faith from the Atlantic to India. They waged a violent battle against all non-Ismailis.

The Ismailis are most remembered for the violence of the offshoot groups that descended from their beliefs. The worst of these were the Assassins, a terrorist group based in Syria whose objective was murder. They occupied a string of fortresses in Syria and their chief was known to the Crusaders as "the Old Man of the Mountain." Marco Polo passed through the region in 1271 A.D., and recorded the account of his travels about what he heard about the sect.²⁹

The "Seven-Iman Shiites" are found in India and have

sizeable numbers in Central Asia, Iran, Syria and East Africa.

Five-Imam Shiites

Another group of Shiites that still exist is called "Five-Iman Shiites" or "Fivers." They are found only in Yemen.

The Druzes

Another heterodox sect which is an offshoot of Ismailism are the Druzes. They are a reclusive group of people who live in the hills of Lebanon, Syria and Israel. The Druzes have a monotheistic belief system, but, believe that God has reappeared in as many as seventy incarnations. The Druze religion is closed to converts and they keep their doctrine secret. They will not accept converts. They have learned to assimilate into the surrounding populace without calling attention to themselves. For instance, in Israel, they serve in the Israeli Army.

The Druze accept both the Gospel and the Quran as inspired books, but only their Druze scriptures are regarded as "the bible". There appears to be no restriction among the Druzes against participating in the rites of other religions; they may be seen kneeling in prayer with Muslims and attending Mass in Christian churches.³⁰

Sufis

The Sufis are an esoteric belief system in Islam. They are mystics. They believe that the faithful can have a personal relationship with God based upon love rather than on fear and prohibition. Their name is derived from the Arabic word for wool, suf. The early followers wore a coarse woollen garment. They rejected more sophisticated materials. The mystics were

impelled by the insistent desire to find a more intimate and personal approach to, and union with, God than was provided by Sunni formalism and detachment, which placed man at an almost infinite distance from his creator and regarded the Prophet as merely an interpreter of God's word, not a mediator between God and man.³¹ Sufism is found throughout the Muslim World.

The foundation of Sufism is a communal life, or brotherhoods. Sufi orders spread all over the Muslim world. North Africa is a stronghold of Sufism.

Sufis detached themselves from material things to focus upon God. They use various means to heighten their contact with God, including repetition of religious phrases, fasting, dancing, the use of drums and stimulants to help produce a trance-like state, and so forth. They experienced conflict with orthodox Islam because some of their practices such as music, dancing and the prayer-beads, similar to the rosary, were seen as inappropriate by orthodox Islam. Sufism has been strong among non-Arabs and some Sufi sects have recently attracted many people in the West.³² A Sufi can be a member of a regular Islamic group and practice Sufism.

Other Groups

Bahai

The Bahai developed in Iran as an off-shoot of the "Twelve-Imam" group in the nineteenth Century. They were persecuted and have developed a strong following in Europe and the United States. The Bahai headquarters is in Tel Aviv, Israel. The Bahai promote world peace, brotherly love and emphasize that all

nations and groups of people have messengers of God and there are different paths to salvation.

Nation of Islam

The Nation of Islam in the United States, also known as the American Muslim Mission and the Nation of Islam, all more popularly, but inappropriately known as Black Muslims was founded and controlled by blacks in the United States. Their early leaders were Elijah Muhammed and Malcolm X and the movement had its beginnings as a black separatist movement. In recent years they have modified their position and are accepted in the Muslim family. They make the pilgrimage to Mecca and observe all of the tenets of orthodox Islam. In recent years they have adopted a para-military police role in some drug-infested communities in the United States and use this as an example to proselyte for new members among people in those neighborhoods.

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CHAPTER II

BELIEFS AND WORSHIP

The starting point for all Muslims is the statement, "There is no god but God, and Muhammed is the messenger of God." From this expression of belief in the oneness and uniqueness of God, and the messengership of Muhammed stem all of Islam's concepts, attributes, moral values and guidelines for human behavior and relationships.¹

A Muslim worships Allah, the same God of Christian and Jews. Allah is Arabic for God. Muslims believe that Allah revealed His will to Muhammed of Mecca beginning about 610 A.D. through the Archangel Gabriel. Those revelations are recorded in the Quran, the holy book of Islam.

Muslims believe that Allah has no physical attributes or human characteristics. They believe that God is omnipotent, omnipresent, the beginning and the end. God is the Presence who knows every need. Muslims believe that they must follow all of God's commands. This includes the acceptance of Muhammed's message of the oneness of God, justice for all, honesty, respect for others, self control and devotion to Allah.

Muslims are not to worship the Prophet Muhammed and it is anathema for them to be called "Mohammedans." They are to worship only God. The corollary of this is that any association of another being with God is the unforgivable sin of polytheism thus ruling out any veneration of minor gods, idols, human saints, or divine consort or son.² A difficulty orthodox

Muslims have with the Shiites, is their veneration of saints and their burial places.

Muslims believe that even though God is absent of human characteristics, He is as near "as the veins in one's neck." Most Muslims believe that they do not need anyone to act as an intermediary such as a priest, minister or saint. Every man can have a relationship with God if he submits, is truthful, and believes there is no god but God, and Muhammed is the Messenger of God.

Angels, Jinn, and Devils

The Quran mentions three types of creatures other than mankind. The first are angels, the messengers and slaves of God. They were formed from the light and appear in various forms. They are commanded by four archangels, Jibril (Gabriel), Mikail (Michael), Izrail and Isiafil.

The second species of intelligent beings are jinn who were created from smokless fire. They possess freedom of choice; some of them are good and others are evil.³ The English word for genie comes from the word, jinn. Some jinn are friendly to mankind, and others hostile; some are beautiful, and other, the ifrit and ghue (from which the word ghoul derives), are hideous.⁴ The jinn are mysterious creatures, invisible to man. They take on visible form when they work on a visible substance that responds to them. For example, magnetic fields are only visible when they work upon a substance that responds to them, and in the same vein if angels appear, they must do so in an "ethereal" form.⁵

The third type of creatures are devils. The Quran speaks of Shaitan (Satan) in the singular and also in the plural (Shayatiyn).⁶ Originally, Satan was one of the angels who was disobedient to God, who cast him out of heaven. He was not annihilated or cast into hell, that will happen on the day of judgement. The devil tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to eat from the forbidden tree, which in the Old Testament is called the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." In Islamic belief, the guilt for this sin lies not with mankind as an "original sin" from which man has to be redeemed, but with the devil.⁷ Satan is the power in man's heart that is opposed to God. Muslims believe that one of the weapons the devil uses against mankind is disease, especially plagues.

