

The Beliefs and Practices of Islam

Session 3

The Sharia and Sects of Islam (may cover)

1. Muhammad the Warner:

When Muhammad started proclaiming his message in Mecca, the Quran describes Muhammad as being sent by Allah as a warner, who had been given an “Arabic Quran”. Muhammad said he was called to be a prophet to the Arabs, a people who had never had a prophet or a Book like the Jews and Christians. Only later did the Quran begin to declare Muhammad to be a prophet for all mankind, and finally, the “seal of the prophets”, the final prophet and fulfillment of all other prophets who came before him. From being a monotheistic religion sent to Arabs to turn them from paganism, Islam now declared itself to be the true religion for all men.

It is extremely important for Christians to note that Muhammad taught that the religion he was proclaiming was **not a new religion, but rather the original religion God had given man, and the same one that Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus had also followed. He said he was calling men back to the true religion of Abraham, which he explained, was for man to blindly submit to the will of Allah, just as a slave does to his master.**

Some people have wondered, what is it that draws people to believe in Islam? What can the appeal be of a religion that would make someone believe they are pleasing God in flying a jet plane into a building, hoping to kill 60,000 people? The answer to that lies in the fact that all religion, outside of the gospel of Jesus Christ, has salvation through works as its foundation. Man tries to please God, or earn salvation, through his own efforts and works. The difference between the gospel of Christ and every other religion is that in Christ, God is the One who reaches out to save us. He purchased our salvation with His own blood on the cross, and He offers salvation to us as a gift we can only freely receive. The truth is, we will never earn our salvation, or even begin to please God, through our own works and efforts. The Bible says that “all our righteousness is as filthy rags in the sight of God”. But the spiritually darkened heart of man will always seek to get God to accept him on his own terms.

Islam is the religion of works ‘par excellence’, and its deep appeal is to the religious desire in man to gain salvation through his own works. Its beliefs are simplistic and logical, and through its teachings and rituals and practices it instills a sense of righteous superiority. **Islam has always been a religion of orthopraxy, that is, it puts more emphasis on correct outward practice than on a correct inward state.**

2. The Articles of Faith and Pillars of Islam:

We can compare Islam to a tree. Underground and unseen, are the roots of the tree, which is the Iman, the Faith, or beliefs of a Muslim. These beliefs have been spelled out in what are known as the six Articles of Faith. Above ground and visible, are the tree’s trunk and the branches, the outward “Islam”, or submission to Allah, which is expressed in the rituals and practices of the five pillars of Islam. As a natural tree produces fruit, so a Muslim who believes in the six Articles of Faith and who performs the ritual practices of the five pillars, is believed to produce the fruit of merit, or favor with God.

Briefly stated, **the six articles of faith** are,

1. A belief in God (Allah in Arabic)
2. A belief in God's Holy Books or scriptures
3. A belief in the Prophets or Messengers of God
4. A belief in angels
5. A belief in the Day of Judgment
6. A belief in Predestination.

The five pillars of Islam are

1. Shahadah - the profession of faith in God and Muhammad,
2. Salat - the daily prayers five times a day
3. Hajj - making the pilgrimage to Mecca once in one's lifetime.
4. Sawm - fasting during the month of Ramadan, and
5. Zakat - the giving of a percent of one's wealth to charity,

Clearly, all the pillars of Islam can be performed by someone whose heart is black and full of sin, but still it is believed that the outward performance of the five pillars will bring merit to the one who does them.

1) The first article of faith is to believe in Allah (Arabic word of God)

Allah is one and he is explicitly only one. He has no partner or equal, and the Trinity is expressly denied in the Quran. **The gravest sin in Islam is called "shirk" in Arabic, which means to associate anyone or anything with God. This is what Muslims believe Christians are guilty of, when they claim that Jesus Christ is God.**

Allah is believed to be everywhere, yet he is separate from his creation, which he spoke into existence, the same thing which Christians also believe. God is orderly, and the universe he created is orderly.

The Transcendence of Allah

Allah is considered to be completely unknowable to man, he is the great Other. When Muslims describe Allah, they will usually do it in negatives, by saying, he is not like this or he is not like that.

He is a God whose qualities, when terms like merciful and compassionate are used, mean quite different things than when the same terms are applied to men. The theologian Ibn-Hazm, observed: "While the Quran uses the name Allah, which means 'the most merciful of those who show mercy', this cannot mean that he is merciful in the way we understand the word, for Allah is evidently not merciful. He tortures his children with all manner of sicknesses, warfare and sorrow. What then does the Quran mean? Simply that 'merciful' is one of Allah's names. A name that is not in any way descriptive of Allah or meant to throw light on his nature. We must use it because the Quran uses it, but not pretend to understand what is meant by it". He went on to say, "The word originally used in the Quran must have had a different meaning in that day, which we cannot really understand today. Nevertheless, we must continue to use the word, because we cannot change the words of the Quran".

The important Muslim theologian Al-Ghazzali said: "Love is to sense a need of the beloved and since Allah cannot be said to have a need or an experience of a need, it is therefore impossible that Allah should love".

The Relationship of Allah to His worshipers:

While Allah is said to be as close to a man as his jugular vein, this does not mean in an intimate, relational sense. A Pakistani Muslim lady who became a Christian, later wrote a book about her life, titled “I Dared to Call Him Father”. No Muslim will ever claim that, in fact to say so is considered blasphemy. Muhammad never said he had revealed God, but rather that he was revealing the will of God. What a difference is there in the revelation of Jesus, who said (in John 14:9) “He who has seen me has seen the Father”.

Allah’s will is all powerful, and there’s nothing any man can do to change it. Allah is very arbitrary in his actions, and his will is basically right by might. At the judgment day, “if Allah wills” a man will be saved, because Allah is not required to save the righteous or to condemn the unrighteous. The Quran also talks about how Allah makes a person deceived, which no one can overcome (in Surah 32:13).

In Christianity, God is described as Love, in a word summing up His overall character. In Islam, the best word to describe Allah would be to say that he is Power. Allah rules over men with absolute control, and man’s duty is to blindly submit and resign himself to the will of Allah.

2) The second article of faith for Muslims, is to believe in the Holy Books, or revealed Scriptures

This mainly means the Quran, which is considered to be the final Word of God. Muslims believe it has surpassed all other revelations, and it is believed the Quran is all sufficient in itself. Muslims believe there were other revelations given before Mohammad, such as the Torah, Zabur, and Injil, (meaning the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the Gospels), which is how Muslims describe the Old and New Testaments, but the popular belief is that the Bible has been corrupted by Jews and Christians, and so it is no longer a valid revelation.

Muslims believe that there is a divine, eternal Quran in heaven, called Umm Kitab, the Mother of the Book. This eternal Quran, or “divine revelation”, was revealed bit by bit to Muhammad over twenty two years by the angel Gabriel. The Muslim view of inspiration is that Muhammad was basically like a typewriter that God used to type out his message. They believe that nothing in the Quran came from Muhammad or was in any way influenced by Muhammad. This differs from the Christian view of inspiration, which says that God directed the writers of the Bible by His Holy Spirit in what they wrote, but they expressed the burden of His Word through their own personalities and in their own styles of writing.

Although the style and personality of Muhammad and, indeed, the limited knowledge he had, are clearly obvious in the Quran, Muslims deny that he had any part in it, and proudly feel their concept of inspiration is superior to that of the Jewish and Christian scriptures.