The Hereafter

Muslims believe in an afterlife, which human beings are rewarded or punished according to their conduct. They believe in a bodily resurrection. On Judgement Day men will be given new bodies for eternal bliss or damnation. Men are judged on the last day -- the Day of Judgement when God decides whom He wills to Heaven or to Hell. The souls of the dead remain in the grave until Judgement Day. Islam stresses an individual's accountability to God. Man prepares himself for good or ill for the next life which lasts forever. The garden is the most frequent Quranic symbol of Paradise (al-Jannah).

The Quran contains two versions of Paradise: one flows with rivers of sweet water, milk, wine and honey, and planted with shade trees. The imagination of both East and West has made much

of the beautiful women of Paradise, and there are several passages in the Quran describing the maidens who are to be companions of the believers.⁸ The Quran promises believers that Paradise is a place where there are "rivers of flowing water, rivers of milk unchanging in flavor and rivers of wine -- a delight to the drinkers, rivers, too, of honey purified; and therein for them is every fruit, and forgiveness from their Lord."⁹

The second version, described in the latter part of the Quran, is a more austere description of Paradise. It is described as a pyramid of eight levels, its top shaded by a lotus tree, and its wall guarded by angels. Those who are accepted in Paradise are lodged in rising order according to their merit.

Reconciling the two descriptions need not be important because man's capacity to describe the hereafter is probably beyond his comprehension. The fundamental message is that Paradise holds the means to satisfy man's deepest relationships and most profound spiritual needs.¹⁰

Hell

Hell is the place of torment where the damned undergo perpetual suffering. The most common names for Hell in the Quran describe fire, burning, scorching fire and crushing pressure.

The Prophets of Islam

Adam

The people of the Arabian Peninsula trace their beginnings to Adam who they believe was the first prophet and the builder of the original Kaaba. The Kaaba is a large stone structure,

covered with a black cloth located in the center of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. The Kaaba contains the Black Stone which is thought to be a meteorite and is believed to be a part of the original structure. The Kaaba is the most sacred place for Muslims. It represents a sanctuary consecrated to God since time immemorial. The Kaaba is the direction toward which all Muslims must face when they pray.

Like Christian and Jews, Muslims believe that Adam was the first man and father of mankind, who was created in the image of God. Adam lived in the Garden of Eden with his wife, Eve who was taken from his left side. They disobeyed God and ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In Islam the responsibility of Adam's disobedience lies not with him but with the Devil who tempted him.

Other Prophets

Islam teaches that the prophets were divinely sent with a message of warning and guidance to a particular nation or people. Noah, Abraham, Lot, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jethro and Jesus were some of them. Muslims believe that Abraham and Ismael rebuilt the Kaaba, the sacred shrine in Mecca which is the object of the annual pilgrimage called the hajj.

Islam is part of the monotheistic tradition of Judaism and Christianity, and its ethical code is similar to that of Old Testament Judaism.¹¹ Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet sent to the Children of Israel. Although they believe that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mother by the power of God, they do not believe in the Resurrection or that he had a divine nature.

Muhammed

Islam teaches that Muhammed is the last messenger of God. His name means "the purified one" or "he who is glorified," and the name Ammed, by which the Prophet is also known, is a superlative form meaning "the most laudable": both from the verb hamada ("to praise, laud, glorify").¹²

Muhammed was born about 570 A.D. in the city of Mecca near the West coast of Arabia. Mecca was a commercial center for caravan trade. It had been a religious center of pilgrims for centuries before the advent of Islam. The Kaaba had been there long before the birth of Muhammed and was dedicated to many gods and goddesses under a chief deity called Allah.

Muhammed was brought up by his grandfather, an uncle and was later sent to live with a Bedouin family.

He worked for many years as a caravan foreman for a wealthy widow, fifteen years his senior, named Khadija. He married her when he was 29 years old. Muhammed's marriage to Khadija was apparently happy. Though polygamy was a common practice, he did not take any other wives while she lived. He would later have nine other wives.

Muhammed had two sons and four daughters by Khadija. His sons died in infancy, leaving him without sons in a society that prized male off-spring. This subsequently caused disruption over the succession to Muhammed's temporal authority. All of his daughters married, but it is important to note that his daughter Ruqayya married 'Uthman who became the third caliph and Fatima, Muhammed's only child to survive him, married Ali. The Shiites

look upon the descendents of Ali and Fatima as true heirs of the caliphate. That issue continues to divide the Sunnites and Shiites to this day.

Muhammed had always been a spiritual man who spent a lot of time in meditation and prayer. One night when he was in his early forties, he related that the Archangel Gabriel appeared to him while he was in a mountain cave, and gave him the first part of his divine message. He was told by Gabriel to proclaim the message of God. At first he told only his wife, Khadija, but later the Angel commanded him to proclaim publicly what had been revealed to him. He told men to believe in one God, Allah, seek God's forgiveness for their sins, live better lives, help those in need, and accept him as the "Messenger of God."

His wife, Khadija, was Muhammed's first convert, the first to believe that he had a divine mission. Others followed as Muhammed began to preach publicly to his own clan, the Hashemites.

His early converts were among the poor, the young and the enslaved. Among his earliest followers were Abu Bakr, a friend and his future father-in-law; Ali, a cousin and future son-in-law, and Bilal, an Abyssinian slave, whom Muhammed made his first muezzin, or caller to prayer.

As a result of the teachings of Muhammed, Islam grew but resistance to it increased because the merchants and the keepers of the Kaaba, who were of the Quraysh tribe, were threatened by Muhammed's message which condemned worship of idols causing them to fear loss of control of the lucrative pilgrimage trade to the

Kaaba in Mecca which they controlled. Muhammed refused to compromise. The Quraysh put a ban on Muhammed's Hashimite clan and attempted to discredit Muhammed by accusing him of fraud and borrowing religious ideas from the Christians and Jews. They persecuted him and his followers.

They were oppressed so severely that he sent some of them to Abyssinia where they were given tolerance and hospitality by the Christian inhabitants. As a result of their experiences there, the early adherents of Islam had great affection and respect for Christianity.

Islam continued to grow and the number of Muslims increased. In spite of his success, there were difficult times for Muhammed. His uncle and his wife, Khadija died. He, and his followers, continued to be persecuted.

He married another widow, Sa'uda. He also became engaged, and later married Aisha, a young daughter of Abu Bakr. She was the Prophet's favorite wife in his later years.

The Night Journey

In 620 A.D. Muhammed made what Muslims call his Night Journey, in which he was transported to Jerusalem and ascended from there into the heavens.¹³ In Arabic the journey is called al-Mi'raj. This may have been a mystical vision, but many Muslims believe that Muhammed made the journey miraculously in bodily form. On his arrival to Jerusalem, he met and prayed with the prophets of the past, including Abraham, and Moses. He also conversed with Jesus at the place where the Dome of the Rock now stands. From the Dome of the Rock, he ascended to Heaven where

he met and talked with angels and other heavenly beings after which he returned to Jerusalem and finally back home to Mecca. The Night Journey confirmed the prophethood of Muhammed and also established Jerusalem as one the three holy cities of Islam.¹⁹

The Hegira

The hegira was the emigration of the Prophet from Mecca to Yathrib, later called Medina, at the end of September 622 A.D. The lives of the Prophet and his followers were in danger in Mecca. They were offered sanctuary in Medina by a group of warring Arabs who believed Muhammed to be a wise man. They felt that their factionalism might result in their being taken over by the Jews in the area. They offered to let Muhammed come to Medina to serve as an intermediary.

He sent about seventy of his followers out of Mecca in small groups so as not to arouse suspicions. He and Abu Bakr escaped from Mecca on camel with a flock of sheep driven behind them to cover their tracks. They arrived in Medina in about fourteen days and were given an enthusiastic welcome. That journey is called the hegira.

Following the hegira, Islam grew rapidly, but Muhammed still had the desire to convert the Meccans. He eventually returned to Mecca and was involved in a series of battles. He was successful and a truce was signed. He took control of the Kaaba and ordered his men to destroy the images of the pagan gods. He proclaimed the Kaaba as the central shrine of Islam. Muhammed returned to Medina where he died on June 8, 632 A.D.

Sixteen years later, the Caliph 'Umar formalized the

Prophet's custom of dating events from the hegira, the moment of the establishment of the first Islamic state.¹⁵ The Islamic calendar today is called the Hegirian calendar because it dates from the journey of the Prophet to Medina. Thus the year of the hegira became the first year of the Islamic era.¹⁶ The years following the hegira are known as Anno Hegira or A.H.

The Divine Decree

Islam believes that everything is under the direction and control of Allah and that He is continuously active in all of His creation. The divine decree is a form of predestination. Muslims believe God alone is the source of benefit or harm, and turning to anyone or anything other than Him for protection and help when everything is dependent on His will, is not only utterly futile but wrongfully attributes to others, powers which God alone possesses.¹⁷

Muslims believe that belief in the divine decree is a statement of belief in His sense of total trust, dependence and submission to his creator.

The Five Pillars of Islam

Obligatory acts of worship set forth in the Quran and Hadith are often referred to as the Five Pillars of Islam. All are specific actions which a Muslim must perform in order to be a practicing Muslim. They are obligations placed upon all Muslims no matter where they happen to live, whether in a Muslim society or living away from any Muslim community.¹⁸

These are testimony to faith (shahada), prayer (salah), almsgiving (zakah), fasting during the month of Ramadan (sawm),

and the pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj).

The First Pillar: The Declaration of Faith

The first and most important of the Five Pillars of Islam is the declaration of faith or testimony, in Arabic called shahada. The declaration of faith is "There is no god but God; Muhammed is the Messenger of God." The statement contains the essence of Islam: the unity and uniqueness of God and the role of Muhammed in bringing the message of God to mankind.¹⁹

Islam has no provision for becoming a member or follower as does Christianity with its catechism, probationary period or membership requirements. For one to become a Muslim, it is only necessary to sincerely recite and believe the shahada. Reciting the shahada in public is supposedly enough to gain recognition by the Muslim community. The shahada is recited daily by devout Muslim throughout the world. The one condition of salvation for Muslims is the complete acceptance of the shahada.

The Second Pillar: Prayer

The second pillar is prayer, salah in Arabic. The practice of regular salah is a fundamental requirement in Islam. Salah is the canonical, or ritual prayer, as opposed to the spontaneous petitioning of God which is called dua. Salah is not spontaneous in the sense that one can do it anytime. The Quran enjoins Muslims to pray daily and at set intervals. The times of salah have been set by tradition. Every adult Muslim, male and female is required to pray five times a day -- before sunrise, at noon when the sun is at its peak, in mid-afternoon, at sunset and at night. The order of salah given above is from the Western

perspective of time. The beginning of the Islamic day, like Judaism, begins at sunset. So the Muslim would tell you that prayer or salah is required at sunset, in the evening, before dawn, at noon and in the mid-afternoon. The practice of salah is the most fundamental requirement in Islam. It may be done in private, in a mosque (established place for congregational worship), at home, at work, outdoors or in any clean place. It may be done individually, but it is preferably done in congregation.

Whenever Muslims pray they are obligated to face in the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca. Worshippers must be in a state of ritual purity before performing salah. Muslims put themselves in a state of purity by washing the face, the hands and arms up to the elbow, rubbing water on the head, and washing the feet. Running water is provided at mosques for such cleansing. If water is not available, then clean sand may be used. Shoes are removed and salah is done on a small rug, except when other conditions exist such as traveling.

Women, as well as men, may pray in the mosque if they desire, but it is preferable and customary that women pray in the privacy of their homes, especially since leaving the home and children to go to the mosque five times a day is neither practical nor possible for many women. Many mosques have separate sections for women in order that they may pray in complete privacy and there may be no distraction caused by physical proximity of men and women.²⁰

Muslims believe that salah should be done devoutly and with

solemnity. Worshippers in prayer should not be interrupted, stared at or photographed.

The ritual of salah follows a set form throughout the world and must be recited in Arabic.

Islam provides for weekly congregational worship on Friday. The weekly congregational worship is called Salat al-Jumah and is observed around noon, when the sun is at its zenith. Attendance is obligatory for all Muslim men to the extent that if one misses three consecutive Fridays without a valid reason, one is considered to be out of Islam. Women may worship at home. In addition to Salat al-Jumah, special salahs are held on the great feast days of Islam.

Although in most Muslim countries Friday is a holiday rather than Sunday, Friday has not been preserved as a day of rest in the Judeo-Christian sense. Friday is the day of obligatory worship; work and business transactions are permitted as usual before and after the time of the Friday prayer.²¹

The Third Pillar: Almsgiving

The third pillar of Islam is almsgiving or zakah. It is the obligatory tax for the needy. The obligation for the faithful to share with the less fortunate is stressed throughout the Quran. Muslims are encouraged to charitably support widows, travelers, orphans and the poor. In some Muslim countries, the zakah is voluntary, in others it is enforced by the government. Islamic legal tradition has produced a set of technical regulations about how much zakah is due and upon which property it is to be taxed. Simply put, it can be generally stated that

the most common calculation is 2.5 percent of the amount of cash an individual holds in savings or investment for a year.

Zakah can be paid directly to deserving Muslims in one's own community or it can be sent to Islamic organizations for distribution to the needy.

The Forth Pillar: Fasting During the Month of Ramadan

The forth pillar is sawm, the fast during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar which commemorates when the Prophet received the first revelation. The fast begins when the new moon is sighted. Since a physical sighting of the new moon must be observed, the fast during Ramadan varies in length from twenty-eight to thirty days.