The Quran was specifically given in Arabic, and Muslims believe it cannot really be translated into another language. Although there have been translations of the Quran into over 125 languages, these are regarded as mere paraphrases, and are not valid

translations that can be used for ritual purpose. Even in countries where other languages are spoken, the Quran is always recited in Arabic. The language of the Quran is regarded as surpassing anything that can be written in Arabic. To imitate the style of the Quran is a sacrilege.

Muslims also believe the Quran is the purest form of Arabic, with no loan words from other languages, but it has been proven that many words like Injil, Torat, Satan, the words "to believe", prayer and others are directly taken from Hebrew and Syriac and other languages.

The Quran generally appears as the speech of God, who mostly speaks in the first person plural, "we". When the prophet Muhammad is speaking, his words are introduced by the command, "Say," thus emphasizing that he is speaking only because God has told him to do so.

The concept or the doctrine of Abrogation:

An important concept in the Quranic revelation is called *nasikh*, which means abrogation. As Surah 2:106 says, 'None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause it to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: knowest thou that God has power over all things?' **Abrogation means that when Allah gives a command or revelation differing from a previously given command or revelation, then the earlier verse is cancelled out and annulled, even though it is still kept in the Quran.** For example, an early verse in the Quran permitted the Muslims to drink wine, but this was later cancelled out after a scandal in which Muhammad's uncle turned up drunk at prayers, and Muhammad then had a revelation forbidding Muslims to drink wine. The direction to face when praying was also changed in this way from Jerusalem to Mecca. And again, another verse, in which Muhammad declared there is no compulsion in religion, was later overruled by verses calling on Muslims to fight against unbelievers and to subdue them. Some verses are even given, that claim to abrogate earlier Quranic verses not found in the Quran.

History of Quran:

The Quran began to be revealed to Muhammad when he was forty years old, in 610 AD, and revelations continued coming until he died twenty two years later, in 632 AD. During his lifetime, he would repeat the revelations he received to his followers, and they would memorize them, and in some cases write them down on various things like stones and leaves and pieces of leather.

The year after Muhammad's death, when the caliph Abu Bakr was putting down the rebellions of apostasizing Arab tribes, a battle occurred at modern-day Riyadh in a place called Yamamah. In the battle, a number of *qurra*, or those who knew the Quran by heart, were killed. The fear arose that the knowledge of the Quran might completely disappear once all those who knew the Quran had died. Abu Bakr decided to collect the revelations from all available sources and put them into writing, and he commissioned a young man named Zaid to do this.

Zaid compiled a copy, which he gave to Abu Bakr. This copy seems to have been just one of many that were eventually made, not all of them agreeing with each other. It

was kept as a personal Quran of Abu Bakr and was then passed on to the next caliph, Umar, who gave it to his daughter, Hafsa, who kept it in safekeeping under her bed.

After Umar's death, Uthman became caliph. He wanted to strengthen central control over the growing Muslim empire and he placed his family in positions of authority throughout the empire. There was a growing discontentment with his cronyism and he faced numerous rebellions. One source of competing authority to his, were the qurras, the men who knew the Quran by heart, who were influential in the various centers of the Islamic empire, such as Basra and Damascus. These qurras, some of whom were considered the best sources for an authentic Quran, had compiled their own written Qurans, which were popular in each center. These Qurans also contained numerous differences with each other and the Quran of Abu Bakr.

To deal a blow to this threat to his authority, Uthman called for the Quran under the bed of Hafsa, and told Zaid to correct and update the copy he had made for Abu Bakr. Uthman then made copies of this revised text and sent it to every region, ordering Muslims to burn every other Quran and to use only his version from then on.

Muslims nowadays say the textual differences were only matters of dialect, explaining "it was decided that in case of doubt about the pronunciation, the dialect of Quraysh, the Prophet's tribe, was to be given preference". But since written Arabic of that time had only consonants and no vowels, pronunciation would not be a part of the text. The variant Qurans were destroyed, but records by several Muslim scholars were kept which list hundreds of differences. This official version of Uthman's was also seen later to have verses missing (for example what are known as the "stoning verses"), but since the canon was officially closed, they weren't added in. Uthman was murdered soon after by angry Muslims.

The Anatomy of the Quran (structure and organization):

The Quran is organized into 114 surahs, or chapters, and is about the size of the New Testament in length. The surahs are not organized by chronology or subject matter, but rather by size. The suras are unequal in length, and the Quran has been arranged generally so that longest surahs are placed first, and the shortest are placed last. Since the suras revealed at the beginning of Muhammad's career were generally shorter in length, while the ones revealed in the later period at Medina were longer, the effect is that the Quranic chapters are generally sorted in a reverse chronological order. It should be said though, that a number of suras contain both Meccan and Medinan passages placed in a generally incoherent mix.

Every sura has

- 1) A title taken from the conspicuous words in the sura (like "The Cow, Spoils of War, Joseph" etc.)
- 2) The bismillah; or formula-prayer "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate
- 3) An indication of whether the surah was revealed at Mecca or at Medina, and the number of the surah's verses.

The verses in the Quran are called ayat (literally meaning "signs") and also vary considerably in length. The shortest verses generally occur in the earliest surahs, in which the style of Muhammad's revelation comes very close to the rhymed prose used by the poets and soothsayers of his time.

The Quran does not give the appearance of a planned, organized, or systematic work, an impression that is further heightened by the fact that certain favorite phrases such as "but God is forgiving, compassionate," or "God is knowing, wise," or "most of them know nothing" are put in, often with little or no apparent connection with the immediate context. Some skeptics claim that these additions served only to produce a needed rhyme.

Influences on the Quran and the content of the Quran

Though claiming to be free from any influence apart from the eternal Word of Allah in heaven, the Quran is filled with references and analogies to the daily life and circumstances found among seventh century Arab Bedouins and those living then in commercial towns like Mecca. Many images were drawn from contemporary business transactions, from life in the desert, from caravan trade, and from the widespread slavery that existed, among others. Much of the narrative material in the Quran concerning biblical persons and events, **differs markedly from the Bible and seems to have come from later Christian apocrypha circulating, and, above all, from Jewish sources like the Talmud, the Midrash and the Mishna with their fables & folklore.**

The Story of Abraham:

The Quran relates a story of Abraham, in which he challenges his father and his townspeople about the worship of idols they had made. When they refused to listen to him, Abraham waited until they had gone, and then smashed all their idols, except the biggest one, into whose hands he placed a hammer. When they returned and accused him of breaking the idols, Abraham explained that the biggest idol had done it. They responded, "you know the idol is not able to do something like that", at which Abraham rebuked them, saying "why then do you believe in such idols?". This non-biblical story is almost exactly like a story that was circulating in the Jewish Midrash Rabbah.

The Story of Cain & Abel:

A number of other stories similarly are told in the Quran, such as a tale about Cain and Abel in which Cain buries his murdered brother Abel, after watching a raven scratch in the ground. The moral of the whole story seems to be, that this is how the custom of burying the dead in the ground was established, and no indication is given of any moral significance behind why Abel's offering was accepted while Cain's was rejected. This tale was also very similar to a story being told in the Midrash.

The Quran also says that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was raised in a small room in the Temple at Jerusalem, where she was fed miraculously by angels. This story comes from an apocryphal work, "The Protevangelium of James the Less" which was written in the second or third century AD. When Jesus was a small boy, the Quran also says, he playfully made birds out of clay that flew

miraculously away. This comes straight out of the “Infancy Gospel of Thomas” which dates from the mid-second century.

Muhammad’s understanding of Bible stories seems to have come from conversations with people telling him stories, and not from having directly read the stories himself. Bible stories are told in the Quran in a mixed up way, usually with no moral point, and the stories themselves even develop as they are further retold in the Quran, showing Muhammad’s improvement in knowledge of the Bible stories.

For example, the story of Lot and Sodom is told four times in the Quran. The earliest version mentions his escape from destruction, and says only that “an old woman was left behind”(Surah 26:160-175; 37:135). In the next version, the fact that it was the wife of Lot who was left behind is mentioned (Surah 27:54-58). In the third telling of the story (Surah 15:51-77), the angels sent to Lot announce their mission at the beginning of their introduction to Lot. It seems strange, then, that Lot, knowing these men were angels, would afterwards offer his daughters to the pressing crowd of Sodomites. But finally, in the fourth retelling, Muhammad begins to get things right, and this time it is only after Lot has offered his daughters to the crowd, that the angels reveal who they really are (Surah 11:74-85).

Muhammad mixed up many things he heard, confusing elements of one story with another. For example in the Quran, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is said to be ‘the sister of Aaron’ and ‘the daughter of Imran’. This is a confusion of Mary with Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron in the Old Testament, whose father’s name in the Bible is Amran, or Imran in Arabic. Muslims try to explain that ‘sister of Aaron’ meant she was just a descendant of Aaron, but the Bible says that Mary was a descendant of David from the tribe of Judah, and not of the line of Levi as was Aaron. In Arabic, both Mary and Miriam are the same name, Maryam. By giving Imran, the father of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam as the name of Mary’s father, the confusion Muhammad had is clearly revealed.

The Satanic Verses:

Mentioned here can be made of the so-called Satanic Verses, which most Muslims know about, but try to deny. These occurred in the early period when Muhammad was preaching in Mecca, after persecution against him had started. Because of the persecution, some of the followers of Muhammad had left Mecca and gone to nearby Abyssinia, or Ethiopia. Muhammad remained in Mecca, seeking to convert the Meccans. **His desire was so strong to win them over to his cause, that one day, as Muslims and non-Muslims were together at the Kaaba, he gave a new Quranic revelation saying, “have you thought about al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Munat? These are the exalted ones and their intercession is expected.”** Al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Munat were the three goddess daughters of Allah worshipped in Mecca, who it was believed had the power of intercession with Allah. What Muhammad was saying, by supposed divine inspiration, was that Allah wanted the Meccans to worship and honor these goddesses and to seek their intercession with him. After Muhammad had spoken, the hadith (in Bukhari 6:385) says all the pagan Meccans bowed down

together with the Muslims and worshiped. They worshipped because he had agreed with their pagan religion.

Later, Gabriel came to Muhammad and said “What did you do? You have brought forth something I did not bring you from Allah.” Muhammad then admitted that Satan had inspired him, not Allah. Gabriel annulled the offending verses and substituted other verses, which are now in Surah 53:19-23.

Muslims today try to strenuously deny that this ever occurred, but there are a good number of mentions made to it by very early Muslim historians, as well as Quranic (sura 22:52) and hadith references that don’t make any sense apart from the story being true. Above everything else is the fact that this story was reported on by the early Muslims themselves numerous times, and didn’t come from outsiders seeking to attack Islam.

The importance of Geography in the Quran:

As has been mentioned already, there is a marked division in the style and length and subject matter of the Quranic materials, between the Meccan and Medinan periods. **The Meccan period, which lasted from 610 – 622 AD, was a period of preaching in Mecca, with growing opposition.** The revelations Muhammad had then were usually shorter in length and very poetic, and contained more doctrine and theology. **At Medina, in the period from 622 – 632, Muhammad changed from a prophet into a prince, and the Quranic messages confirm him as the leader and political authority of the Muslims.** The verses given then tend to be longer and more rambling, dealing with rules for the Muslim community and legal matters. In the Medinan passages, the Quran also gives a number of personal defenses of Muhammad, because of questions arising about his life and actions.

The overall subject matter of the Quran is not history, in fact, the Quran hardly gives any historical background at all to the suras. The background for these usually comes from the hadith, the collected traditions of what Muhammad said and did. The subject matter of the Quran is also not systematic theology. This was something carried out by later Islamic scholars.

But the Quranic material is mainly a collection of warnings, discourses, allegorical sayings, and formulas for worship and prayer. It is Allah’s call for all men to repent and worship Allah, and it clarifies man’s duties for personal and social life. The absolute oneness of God’s nature is emphasized, and the means of salvation is expressed in essence as, “believe in Allah, and in Muhammad as his prophet, and do what God requires. And if Allah wills, he will accept you.”

Some Teachings of the Quran

The Fall of Satan?

The Quran teaches that in the beginning, God created the angels from light. Afterwards man was created, from clay, and a separate race of beings called the jinn were created from fire. When God had finished creating them, he gave the command for all the angels and jinn to bow down and worship man. Iblis,

or Satan, who was one of the jinn, refused, saying “I was created from better stuff than man was, why should I worship him?” Allah then cursed Satan and cast him out of paradise. In this way Satan became the enemy and seducer of mankind. He is now the head of all demons and evil jinn.

The Fall of Adam?

When Adam disobeyed God in the garden, the Quran says that God forgave his sin, without any need for a sacrifice. In fact, Islam says God does not ever need a sacrifice to be made for sin in order to forgive. Muslims do not believe that Adam’s sin resulted in the fall of man, as Christians do, **they believe it just affected him alone**. They believe that all men born afterwards are born Muslims, but are then led astray by their parents to be Christian, Jewish or whatever.

Concerning the Lord Jesus Christ:

The Quran denies that Jesus Christ is God, saying that God created Him with his word, meaning in the same sense that he created Adam. The Quran does give Jesus interesting titles, such as a “word from him” and “the spirit of God” and He is even called the Messiah without any understanding of the divine implications in the term.

There is some confusion in the Quranic descriptions of Jesus, for example in Surah 4:171 Jesus is called “His Word”, meaning God’s word, and not just a word from Him, and yet the same passage expressly denies the Trinity.

The Quran teaches that Jesus did not die and He was not crucified, but rather, God made it only seem to them that it was Jesus. God then took Jesus directly to heaven. At the end of time, Al Dajjal, the antichrist, will come, and many Muslims believe that Jesus will return to earth then and defeat the AntiChrist, and rebuke the Christians for worshiping Him. Jesus will then marry and have children and die, and be buried next to Muhammad. After that the end will come.

Finally, for Muslims, the Quran is revered as the Word of God, and even the physical book is held in great honor and esteem. A Muslim will wash his hands before handling the Quran, and place the Quran in a high place in his house, or on a special stand made just for the Quran. To show disrespect in any way for the physical Quran is the same as showing disrespect for God.

3) The third article of the Six Articles of Faith is to believe in the prophets or messengers God has sent, especially Muhammad

Muslims believe God has sent prophets to every people. According to tradition, there have been one hundred forty-four thousand prophets, and about twenty five are specifically named in the Quran. Jesus is mentioned ninety three times in the Quran. But the final and greatest prophet is Muhammad.