The Quran commands that for the entire lunar month of Ramadan, Muslims are required to abstain from food, drink, tobacco and sexual relations during the hours of daylight. Ramadan is reckoned according to the lunar calendar and therefore it occurs on different dates in each year of the Gregorian calendar. It is observed during the long days of the summer as well as the short days of the winter as it moves through the year because it is tied to lunar months rather than the solar calendar. During the long days of the extremely hot summer months Ramadan can be a severe hardship.

The fast is a test of self-discipline and scrupulous obedience to God. It also permits the rich to experience the deprivation of the poor. All Muslims, men and women, boys and girls keep the fast. Very young children, aged travellers, pregnant and nursing women, the sick and the elderly are exempted

from the fast. The fast must be broken at sunset each day. A heavy late evening meal is served in many homes during Ramadan as well as a pre-dawn meal before resuming the fast.

In some Muslim countries the fast during Ramadan is enforced by law. Restaurants are closed, hours of grocery stores are restricted and smoking is prohibited. People are encouraged to go to the mosques to pray.

Ramadan is also a time of jubilation. During the evenings children stay up later and are allowed to play. Shops, cafes and places of amusement are opened. Just before dawn men parade through the streets beating drums to awaken everyone for a final meal before the day's fasting begins.

At the conclusion of Ramadan, Muslims celebrate one of the two major festivals of Islam, 'Eid al-Fitr, the Festival of Fast-Breaking.²² 'Eid al-Fitr lasts three days or more. Children receive presents, family and friends share gifts, and alms are given to the poor.

In strict Muslim countries it is bad manners for foreigners to eat, drink, or even smoke in public during Ramadan.²³

The Fifth Pillar: Pilgrimage to Mecca

The fifth pillar of Islam is the pilgrimage, or hajj, to the Kaaba, the holy shrine in Mecca. The Quran requires that every adult Muslim who can afford it, and is of sound body and mind is to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime.

There are two kinds of pilgrimages. The lesser pilgrimage call, umrah may be made at any time of the year. It is a

voluntary pilgrimage. The required pilgrimage called hajj must be made during the twelfth month of the Lunar calendar.

Muslims perform the hajj with enthusiasm, not only for its religious meaning but as an opportunity to travel. It gives them an opportunity to meet Muslims from all over the world. Muslims who make the hajj are held in high esteem and are called hajji. Many believe that a hajji is guaranteed a place in Paradise.

Special dress is prescribed for men and women who make the Hajj. Hajjis must be in a state of ritual purity. Men wear two sheets of seamless white cloth, one wrapped around the hip and the other draped over the shoulders. Women wear a simple white robe and a simple covering for the head. Uniformity in dress is meant to remove all distinction of class, wealth, and origin among those making the hajj. The ultimate destination for all of the pilgrims is the Sacred Mosque in Mecca where the Kaaba is located. When pilgrims arrive in Mecca and get a glimpse of the Kaaba, they perform a brief salat of greeting to the Mosque. The pilgrims circle the Kaaba seven times, or what Muslims call performing seven circumambulations. Most attempt to touch or kiss the sacred black stone. After the circumambulations, the pilgrims pray personal prayers (dua) and ritual prayers (salat). Other acts and rituals associated with the pilgrimage are also performed.

During the hajj, many pilgrims visit Medina to pay their respects to Muhammed's tomb and the tombs of his family and companions. The prophet forbade access to Mecca for unbelievers and that has generally been held to apply to Medina also.²⁴

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CHAPTER III

OTHER ISLAMIC BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The religion of Islam is one of the most misunderstood religions in the West generally, and in the United States in particular, because so little known about it and people fail to understand Muslims and learn something about the beliefs and practices of Islam. Most people in the United States are of the Judeo-Christian heritage and the culture of Islam is alien to them.

There are many misconceptions and notions about Muslims because people tend to generalize and associate to all of Islam what they read in the newspapers and see on television about terrorist incidents perpetrated by organizations that claim to be following the tenets of Islamic jihad, or holy war. As a consequence, many Muslims are considered to be militant "gun-toting" terrorists or hostage takers with long robes and beards, or rich decadent playboys.

Muslim women are seen as passive women with long dresses and covering black veils or militant women supporting their men in the defense of Islam. Children are seen as being sent to Iranian battlefields to die with the promise of going directly to Paradise.

Muslims are also viewed as religious fanatics serving a strange God, called Allah. Others view Muslims as racists with a dislike for Americans in general, and whites in particular. That notion probably prevails in the United States because of the

teachings of the "Black Muslims," a heterodox Islamic group founded in the United States by Elijah Muhammed which, in the past, taught racial hatred and separatism. The resurgence of Islamic Fundamentalism and the Iranian revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini has contributed to a misunderstanding of Islam by many in the West.

Getting to know Muslims and something about their beliefs and practices might foster a better understanding, respect and appreciation for that religious group.

Non-Muslims who live in Islamic countries can observe the customs and practices and still not understand them. People who live in non-Muslim countries often have a harder time understanding those who are followers of Islam.

The following are some customs and practices that may help those who interact with, or wish to know and understand Muslims better. Some customs and practices differ from country to country and others have an ethnic rather than religious origins.

The Muslim Day and Week

The Muslim sense of time and calendar differ from those used in the West. The Muslim day begins at sunset, when clocks are reset daily at zero hour. Some countries have adopted international time systems except for religious purposes, to exist side by side with the Muslim custom of reckoning time. Prayer is based on suntime and strict accuracy is considered essential. For instance, mid-day prayer occurs when the sun is at its zenith.

The Muslim week is seven days long beginning on Sunday.

The first five days are named for the first ordinal numbers, one through five, i.e. Sunday is Ahad which is one, Monday is Ithnain which is two and so on. Friday is Juma which means "assembly." It is the required day for congregational worship and it is called, Salat al-Jumah. Saturday is named Sabt which means sabbath, probably a holdover from the Jewish calendar. Muslims have no sabbath day in the Judeo-Christian sense. The religious obligation is for congregational worship at midday every Friday. Business is conducted as usual before and after Salat al-Jumah.

The Muslim Year

The Muslim year is lunar, rather than solar as it is in the West.¹ The lunar cycle is approximately twenty-nine and a half days long. There is a leap year about once every three years. Because the lunar year is ten to eleven days shorter than the solar year, months move slowly forward through the seasons. A given holy day will appear in winter, spring, summer, autumn and back to winter over a period of thirty-three years.

The Islamic era starts from the year of Muhammed's migration (hegira) from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D. Islamic dates are designated Anno Hegira, A.H. It is complicated to convert the date in one system to that in another because Muslims use the lunar calendar and their year is shorter. In other words, one cannot just subtract 622 from the Christian based calendar to establish an Anno Hegira date. There is a complicated mathematical formula for doing so.