The prophets were men specially selected by God to be his messengers. They are not all equal in importance, with some being particularly outstanding in their qualities of patience under trial. Abraham, Noah, Moses, and Jesus are considered to be such great prophets. As vindication of the truth of their mission, God often gave them

authority to perform miracles: Abraham was saved from fire, Noah from the flood, and Moses from Pharaoh. Not only was Jesus born of the Virgin Mary according to the Quran, but God also saved him from crucifixion at the hands of the Jews. **This conviction that God's messengers are ultimately vindicated and saved is a central part of the Quranic doctrine, and helps to explain the Islamic rejection of the crucifixion of Jesus.** For Muslims, to believe in the crucifixion is to say that God failed to protect and deliver His honored servant.

The prophets were only human and simply recipients of revelation from God. Special prophets received “books” or written revelations, and included within that group is Jesus. The Muslims believe God delivered a book to Jesus, which is called the Injil. The word Injil actually comes from the Greek word evangel, which means “good news”. The actual “good news” is that Jesus came and died for our sins, but Muslims understand the Injil to be a book of Islamic laws and teachings that pointed ahead to Muhammad.

According to the Quran, Muhammad never did miracles like other prophets, and the only miracle he did was to produce the Quran, the like of which, it is said, no human being can produce. In a reverse kind of way, Muslims say that having no miracles shows Muhammad’s superiority, because he didn’t need such things to prove the truth of his message, as if doing miracles were somehow a sign of weak theology. Soon after Muhammad’s death, however, many miracles came to be attributed to him, although this flies in the face of the Quran’s denial of them. Muslims believe all the prophets were sinless, at least after they became prophets. The Quran, however, while it says that Jesus was sinless, never declares that about anyone else, including Muhammad.

4) The fourth article of faith is to believe in angels

Angels are important in Islam. They are said to be created from light and are incapable of rebellion against God’s will. There are an unknown number of angels, and they hold different ranks and responsibilities. Four hold up the throne of God. Some angels mentioned in the Quran are Gabriel, who is the agent of divine revelation, and who brought the Quran to Muhammad, Mikael, who brings God’s prosperity to man, Izrail, the angel of death, Israfil, who will blow the trumpet on the last day, Malik, the angel supervising Hell, and Radwan, who is responsible for Paradise. Two black and blue angels are encountered shortly after death, Munkar and Nakir, who question the newly dead about their lives.

5) The fifth article of faith is to believe in the Day of Judgment

Muslims believe on the last day, the Day of Judgment, a trumpet will be blown, and all the dead will be resurrected, and a judgment pronounced on each person according to his deeds. Sura 21:47 says, “We shall set up scales of justice for the Day of Judgment so that not a soul will be dealt with unjustly in the least. And if there be (no more than) the weight of a mustard seed We will bring it (to account): and enough are We to take account.” Each man’s deeds will be weighed in the balance, his good deeds on one side, his bad deeds on the other. As on a scale, the bad deeds and good deeds will cancel each other out. Those whose bad deeds outweigh the good will go to hell fire, while those whose deeds tip on the positive side will go on to paradise. Until

that final day, however, no man can know his eternal fate. While he lives, no one has an idea where the balance stands, so he must strive to build up merit which will go to the positive side of his account.

But there is no assurance, no real security, in such a religion based on man's works. The caliph Abu Bakr, the friend of Muhammad, was told by Muhammad that he was one of ten that Muhammad had seen who would be guaranteed paradise. **But Abu Bakr is said to have stated, "If one of my feet were inside paradise, and the other one were still out, I would not yet trust the cunning of Allah."** He was nicknamed the "crying man" because he would continually cry as he prayed. When asked about this one time, his answer was "Every time I start to pray I imagine Allah standing in front of me and the king of death behind me, the paradise to my right, and the hell to my left side, and I do not know what my God is going to do to me."

According to strict Quranic doctrine, on Judgment Day there will be no intercession allowed or accepted, though God may, in His mercy, forgive certain sinners. Muslims, have, however, through later traditions, come to believe that Muhammad and the angels will intercede for them at the end. Most Muslims today have a belief in something like the Catholic purgatory, where the unrighteous Muslim will suffer for a while, and then be taken to paradise. There is no mention of this in the Quran, however.

Paradise is described in the Quran as a sensual place, where every man will have many houris, beautiful perpetual virgins, and be able to eat and drink wine to the full, resting on couches forever beside flowing streams of water.

While it is true the Quran gives no assurance of paradise to men, there is one important exception. The Quran says that those who die in jihad, or holy war in Allah's cause, are taken directly to paradise without facing any judgment. Throughout Islam's history, this has been a powerful incentive to many Muslims, like the 9/11 attackers, to partake in suicidal attacks in the name of Islam, believing in this way they will be definitely assured of paradise.

6) The sixth article of faith is to believe in Predestination

God has knowledge of all that has and will happen, all that has taken place and is yet to take place. Whatever He wills shall happen, and whatever He wills not, shall not. Muslims believe each man's fate is written already in heaven.

Damnation and salvation are equally predetermined: Surah 35:8 says "Allah leaves to stray whom he willeth, and guideth whom he willeth". As for those whom Allah leaves astray, the Quran states that "for them there will be no helpers", Surah 30:29. Allah has already decided that many will fail. Surah 32:13 says, "If We had so willed We could certainly cause proper guidance to come to every soul, but true is My saying 'assuredly I shall fill hell' ".

The hadith tells a story about when Allah was creating Adam from clay, and he took a handful of clay from Adams back and threw it to one side, saying "This part shall go to paradise, and I care not." He then took another handful out and threw it to the other side, saying, "This part shall go to hell, and I care not." **The meaning is, that Allah**

has prejudged and predestined the descendants of Adam for either heaven or hell, and he does not feel emotions one way or the other, about the outcome.

So far, we have talked about the six basic Articles of Faith which a Muslim must accept, the beliefs which are like the unseen roots of a tree. Now we will look at the external forms, the root and branches of the tree, of a Muslim's Islam, or submission to God. These basic practices, or rituals, developed over time in the early years of Islam after Muhammad, into what are known as the Five Pillars of Islam.

1) The first pillar is the Shahada, or confession of faith

This confession states: "There is no God but Allah; and Muhammad is His prophet". To repeat this profession of faith with intention, is what establishes one's conversion to Islam. From this fundamental profession and its belief are derived all the six fundamental Articles of Faith, for to accept Muhammad as the Prophet of God is to accept his teachings as true.

2) The second pillar of Islam is Salat, the ritual prayers said five times daily by Muslims

The first prayer is performed before sunrise, the second just after noon, the third in the later afternoon, the fourth immediately after sunset, and the fifth before retiring to bed. Before prayer, ablutions, which include the washing of the hands, the face, and the feet, in a certain prescribed way, are performed. The call for prayer is given from a raised place such as a minaret in the mosque. When prayer starts, the imam, or leader of the prayer, stands in the front, facing in the direction of Mecca, and the congregation stands behind him in rows, following him in the various postures. Each prayer consists of different units of standing, bending, and prostrating, with the same words being repeated at the same points, every day. At the end of the prayers, the Muslim turns to greet the angels on his right and left side.