Sacred Holy days

Two months of the Islamic year are considered holy. The

first is Ramadan, when Muslims fast during the ninth month of the Islamic year which commemorates when the Prophet received his first revelation. Another month sacred to Muslims is Dhu al-Hijjah, the twelfth month, when the pilgrimage to Mecca takes place.

Islam has two great holidays. The first is Id al-Fitr, the feast of Breaking the Fast at the end of the holy month of Ramadan. The other is al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, celebrated at the end of the pilgrimage on the 10th day of Dhu al-Hajjah in memory of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael. Unlike Christian and Jews, Muslims believe that Abraham sacrificed Ishmael rather than Isaac. They cite the scripture that states that Abraham was preparing to sacrifice his "only son." Muslims point out that Ishmael was born several years before Isaac. Many Muslims sacrifice animals in commemoration of al-Adha, the Feast of the Sacrifice.

Some Muslims celebrate Mawlid al-Nabi, the birthday of Muhammed while others do not. The Shiites celebrate the birthdays of Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain.²

Other holidays celebrated by some Muslims are New Year's Day, the first of Muharram. The anniversary of the Prophet's miraculous nocturnal journey and ascension to heaven is celebrated on the 27th day of Rajab, the seventh month. The 14th day of Sha'ban, the eighth month is devoted to prayers for the dead and visiting and cleaning the tombs of the deceased.

Mosque

A mosque is a place of congregational worship. The word

has its roots in the Arabic, masjid which means "place of prostration." A mosque is not a synagogue or a church in the Judeo-Christian sense. There is no altar, baptistry, baptismal font, tabernacle or a place for the clergy or choir. The mosque is a place where the faithful gather to pray as a congregation. Everyone is suppose to be equal in a mosque. It does have a pulpit which was adopted at the suggestion of a Muslim who had seen one in a Christian Church.³ The pulpit is a small platform from which the leader of the congregation, called an imam, delivers addresses. The addresses may be either religious or political.

Mosques may be simple and austere while others are elaborate structures of domes, columns and courtyard. Whether austere or elaborate, some things are common to all mosques. They contain no statues, paintings, or figures and the open floors are normally covered with rugs. Two other features common to almost all mosques are the mihrab and the minaret. The mihrab is an indentation in the wall indicating the direction of Mecca. The minaret is the tower from which the faithful are called to prayer. Most mosques have washing facilities where the faithful can perform the necessary ablutions before prayer to put themselves in a state of ritual purity.

Large mosques often have facilities for libraries and religious schools, where students are instructed in the Quran, religious law and Arabic.

Injunctions and Prohibitions

In Islam there are a number of Islamic injunctions and

prohibitions. Obeying the injunction is considered a virtue. Examples of injunctions are purity, modesty and decency in behavior, appearance, dress and speech. Doing what is prohibited is a sin because it constitutes disobedience to God.

Prohibitions include free mixing between men and women, and any form of physical contact outside of marriage. Adultery, fornication, prostitution and homosexuality are prohibitions.

Dress of Muslim Women

The Quran tells "believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms..."⁴ The basis for Islamic dress for women is laid down by the verse stated above and a Hadith of the Prophet. In her book, What Everyone Should Know About Islam and Muslims, Suzanne Haneef states, "Muslim women are in no way constrained to wear a particular form of dress and are free to improve on or invent new types of dresses in keeping with the Islamic guidelines, as directed by convenience or taste."⁵ The intention is that whatever is worn by Muslim women should be Islamic hijab. Hijab is the covering dress for Muslim women.

Some Muslims say Islam is very flexible. Devout Muslim women following the Sunnah (practices and recommendations of the Prophet) would want to cover all parts of their bodies except the face and the hand. Some would want to cover their faces with a veil. Around the Muslim world, a variety of garments meet these requirements. Some Muslim women wear knee length dresses and socks that are not transparent, and are within the requirements of

Islam. In other places a woman could wear long pants as long as the outlines of her body were not sexually accentuated. The clothes of women differ from country to country and in some countries even differ from region to region, or among various groups within the same country. Whatever is worn should be full and honest hijab.

Many Muslim women wear the veil which is a head covering and the covering of the face. Some scholars hold that the covering of the face is required while others are of the opinion that it is not required. Obeying the injunction regarding dress for Muslim women is a virtue. There is no set requirement other than the hijab, that is that a Muslim woman is required to conceal her attractions from men by a strictly modest, straightforward type of attire.

Dietary Laws

The dietary laws of Islam resemble those of the Jews, but are not as strict. The only animal forbidden is the pig and its by-products and any food that has been immolated to the name of any other than the Allah.⁶ Muslims can eat all seafood.

The Quran is quite explicit in stating that the food of Christians and Jews is lawful for Muslims. "This day are all good things made lawful for you. The food of those who have received the Scripture (Christians and Jews) is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them."⁷ Muslims living in Christian countries can eat commercial food, except pork. A devout Muslim pronounces the name of God over all food that is to be eaten.

Muslims are forbidden to drink alcoholic beverages. This was not true at first. Wine was praised as one of God's bounties of mankind, but excesses among believers caused disruptions and interfered with prayers. As the ritual of praying five times a day became the hallmark of the faith it not surprising that alcohol was finally forbidden because it would be difficult to see a time when the effects of drinking would not be present during one the prayers.⁸ According to the Quran, the elect will be allowed to drink in Paradise.

The law schools extended the prohibition to distilled spirits when they became available in the Muslim world.⁹

Taboos

A Muslim always eats with his right hand and avoids touching it with his left hand. Satan is believed to eat and drink with his left hand. The left hand is unclean because that is the hand used for relieving and wiping one's self after using the toilet. It is taboo to pass anyone anything or to accept anything with the left hand. In times past when Muslim families ate from a common plate only the right hand was used and each ate what was nearest to him.

Religious Expressions and Greeting

The speech of Muslims is saturated with religious phrases and expressions. The most widely used salutation, salaam means peace. Salaam alekim which means, peace be upon you, is the traditional greeting and an appropriate reply is, We alekim salaam, and on you be peace.¹⁰ Muslim believe that only God knows the future and the phrase, insh'Alla, which means, "If God

wills," is pronounced by Muslims whenever they refer to the future.

Polygamy

The Quran makes it legal for a man to have up to four wives if he can treat all of them equally. The Quran advises that a man is not able to deal equally between wives no matter how much he may want to do so. The clear message is that polygamy is legal but monogamy is preferred. In most Muslim countries, monogamy is practiced most often.

Names

The teachings of the Prophet influenced the names given to his followers. Names frequently given to Muslims include Abd'Alla (servant of God), Abdu'r-Rahman (The servant of the Merciful One) and Muhammed, Ahmed or Hamed after the Prophet. Other popular names are, Ali (the Prophets cousin and son-in-law). Musa (Moses), Da'ud (David), Ibrahim (Abraham), and Hasan.

The prefix, Abu means father of, Umm or ummu means mother of, and Ibn means son of. Abbu Da'ud means father of David, ibn Musa means son of Moses, and Ummu Fatima means mother of Fatima.

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CHAPTER IV

THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM UPON TERRORISM

Most in the Western world believe that terrorism is barbaric, illegal and against all principles of morals and ethics in the the Judeo-Christian context. Terrorism is defined in the following ways: systematic and indiscriminate use of violence or the threat of it as a leverage to influence behavior.¹ Another definition explains that terrorism involves a criminal act that is often symbolic in nature and intended to influence an audience beyond the immediate victims.²

In Islam, terrorism is not addressed and one is hard pressed to find the subject of terrorism listed in the indices of books written on Islam and particularly those written by Muslims. The nearest term in Islam that can be associated with the word, terrorism as used in a Western sense is jihad.

The events of hostage taking in the Middle East and the hijacking of United States' airlines and sabotage by Arab nationals have exacerbated the tension between the West and the Middle East. The perpetrators of the kidnappings and hijackings claim to be Islamic Fundamentalists. They call their acts of violence, jihad or holy war. Those in the West call it terrorism.

The result is misunderstanding and the belief by Westerners that Islam promotes terrorism.

The Spread of Islamic Fundamentalism

In recent times Islamic Fundamentalism has had a bigger

impact on the West than any other Third World movement.³ The reason for this is that Islam is the predominant religion of the Middle East and the area is experiencing a religious revival because some activist religious leaders believe that Western decadence is polluting Islam. In addition, Islamic countries of the Middle East that are experiencing the resurgence of Islamic Fundamentalism are situated in an area that is strategically vital to the interests of the United States and its allies. The region is rich in oil.

While Americans equate Islamic Fundamentalism with the Shiite-sponsored Iranian Revolution of 1979, Islamic Fundamentalism is also found in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Morocco.

Many religions tend to revitalize themselves periodically. When Christianity experiences a period of revivalism it involves the religious dimension. The focus is upon the inner person and his or her relationship with God and others. Christianity encourages its followers to love God and fellow man more deeply and to rid themselves of those things which separate them from God. It addresses the religious dimension. In Christianity there is no doctrine or concept of holy war. On the contrary, Christians are enjoined to be obedient to all authority, good and bad. There is no encouragement to overthrow oppressive governments. In the United States the doctrine of "separation of church and State" is generally understood. Muslim countries do not have such a doctrine.

In Islam the religious perspective is different because it

embodies the social, political, economic, and legal systems into its religious beliefs. The embodiment of all of those things wrapped into religion affects all Muslims and all who relate with them. For Muslims, the spiritual and secular are bound up together. The fact that Islam finds it difficult to make a clear distinction between the spiritual and the secular might increase the danger of instability for Muslim countries because if its influence upon the political sphere has become threatened its influence upon the spiritual life may go by default.⁴

Such a comprehensive system which binds the secular and the spiritual so tightly may set such narrow standards and norms for its followers that they may have difficulty, or refuse to live up to them. An example is the Western influence in Iran prior to the 1979 Revolution. Women wore clothing that exposed more of their bodies and adopted other Western customs. According to Shiite Fundamentalists there, they were not dressing full and honest hijab.

When adherents to the religious faith fail to follow its basic tenets, an opportunity for religious revival arises. As the failure of the faithful becomes more evident, a pious leader arises and call them back to the basic fundamentals of their faith. Fundamental Islam calls its adherents back to the purity of Islamic precepts as set forth in the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet. It calls for a purification of the faithful and a very narrow and strict observance of the Pillars of Islam.

Early Islam spread in Africa, Asia Minor and to the southern portion of Europe. As Islam spread, it also adapted

itself to different cultures and as a result Islam itself became modified or diluted. This in turn led to periodic revivalist movements to purify the faith to return the faithful to their definition of true Islam.

Islam also had to deal with Christianity and the dominance of Western powers in the Islamic world. Islam entered the modern age under the leadership of the Ottoman Turks, with Istanbul as the capital of the caliphate.⁵ During the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries, Islamic countries were feeling the effects of European expansionism. The Ottoman Empire was not up to the task of fending off its European rivals.

The Hapsburgs seized territories. Napoleon occupied Egypt in 1798 and France continued to push into the Ottoman Empire by occupying Algeria in 1830. Muslims saw the Ottoman Empire in decline. The great Muslim thinkers must have pondered the superior strength of the Christian European powers. As in the Old Testament account of the fall of Israel and Judah, the Islamic religious leaders like the Old Testament prophets attributed their failure to the decadence of the people. The Muslim leaders could conclude that the Christians had devised a better system or the Muslim community had failed to follow true Islam. They could not conclude that their religious belief system was inferior to that of the Christians. The conclusion they reached was that Muslims had deviated from the true path. The stage was set for Islamic reform. It had as much to do with political power and policies as with religion and theology. In Islam they are all one.

Islamic Fundamentalism was spread in Egypt by the Brotherhood to combat the British Mandate and Zionist Colonization in 1936-37. The Islamic Brotherhood was organized in several Muslim countries to promote Islamic values, religious pride and self-determination. Egyptian and British conflicts caused the Brotherhood to grow and develop rapport with other likeminded organizations in the Middle East.

The Muslim Brotherhood grew in Syria when Syrian Students returned from Egypt in the 1930s and formed branches called the Young Men of Muhammed. The Brotherhood became a fixture of the political and religious establishment.

The Brotherhood in Syria favored ending the French Mandate and for political and social reform along Islamic lines. In Syria, the Brotherhood developed as a movement of resistance. Through the Brotherhood, Islamic Fundamentalism expanded throughout the Muslim world.

In recent times Islamic Fundamentalism flourished in Libya, where Islamic law has been influenced and interpreted by Colonel Muammar Qadhafi.

Saudi Arabia and Iran have been heavily influenced by Islamic Fundamentalism. Saudi Arabia, a monarchical autocracy and Iran an Islamic republic are so different yet so similar. Both were ripe for an Islamic revival because the religious leaders felt that their spiritual heritage was being threatened by outside influences. Under the Islamic Fundamentalist Wahabi Movement the feuding nomadic tribes of Arabia were unified into the State of Saudi Arabia. In Iran it was a movement led by

Shiite Ayatollah Khomeini that brought about the revolution.