Prayers are always in Arabic; often though many of the world's Muslims don't speak or understand Arabic, because the very act of doing it in Arabic is meritorious. Women pray at home usually, though in some lands they are allowed to pray in a separate part of the mosque. Strictly speaking, the five daily prayers cannot be abandoned, even by the sick, who may pray in bed and, if necessary, lying down. In practice, however, much negligence has occurred, particularly in modern times.

Special congregational prayers with a sermon, at the mosque, are offered on Friday in place of the prayers just after noon, and these Friday prayers, somewhat equivalent to Christian Sunday morning services, are usually well attended.

3) The third pillar is the giving to charity called Zakat

Zakat means purification, and the idea is that giving from one's wealth to charity makes one's wealth religiously pure. The amount given is about two and a half percent of one's earnings, and can be given to the poor, but it can also be given to one's relatives or even one's parents. It can also be used to support jihad, according to Surah 9:60. Many Muslims make their annual zakat donations during the month of Ramadan.

When charity is given to beggars, they will usually receive it without expressing thanks and gratefulness, lest they take away from the reward of merit due to the giver. The central motive, in this as well as in the other pillars of Islam, is a desire for merit that will be accounted to one's favor at the judgment.

4) The fourth pillar is Sawm, the fasting during the Islamic month of Ramadan

The Islamic calendar is a lunar one, so for every year in the western calendar, the Islamic months occur about ten days earlier than the previous year. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic year, and during Ramadan all Muslims are required to fast from sunrise to sunset. They may not eat, drink, smoke, or have sexual relations during the daylight hours, starting in the morning when one can discern a white thread from a black thread, and ending when one can no longer see the difference. The month begins when religious authorities sight the new moon (and so it can vary from country to country by a day or so), and it ends with the sighting of next new moon.

Although it is a time of fasting, more money is actually spent on food during this time than during the other months of the year. When the daily fast is over, families gather for special meals, with an abundance of food. Early the next morning, before the start of the day's fast, the Muslims will eat another meal. This is not to say the fast is not difficult, especially in those years when Ramadan occurs in the summer months, and in those places like the Middle East, where it is very hot.

During Ramadan there is noticeably more irritability and quarrels than normal. It is also a time when religious sensibilities are heightened and emphasized, and young women and girls who do not normally cover their heads, for example, will do so during Ramadan. This is the most difficult time for new converts to Christianity, especially in Muslim lands, because of the strong peer pressure to conform, and the difficulty of hiding the fact that one is not fasting. As in the other pillars of Islam, the motive for fasting is to gain righteous merit before God.

During Ramadan, Muslims are encouraged to read through the whole Quran, and it has been divided into sections just for this purpose. About the twenty seventh day of Ramadan, the Night of Power, or "Laylat al Qadr" occurs. This is supposed to be the night the Quran first came down to Muhammad, and Muslims believe on this night Allah will decide every man's fate for the coming year. Extra prayers are made that night seeking God's mercy. At the end of Ramadan is a festival called Id al Fitr, or the lesser feast. Families celebrate with feasting, and there is a special prayer and preaching at the mosque then.

5) The fifth pillar of Islam is the Hajj, the pilgrimage to the Kaaba in Mecca

The pre-Islamic pagan Arabs of Mecca had an annual period of three months when pilgrimage was made by Arabs from all over central Arabia to the religious center in Mecca, called the Kaaba. The Kaaba, or cube as the word means, is a square like structure which contained over three hundred idols in the time of Muhammad. The Arabs coming on pilgrimage would circle the Kaabah seven times, and kiss a large black stone which is in one corner of the Kaabah. Then there was a running between two nearby hills, which had pagan meanings, and a throwing of stones by the pilgrims

at a stone representing the devil. Finally the Kaaba was circled again. When Muhammad conquered Mecca, he removed the idols from within the Kaabah, but almost wholesale, he incorporated the basic rites of the pagan pilgrimage into Islam, saying that the Kaaba had originally been a center of worship built by Adam, and then rebuilt by Abraham and Ishmael after it was destroyed in Noah's flood. Outside of Muhammad's declaring this, however, there is no pre-Islamic historical record of Abraham ever doing this.

The pilgrimage, or hajj, occurs on the last month of the Muslim calendar, and lasts for about five days. At the end of the hajj, a festival called the Id al Adha, or Feast of Sacrifice occurs, when the pilgrims, as well as Muslims all over the world, sacrifice animals in remembrance of when Abraham is said to have offered up Ishmael (not Isaac) as a sacrifice in obedience to God. All Muslims are enjoined to make the pilgrimage at least once in their lives if they can afford to, and those who do it are given extra respect..

3. Sharia Law

In Christianity, the central focus is on the Savior, and on man's redemption through having faith in that Savior and His sacrifice for our sins. In Islam, the central focus is placed upon man's total and unqualified submission to the will of Allah.

An important idea in Islamic thought is a word called Tawhid, or unity. In Islam, all of life is seen as a unity, and every aspect of it comes under Allah's control. In the west, we separate church and state, and compartmentalize our lives between the religious and the secular. **But in Islam this is seen as a false separation, and politics, business, and all the aspects of social life are supposed to be as much under the control and influence of Islam as the religious practices of the Five Pillars are.**

Islamic law is called Sharia, which literally means, "the path leading to the watering place", and it is the center of all Muslim religion and society. Sharia law is the expression of Allah's command, and its rules and decrees are given to guide every aspect of a Muslim's conduct.

Development of Sharia Law:

The legal code of law and ethics known as Sharia law slowly developed over the early centuries of Muslim history. After Muhammad died, the beginning of Islam's outward expansion began. With the Quran now complete and no one else who would arise as a prophet, where was the Muslim community to find guidance for the new circumstances it found itself in?

The Quran sets out some basic standards of conduct. But the Qur'an is in no sense a comprehensive legal code. In the whole Quran, no more than eighty verses deal with strictly legal matters; and while these verses covered a number of topics and introduced some new rules, their general effect was simply to modify existing Arab law.

During his lifetime Muhammad had resolved legal problems as they came up, by interpreting and expanding the general provisions of the Quran, and the same improvising activity was carried on after his death by the early caliphs.

But with the foundation of the Umayyid dynasty in 661, governing from Damascus over a vast military empire, a legal development of much broader dimensions came into being. With the appointment of judges, called qadi (Judge in Arabic), to the various provinces and districts, an organized judicial system began. But with no clear guide for these judges to go by in their new circumstances, many elements and institutions of former Byzantine and Persian law were soon absorbed into Islamic legal practice inside the conquered territories. In the 700s, a number of scholars began to openly debate whether the Umayyid empire was properly implementing laws and rules according to the ethic of Islam. The Abbasids, who overthrew the Umayyid dynasty in the mid 700's, received widespread popular support for their rebellion, in large part by promising to return to Islamic principles. After coming to power, the Abbasids began to support the development of schools of judicial thought, to develop a legal code that would be in proper agreement with Islamic principles, known as Sharia Law.

Sources of Sharia Law

The first and most important source of law was, of course, the Quran. There were two main schools of thought that developed in the beginning. One, more liberal, felt that the Quran was authoritative, but that when it came to matters outside of the Quran, people could use their own human reasoning to decide what was going to be binding or not. The other, more traditional group, felt that following human reasoning was too dangerous, and it said **that Sharia law could only be established through following the Quran and the sunna, or example of Muhammad's life, as revealed in the traditions of his words and acts known as the hadith.** The second group dominated, and as a result, there was a great effort to collect and classify these traditions of Muhammad's words and actions.