Iran, long a center of Islam, particularly Shiite Islam, underwent secularization under the Pahlavi dynasty (1926-1979). That secularization was used by Ayatollah Khomeini to justify and to usher in his fundamentalist Islamic regime.

Afghanistan developed into a landlocked society which clung to medieval Islam and resisted modernization. Today, ruled by a Marxist regime, Islam has emerged as an ideology of armed resistance.

Revival and reform have been evident throughout the history of Islam. People fall away from the faith, nations are conquered, outside social, political, economic and religious forces intermingle with the religious traditions. Technological development, changing economic priorities and modernization created tension and religious instability in the world of Islam.

Economic development changes priorities and lives. People move from the rural areas to the urban centers. They feel lost and displaced in their new surroundings. Alienation pervades the masses and provides a ready audience for radical and revolutionary groups. Those in the midst of change are a fertile ground for Islamic Fundamentalists to try to rally the alienated and the underprivileged back to the basics of Islam as they see them. Islam is presented as a religion of justice and equality. Any opposition to Fundamentalist movements, whether groups or individuals, ideas, social, political or economic systems, they are all given the name of Satan. The faithful are told by Fundamentalists that the oppositon must be defeated at all costs.

Fundamentalists may term this holy war, a jihad.

Jihad

The Quran and the Prophet taught that Muslims were required to fight for the faith and that those who died in its defense were assured a martyrs' reward in Paradise.⁶ Orthodox Muslims believe that jihad is a religious war against unbelievers with the objectives of converting them to Islam or subduing all opposition.⁷ Jihad is not any conflict that a Muslim chooses to fight. Hijacking an airplane or taking hostages are not considered jihad by most Muslims, only by some terrorist groups holding a special view to justify their acts.

Muslims consider jihad a duty for a nation, not individuals or groups. It relates only to religion. It has nothing to do with economic exploitation, political repression or imperialism in any form.⁸ The belief that Arabs swept out of the Arabian Peninsula on some fanatical religious mission, a mission embodied in the term jihad, has been substantially refuted by historians of the era.⁹

Today jihad is perhaps the most misunderstood term in Islam because the term is used differently by different groups. Some Muslim leaders call for jihad when they speak of freeing Jerusalem from Israeli occupation, punishing the United States for its involvement in Iran, ousting the U.S.S.R. from Afghanistan and liberating oppressed Muslims from their oppressors. Thomas W. Lippman in, Understanding Islam: An Introduction to the Muslim World, states, "Literally, the word means 'utmost effort' in promotion and defense of Islam, which

might or might not include armed conflict with unbelievers."¹⁰ It is interesting to note that in his early career Muhammed spread Islam by teaching and persuasion. When he wanted to convert the Jews in Medina he stated that there was, "no compulsion in religion."

Later in his career Muhammed declared that God had allowed him, and his followers, to defend themselves against infidels. He then believed that God had allowed him to attack and set up the true faith of Islam by the sword. The Prophet had a burning zeal to spread the faith, yet Muslims permitted other religious groups to live in their areas. In the early days jihad was a religious war to spread the Islamic faith and the rules were very detailed.

According to the Sunnah, a jihad is not lawful unless it involves the summoning of unbelievers to belief, and the jihad must end when order is restored, that is when the unbelievers have accepted either Islam, or a protected status within Islam, or when Islam is no longer under threat.¹¹ An important precondition of jihad is a reasonable prospect of success.

During colonial times, when Muslims were under non-Muslim domination it was concluded that provided Islam was not prohibited, jihad could not be justified. Opportunists for jihad during that time never received general support from the religious authorities. A genuine jihad has rarely been invoked since Islam's original struggle for survival against the Meccans.

Some radical Muslims are motivated to participate in a holy war because those who die in a genuine jihad are martyrs and

enter Paradise directly.

Relation of Jihad to Terrorism

Jihad is to be taken seriously because many Muslims, especially, Shiites believe that it is one of the major tenets of Islam. There are many Islamic groups who use jihad as the reason to justify terrorist activities. Many groups and some countries use jihad as a rallying point to make a political statement rather than a military commitment.

Jihad has its genesis in the very foundation of Islam. From the beginning, Islam was surrounded by hostile forces. The Prophet and his followers were literally driven out of Mecca. They had to make a clandestine journey to Medina where the inhabitants were embroiled in conflict. He had to defend himself and his followers and he determined that the will of God demanded that he carry the message of God to everyone, and by the sword if necessary. The "People of the book," Christian and Jews, and others were to accept the message of the Prophet. The Quran is clear that the followers of Islam are to join battle against the infidels who spurned Islam and persecuted the believers. It is not clear on the circumstances in which the believers are to undertake the struggle.

The word, jihad is not in the Quran. The Quran calls for war on the infidels and for courteous treatment of them; it calls for ruthlessness and for tolerance; it brands the unbelievers as doomed infidels, yet teaches that whoever believes in God and lives virtuously, whether Muslim or not, will be admitted to Paradise.¹²

Some scholars advise that jihad was defensive in nature while others say jihad is any conflict where Muslims are in conflict with non-Muslims.

The Kharijites were a fanatical and violent group of dissidents who struggled against orthodox Islam long ago. They believed that the profession of faith could only be accompanied by righteous works and and Islam was to be imposed upon others by force.¹³ They believed that jihad was among the cardinal pillars of Islam and that it was actually the Sixth Pillar of Islam. The Kharijites were defeated by the end of the seventh century and the call for jihad to be the sixth pillar died with their defeat.

Another influence upon Islam was martyrdom as adored by the Shiites. The Shiites have a long history of commemorating the martyrs of their community. Many of their early leaders died violent deaths and were looked upon as having died for the faith.

The early history of Shiite opposition to established authority attracted all sorts of non-conformists. The religion was a major force in the lives of the people. The spread of Islam by conversion brought into the Islamic community large numbers of new believers who carried with them, from their Christian, Jewish and Iranian backgrounds religious concepts and attitudes unknown to the early Arab Muslims.¹⁴ The esoteric nature of Shiism and their high regard for martyrdom continues to be a factor in Shia Islam today.

Another early sect in Shiite Islam were the Ismailis. An outgrowth of the Ismailis was a fanatical group who were known as

the Assassins, a terrorist group based in Syria. Their objective was murder, particularly against all non-Ismailis. They were a religious group with a political purposed whose aim was to overthrow the existing Sunni Order in Islam and replace it with a new order of their own. Their targets were religious and political figures. Their leaders were said to have endowed them with hashish -- hence the name hashishiyun, "assassins."¹⁵

The story is related that the Assassins were led by a mysterious leader known as the Old Man of the Mountain. One account relates that the sect lived in the mountains. Beautiful palaces surrounded by high walls were located there and only the elect could be admitted. The Old Man of the Mountain had the allegiance of the young men who were permitted to live in the earthly paradise. Those selected to live in the paradise were drugged with hashish and taken to the fortified city. No one entered the garden except those the Old Man of the Mountain wanted to be his ashishin or assassin. When they awakened, they found themselves in heavenly surroundings with all kinds of food, drink and women. They had the joys of Paradise. They were taught by their teachers that they were to be obedient to the Old Man. They were summoned to him when it was his desire to have someone killed. They were drugged and taken out of their paradise with the understanding that if they accomplished the mission and lived they would be returned to paradise. If they died on the mission they would go directly to Paradise.

The accounts of the Assassins were recorded by an envoy sent to Egypt and Syria in 1175 A.D. by Emperor Frederick

Barbarossa, William, Archbishop of Tyre, and Marco Polo.¹⁶ Other travelers also wrote of the Assassins and many of their manuscripts are extant.

Islam has a rich history of its rise and influence in the Middle East and the world. Though Shia Islam is the only numerically significant schismatic group in contemporary Islam, other schools of thought, minor sects, politico-religious organizations, brotherhoods and dynasties exist within the framework of the religion, which continue to influence events.¹⁷

Islam is growing and is a living socio-political-religious ideology. To know about the religion and its rich history is to bring about an understanding and appreciation of its heritage. The good, the bad, the indifferent -- Islam as a force in the world today has to be reckoned with. Islam has been here, is here today, and will be here tomorrow.

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17. Lippman p. 149.

CHAPTER V

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON THE RELIGION OF ISLAM

This portion of the paper is meant to be used for basic background information on Islamic religion. It is by no means complete, but should give the reader a quick overview of some of the practices of the religion of Islam.

Q. What is the religion of Islam?

A. It is a belief in Allah as the one and only deity and that Muhammed (570 - 632 A.D.) is the last Messenger of God.

Q. How many Muslims are there?

A. More than 800 million in the world and approximately two million Muslims in the United States.

Q. What nations have Muslims making up a majority of their populations?

A. Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Turkey, Pakistan, Sudan, Nigeria, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Many more nations have large Muslim minorities or pluralities, e.g. India, Peoples Republic of China, U.S.S.R. to name a few.

Q. Are there Muslims in America?

A. Yes. Immigrants from the nations noted above, and the Nation of Islam which is active among blacks.

Q. Do Muslims believe in racial superiority?

A. No. Racial superiority of any kind has no substantiation in the Quran or the reliable traditions of the Prophet. Islam works very hard to eliminate differences based

upon race or economic standing. The requirement for Muslims to dress in the same manner on the hejira is an example of the faith to treat all equally.

Q. Is there a group called "Black Muslims?"

A. There are many blacks who are Muslims but they are not appropriately referred to as "Black Muslims." The Nation of Islam used to be erroneously referred to as "Black Muslims" but they are Muslims as any other followers of Islam. Many Black Americans are members of "The American Muslim Mission," also known as, "The World Community of Islam in the West."

Q. Do Muslims worship Muhammed?

A. No. He is considered a prophet, a vehicle for Allah's Word.

Q. Do Muslims have dietary restrictions?

A. Yes. Muslims are forbidden to eat pork or its by-products. They can eat all seafood. Muslims can eat food prepared by Christians and Jews as long as they pronounce the name of God over it before eating. Muslims are forbidden to drink alcoholic beverages of any kind.

Q. What is the Quran?

A. The Quran is the sacred scripture of Islam. It was revealed to the Prophet in a series of visions over a period of twenty years. It was originally written in Arabic. The Quran, Hadith, and Sunnah are the foremost authorities for Muslims in all matters of faith and practice. The Quran is approximately the size of the Christian New Testament. It is divided into 114 chapters, each called a "sura."

Q. What are the major tenets of Islam?

A. There are five major tenets or "Pillars." They are: (1) Belief in Allah as the one and only diety and that Muhammed was the last messenger of God, (2) Prayer five times a day, (3) Alms to the poor, (4) Daytime fasting during the lunar month of Ramadan, and (5) Pilgrimage to Mecca.

Q. Are there religious denominations or major divisions in Islam?

A. Yes. Islam is divided into two major divisions, Sunnites and Shiites. Most Muslims are Sunnites. The Shiite minority numbers about 20 million. At present, over fifteen Islamic groups exists in the United States. The World Community of Islam in the West, also known as the American Muslim Mission, and the Hanafi Muslim movement are two of the larger Islamic groups drawing primarily on the black or African-American community. Other groups include the Moorish Science Temple, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Movemment, and the Nubian Islamic Hebrew Mission.

Q. What are some of the conditions governing prayer (salat) in Islam.

A. Some include: Have the intention of prayer, be in a state of cleanliness, face the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, and exalt Allah.

Q. Are there other prayers made in Islam?

A. Yes. Formal prayer called salat and extemporaneous prayer called dua.

Q. Is there an Islamic Sabbath?

A. Not in the Judeao-Christian concept of the term.

Muslims have a day of congregational prayer (Salat al-Jumah) on Friday. In Muslim countries, shops are closed during Salat al-Jumah, and later reopened. Work is permitted as usual before and after the time of Friday prayer. Friday has not been prescribed as a day of rest but rather of obligatory worship.

Q. Can Muslims pray in congregation at any other time?

A. Yes. Muslims may pray in congregation during any of the five daily periods of prayer, or they may pray individually. It is preferable to pray in congregation.

Q. Are there Muslim priests or ministers?

A. Not in the Christian sense. There are leaders of prayer who are called imams who are chosen by the community because of their attributes and knowledge of the Quran. Muslims in Iran and central Asia give the general title of Mullah to Islamic religious practitioners, scholars and dignitaries. They have other titles for senior religious leaders.

Q. Are there levels or degrees of Muslims?

A. Generally no. The Quran teaches that all men are equal. In Shia Islam and some other sects that may not be the case. Many of their adherents revere their religious leaders. There are hierarchies of religious leaders in Shia Islam.

Q. Are Muslim men allowed more than one wife?

A. Yes, the Quran states that a man may have up to four wives, if they can be provided for in all ways equitably. Monogamy is most common.

Q. What is a mosque?

A. A mosque which can also be called a masjid, is a place for congregational worship.

Q. Which is the correct term, Moslem or Muslim?

A. Muslim is more correct because there is no short vowel "o" in the Arabic language.

Q. What is the Sunnah?

A. Sunnah denotes the written work containing the model behavior of the Prophet Muhammed and the practices he endorsed and the precedents he set.

Q. What are the major Islamic holy days?

A. There are two major holy days. (1) Id al-Fitr celebrates the end of the month of fasting during Ramadan and is usually 3 to 4 days in duration, and (2) Id al-Adha which celebrated the end of the pilgrimage in Mecca and is usually three days in duration.

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