The word hadith, means "a report". From very early on, Muhammad had been viewed as the ideal for a Muslim to follow, and the Quran itself even says in Surah 33:21, "Verily in the messenger of Allah you have a good example". During his lifetime, writing down his sayings and acts was discouraged by Muhammad, lest they be confused with the Quran, but his disapproval of the practice shows that it did exist. After his death, many more hadith, or stories about him, were written and circulated. Many were unauthentic, and as the hadith grew in importance for the Muslims, many were written just to prove a point or to establish the position of this or that group.

A science of hadith came into being, to sort through the hundreds of thousands of stories eventually written within the first two hundred years after Muhammad, to establish which ones were authentic and which were not. **The methodology used was to follow the chain of links reporting the hadith.** For example, a hadith may start: Al-Hakim reported from Muhammad ibn Musab who informed us that Al-Awzai on the authority of Shaddad Abu Ammar on the authority of Umm Al-Fadl bint Al-Harith, said: and then would come the story. If the links of the reporters in the chain were seen to be trustworthy, and the people involved in the links were known to have been in such a place at such a time so that the story could be true, then it was accepted as authentic.

The major emphasis on accepting a hadith as authentic **was the reliability of the chain of reporters listed**, and not, "was this the sort of thing Muhammad might be imagined to have said or done?" The earliest hadith, written close to the lifetime of Muhammad, normally didn't worry much about who the chain of reporters were, so there is good reason to suspect that many of the hadith with the most articulate and well defined links are unauthentic. It is

clear that many customs found their way into Islam in the form of reputed or alleged traditions of Muhammad, that were just fabricated.

In the mid-800s, the six major collections of hadith which are accepted as authentic were compiled, and the canon was closed. **For Muslims, the hadith are second only to the Quran in authority, and they hold the equivalence for them that the Gospels do for the Christians.** The thousands of hadith cover nearly every imaginable topic from the disposal of a date seed to the crisis of the deathbed, from the manner of ritual washing to the duties of forgiveness, from the physical routines of digestion to the description of the day of judgment.

Here are a few examples of hadith:

The climate of Medina did not suit some people, so the Prophet ordered them to follow his shepherd, that is, his camels, and to drink their milk and urine (as medicine). So they followed the shepherd, that is, the camels and drank their milk and urine till their bodies became healthy. Then they killed the shepherd and drove away the camels. When the news reached the Prophet he sent some people in their pursuit. When they were brought, he cut off their hands and feet and their eyes were branded with hot pieces of iron and they were left away in Harra till they died in that state of theirs.

Allah's Apostle passed by two graves and he heard the voices of two person who were being tortured in their graves. The Prophet said, "These are not being tortured for a major sin. One of them used not to save himself from being soiled with his own urine, and the other used to go about gossiping. The Prophet then asked for a green leaf of a date-palm tree, split it into two pieces and planted one on each grave and said, "May their torture be lessened, till these two pieces of the leaf are dried."

Allah's Apostle said, "If a husband calls his wife to his bed (that is, to have sexual relations) and she refuses and causes him to sleep in anger, the angels will curse her till morning."

Once Allah's Apostle went out to offer the prayer of 'Id-al-Adha. Then he passed by the women and said, "O women! Give alms, as I have seen that the majority of the dwellers of Hell-fire were you (women)." They asked, "Why is it so, O Allah's Apostle?" He replied, "You curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands. I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you." The women asked, "O Allah's Apostle! What is deficient in our intelligence and religion?" He said, "Is not the evidence of two women equal to the witness of one man?" They replied in the affirmative. He said, "This is the deficiency in her intelligence. Isn't it true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her monthly periods?" The women replied in the affirmative. He said, "This is the deficiency in her religion."

The Prophet said, "If anyone of you rouses from sleep and performs the ablution, he should wash his nose by putting water in it and then blowing it out three times, because Satan has stayed in the upper part of his nose all the night."

Allah's Apostle said, "He who eats seven 'Ajwa' dates every morning, will not be affected by poison or magic on the day he eats them."

A missionary, writing about the hadith said:

“The Prophet is caught, as it were, in the ordinary acts of his life - sleeping, eating, mating, praying, dispensing justice, planning expeditions and revenge against his enemies. The picture that emerges is hardly flattering and one is left wondering why in the world it was reported at all, and whether it was done by his friends or his enemies. One is also left to wonder how the believers, generation after generation, could have found the stories so inspiring.

The answer is that the believers are conditioned to look at the whole thing through the eyes of faith. An infidel in his fundamental misguidance may find the Prophet rather sensual and cruel - and certainly many of the things he did, do not conform to ordinary ideas of morality - but the believers look at the whole thing differently. **To them morality derives from the Prophets actions, the moral is whatever he did.** Morality does not determine the Prophets actions, but his actions determine and define morality. Muhammad’s acts were not ordinary acts; they were Allah’s own acts. It was in this way and by this logic that Muhammad’s opinions became the dogmas of Islam and his personal habits and idiosyncrasies became moral imperatives: Allah’s commands for all believers in all ages and climes to follow.”

As Sharia law was being debated and formulating under the Abassids, **four schools of legal thought developed.** The strictest, called Hanbali after its founder, said that the Quran and Hadith were the only guides for a Muslim to follow. But other schools of thought took a broader view, and said that when the Quran and Hadith did not give clear guidance on a matter, then Muslim law could be decided using two other sources. They said the third source for Sharia **law was ijmaa, or consensus**, meaning the accepted consensus of opinions of jurists and scholars on a given matter, and this was based upon belief in hadith which say that the majority Muslim community will never be led astray. The period of the 800s are generally seen as the last period in which authoritative consensus was established, and so ijma has come to be seen as a source of rigidity in judicial thinking. The accepted interpretations of the Qur`an and the hadith all rest finally on the ijma', or consensus of scholars then.

The last source of guidance and laws, for those times when even the Quran, hadith, and consensus were not sufficient to give clear guidance, **was qiyas**, or analogy, which was arrived at by looking at the intention of some rule in the Quran or Hadith. An example of using qiyas, or analogy, would be in forbidding the use of intoxicating drugs in the twentieth century, based on the grounds that the Quran forbids drinking wine, which is also intoxicating.

A couple examples of traditional Sharia law are: the hand of a thief is to be cut off as punishment for his crime, and in a trial of murder, a woman’s testimony will be worth only half the legal value of a man’s.

4. Sects within Islam

Most Christians think of Islam as being one large monolithic religion. But just as there are branches within Christianity, like the Catholics and Protestants, Islam also has its various sects. The two main branches within Islam are the Sunnis and the Shias. Sunnis Muslims are in the majority almost everywhere, except in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon, where the majority are Shias.

The Sunni branch

The term Sunni, comes from sunna, an Arabic word meaning ‘the well trodden path’ or in other words, the customary or traditional way of doing something. The Sunni branch of Islam is the majority, traditional branch.

After Muhammad’s death, the majority of his followers accepted the choice made by the small committee who quickly selected Abu Bakr, Muhammad’s father-in-law and friend, to be their new leader. A sizable number of Muslims, though, called the Shia, or ‘party’ of Ali, wanted Muhammad’s nephew Ali to be caliph, believing that only a direct relative of Muhammad’s should rule Islam. Ali himself felt he should have been chosen, but he finally accepted the majority’s decision. Since he was still young, he knew his time would come.

Ali’s chance finally came when the third caliph, Uthman, was murdered. Ali was then chosen to be caliph, but immediately he had to face rebellions because of doubts about whether he was responsible for Uthman’s death. A struggle for power arose, ultimately between Ali and the head of Uthman’s family, named Mua’wiya. Ali was later murdered in a mosque, and the Ummayid leader Mua’wiya became caliph. The Sunni majority accepted the defeat of Ali and the rule of the Ummayids, but the Shia, or party of Ali, rejected it. In this way began the separation of Sunni and Shia. Although their differences were in the beginning mainly political, arising out of the question of leadership, theological differences also developed over time between them.

During the Abassid dynasty in the 800s, the Mu’tazilah controversy arose within Islam, concerning whether the Quran was eternal, and a part of God, or created, and whether man truly had a free will or not. The Abassid ruler sided with the freethinkers who felt the Quran was created, and that man’s will was free. This was contrary to most Muslims’ belief that the Quran was eternal and that man’s destiny was written already. The Abbasid rulers persecuted those who disagreed with them, but in the end a strong popular backlash forced them to finally give in and accept the majority’s opinions.

This and other controversies helped the Sunni to define its own beliefs, which became the traditional and well-defined way, the belief of the majority Muslim community. An abundance of hadith came to be attributed to the Prophet to the effect that Muslims must follow the majority’s way, and that minority groups are all doomed to hell, and that God’s protective hand is always on the majority of the community, which can never be in error.

The Shia branch

The Shia, or party of Ali, after splitting with the Sunnis over the issue of who would rule Islam, became the party of opposition, and saw themselves as the true Muslims, trying to bring restoration and renewal to Islam. While the Sunnis accepted the rule of the Ummayid caliphs, claiming that Allah would never lead the majority astray, the Shias responded that the opinion of the majority was fallible, and so was not to be trusted.

The Shias accepted only the family of Muhammad as true leaders of Islam, believing that only they had the spiritual light and authority to rule, and in this way the Shiite doctrine of the Imam began to develop.

The Imams, who are direct descendants of Muhammad through the line of Ali, **were eventually believed to be living manifestations** of God, spiritually endowed with special

wisdom and light to interpret the Quran. There would be no other prophet to come after Muhammad, but the Imams were seen by Shiites as in some ways just as great as the Prophet. While the Imam does not receive prophetic revelations as Muhammad did, he is given the divine illumination to spiritually interpret them, and only he can properly interpret the Quran and show Muslims what is the true path to follow. The Imam is immune from sin and error, much like a Catholic pope with his infallible authority.

The Sunnis believed that the community had the right to choose who would be its caliph, or leader, but the Shias believed the right to be Imam, their version of the caliph, was conferred by divine decision only.

The Shias were strongly persecuted by the Ummayid and Abassid caliphs, and until the line of the twelfth Imam, all the Imams were murdered in one way or another. The twelfth and final Imam disappeared as a child in the year 873, and was never seen again. Shias now believe this “hidden Imam”, named Muhammad, is still alive and guiding the world, and will one day return to take control over Islam and the world. Some Shias believe Jesus will come back with his armies at the end to help the Imam conquer the world for the Shiites.

Shiites also believe there are hidden levels of meaning in the Koran, beyond the strictly literal meaning of the verses. They also have some other traditions which are different than the Sunnis, for example they believe there are only three daily prayers rather than the five of the Sunnis. The content of the ritual daily prayers is a little different from the Sunnis, too.

In Shiite Islam, divorce is more difficult and inheritances for women are more liberal. A special kind of marriage is allowed, however, **called mut’ah**, in which a man may make a marriage contract lasting for a month, a week, a day, or even for an hour. Sunnis rightly see this as just legalized prostitution.

Although all Muslims agree that mut'ah was recognized and practiced in Muhammad's time, Sunnis think the practice was outlawed by the second caliph Umar, and so is now abrogated.

The Shias also have a doctrine called “**taqiya**”, which permits the telling of lies when one is in danger. Shias have some different holy places, such as Karbala in Iraq, where Husayn was massacred, and other sites like the graves of certain Muslim saints where people come to pray.

Shiites comprise most of the Muslims in Iran and Iraq, with large numbers also in Afghanistan Lebanon, Yemen, and Pakistan.

Within Shiite Islam there are two main sects, called the Twelvers and the Seveners. There is also a minor sect called the Fivers or Zayditis. Each sect name is based on which Imam was considered to be the final one.

The Sufis Sect

Within Islam, another movement developed in its early centuries, called Sufism. Sufis are found in all branches of Islam, though in some ways they have more in agreement with the Shia branch. Sufis are the mystics of Islam, Muslims who seek to experience God.

According to orthodox Islam, man is a slave, the slave of God, whose duty is to blindly submit and obey.

You in your slave-ness and God in His supremacy are far, far apart, and the two can never meet. This is the orthodox Muslim's idea. But within man's heart there is a deep hunger to know God, to have a personal relationship with God, that can never be satisfied with dry empty formulas and rituals. Sufism is the Muslim attempt to meet this need of the human heart.

Sufism began as a reaction to the worldliness seen in the early Umayyid period (from 661-749 AD). There was a growing dissatisfaction by many Muslims with the worldliness of Islam, and as orthodox Islam was developing its traditional views of what was proper ritual and conduct for a Muslim, some Muslims began hungering for more than just a formal external religion.

Ascetics arose who were meditating on the Judgment Day, and became known as "those who always weep" and as those who considered this world to be just "a hut of sorrows." Later, in the 700s, a female mystic introduced the Sufi concept of love for God that was unselfish, not based on fear of hell or hope of heaven. The mystical trend began to grow all over the Islamic world, and was probably influenced **in many ways through contact with Christian hermits and monks**. Schools of Sufi thought began to develop over time, and later on fraternal orders were formed, each centered around a Sufi teacher, who was similar to an Indian guru with his disciples.

Sufis believe that there are stages a disciple passes through, on his way to the hidden knowledge of God. A teacher is always necessary to guide one in the way, and various methods are used, like Zikr, or remembrance. Means used to bring God into remembrance include chanting the 99 wonderful names of God using a rosary, or repeating the name of Allah over and over again, or repeating other religious formulas. Sometimes in Zikr, Sufis will start speaking in tongues or go into trances. Sometimes dances and music are used, as, for example, the whirling dervish branch of Sufis who spin around and around until they go into ecstatic trances. Drugs and narcotics have also been used by some groups.

Sufis say that Muhammad was the first Sufi, because of his mystical experiences, and Sufis have greatly influenced Islamic beliefs about Muhammad, making him almost divine. In their writings and poetry, Muhammad is described as "light from light, and from his light all the prophets are created," and God is said to have told Muhammad, "if you had not been, I would not have created the world." **Sufis have also encouraged the widespread prayer and worship at the shrines of Muslim saints and other folk Islamic practices within Islam.**

Sufis often interpret the Quran allegorically, and in Sufism the external elements of Islam, like the Five Pillars, are de-emphasized while emphasis is put on the internal, and on seeking for an experiential knowledge of God, which means to become absorbed into God, to become one with God. This is all heresy to the orthodox Muslim, and Sufis are generally viewed as being backward and ignorant. Many Sufis won't openly admit they are Sufis.

Early Sufis tended to travel, to be people of poetry, song, and symbol, and they were mainly responsible for the massive expansion of Islam after the ninth century to places like India, Central Asia, Turkey, and Africa below the Sahara desert. They often incorporated local pre-Islamic beliefs into Islam which have been the source of much folk Islam, but which brought more of a willingness to convert to Islam.

Other Groups or Sects in Islam:

Some other groups within Islam, are the **Druze**, a Shia offshoot in Lebanon; the **Bahais** from Iran, a universalist religion popular in the west; the **Alawites**, a Shiite offshoot in Syria who say Ali was divine; and the **Ahmadiyah**, founded in Punjab, India, in 1889 by a man who claimed to be the Christian Messiah, the Hindu god Krishna, and Muhammad all rolled up into one. His followers say Jesus was crucified but didn't die, recovering from His wounds in the tomb and they say He later went to Kashmir where he died and was buried at one hundred twenty years of age. **Black Muslims**, found in the United States, are more of a racial social protest movement, though they have become more mainstream Islamic in recent years.

Folk Islam

Another important aspect of Islam, but which often goes unnoticed, is Folk Islam, or popular Islam, **which involves spiritism and the occult, and is widespread among every branch of Islam throughout the world.**

Most Muslims live on two levels. On the one hand, they will probably ascribe to one of the main branches of Islam. **But beneath the veneer of orthodoxy, there are beliefs and practices that are often very contrary to what the Quran teaches, although in the Quran itself, and especially in the hadith, there are some justifications which support the views and beliefs of folk Islam.**

Orthodox Islam teaches that man's destiny is maktub, "written" by God, and that man is powerless to change his destiny. The orthodox belief, arrived at as traditional Islam developed and began to take its shape in the early years of Islam, is very fatalistic. But for many reasons, this does not satisfy the needs of a man's heart. On the one hand, "fate" is accepted as being determined and unchangeable, but in practice, Muslims will seek to rewrite "what is written" through folk Islam.

A Dutch missionary in Indonesia said: "Working for many years in a Muslim country, I have come to the conclusion that the power of Islam does not lie in its dogma and practices, nor in the antithesis to the Trinity, to the Lordship of Christ, and his redeeming death, but in the occult practices of its leaders, thus holding sway over their people."

The authorities of orthodox religion are the official priests and prophets, who focus on the abstract matters of that which is true and right. Orthodox Islam provides men with answers to the questions of the origin and meaning of life, to that of man's eternal purpose and destiny, and it tries to explain why there is suffering and injustice. But Folk Islam focuses more on the need for power in one's life, and deals with the immediate needs for healing and guidance and help and deliverance in the crisis of today. **The leaders of folk Islam, while sometimes including Islamic priests, are often people outside the structure of official Islam, like the witchdoctors and mediums. Many times these power leaders will be women, who can carry great influence.**

The masses of Muslims today live on two levels, outwardly practicing the external rituals of formal Islam, while attaching folk Islamic beliefs to them, and believing, in practice, more in the power of folk Islam.

Some of the beliefs in folk Islam:

The evil eye: The look, or glance, of jealousy or envy is seen as a powerful force, that can cause harm to someone, and in certain cases, even sickness and death. The effect of the evil eye needs to be countered by things such as quoting the Koran, wearing charms or amulets with verses of the Quran in them, drinking water that has had paper with Quranic verses soaked in it, and other such magic. Belief in the evil eye is sanctioned by certain hadiths and by Muhammad, who acknowledged its reality and suggested that incantation be used in dealing with its effects. The **hand of Fatimah, Muhammad's daughter** who married Ali, is often used as a charm to make the look of the evil eye reflect back upon the one giving it.

The jinn: The jinn were believed in by Arabs from pre-Islamic times, and are considered to be spiritual beings somewhat between man and angels, and were created from fire. The stories of genies in a bottle come from these jinn. Satan is considered to be the head of the jinn, though he is somewhat different than them.

The jinn belong to the spirit world, yet they live on the earth, and not in heaven. They can be good or bad, but most are considered to be bad and to want to bring harm to men. The jinn can make a person sick, paralyze, or even kill someone. They can also possess someone. Muhammad was fearful he had become possessed by jinn when he first began receiving his revelations. The jinn dwell in certain places like brick kilns, garbage pits, inside certain trees, in marshes, rivers, wells, ruins, graveyards, and toilets. Dark rooms and the black of night are also dwelling places of jinn. To counter them and appease them, Muslims will do many things, such as say the bismillah, "in the name of God" when going to the toilet, for protection, and avoid doing certain things like pouring hot water down a drain to avoid scalding a jinn. Mediums or magicians will usually be consulted for help in countering the attack of a jinn.

Mediums, spiritism, astrologers: Mediums, spiritists, and astrologers are very popular means used by Muslims, for help in determining the future and in seeking guidance. In seances, mediums will go into possessed trances and give guidance or answers to questions.

The Quran is also used in a magical way, in a popular practice called "cutting" the Quran. A Muslim will go to a Muslim priest, and the priest will open the Quran at random, punching his finger onto a verse. The verse is then interpreted as giving a yes, no, or maybe answer to the seeker's question.

The worship of saints at the graves and shrines of saints is also a common practice in Islam. Saints, usually dead, are seen as having "baraka" or blessing, a kind of positive, magical force or power, and it is believed they can intercede for the worshipper, for example, to help a barren woman to bear children, or to get healing, or material blessings. Some saints are believed to be particularly effective with certain types of problems. People will make vows at the shrines of the saint, and the saint is supposed to respond with barak, or blessing. People will then leave money and gifts and food at the shrine in payment.

The relics of saints can also perform miracles. Relics of Muhammad include a hair of his in Topkapi Museum in Istanbul, his footprints which are said to be in Cairo and also at the Dome of Rock, and his cloak in Qandahar, Afghanistan (which invested the Mullah Omar of the Taliban) and so forth.

Taboos – Certain actions, places, and things are seen as being proscribed and restricted, like touching a ceremonially impure person before prayer. Ignoring these restrictions can result in sickness, death, or disaster. The cure for any such violation is repentance for breaking the taboo, plus doing some form of prescribed penance.

Muslim festivals: are also seen as having a folk Islamic aspect. For example, **Laylat-al Miraj, the Night of Ascent**, the night when Muhammad went by winged horse from Mecca to Jerusalem and then ascended to the throne of God, is considered a night when Allah and the angels will listen to entreaties for mercy, and Muslims will go to the graveyard to pray for their dead.

Another night, **Laylat-al-Qadr, the Night of Power**, is when the Quran was supposedly first given. Angels are said to fill the earth, and God can be entreated to change one's fate that night.

These are just a few examples of the occultic practices that are widespread in Islam. In many Muslim countries the majority of Muslims believe in and practice folk Islam.

This is the end of session two. In our next session, we will be discussing how you can share Christ with a Muslim. May God bless you.

A Dutch missionary in Indonesia said: "Working for many years in a Muslim country, I have come to the conclusion that the power of Islam does not lie in its dogma and practices, nor in the antithesis to the Trinity, to the Lordship of Christ, and his redeeming death, but in the occult practices of its leaders, thus holding sway over their people!"