

Muslim Australians

THEIR BELIEFS, PRACTICES AND INSTITUTIONS

A Partnership under the Australian Government's *Living In Harmony* initiative

by Professor Abdullah Saeed

MUSLIM
Australia

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DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURAL AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS
and AUSTRALIAN MULTICULTURAL FOUNDATION
in association with
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INTRODUCTION

In a simple and easily understandable way, this book presents key aspects of Islam and Muslim life and shows the variety of voices within Islam on a number of issues of concern to the average Australian.

This book was commissioned as part of a major project which looked into the role of religion in Australian society: 'Religion, Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion in Contemporary Australia', a project that was funded by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. As part of this project, I was asked to write a brief introductory text that was primarily for high school students but at the same time could be used by the general reader with no prior knowledge of Islam. The book is thus an overview of the fundamental beliefs, practices and institutions of Islam. In addition, it contains some basic information about Muslims in Australia and how they interact with the wider Australian society. Relatively little has been written that sheds light on Islam

and Muslims in Australia, including in the category of high school textbooks. In the current climate of anxiety about Islam in Australia, and as a result of the events of September 11, 2001, the Bali bombing in 2002 and the 'war on terror', it was felt that such a book was greatly needed.

Muslim Australians are not very large in number. In fact they represent less than two percent of the Australian population. However, the recent media coverage of Islam and Muslim related issues has led to significant interest in Australia in knowing more about the religion and its adherents. In a simple and easily understandable way, this book presents key aspects of Islam and Muslim life and shows the variety of voices within Islam on a number of issues of concern to the average Australian. While the media representation of Islam and

Muslims often tends to imply that Muslims are a homogenous group, this book shows their diversity.

Readers of this book will find some similarity between topics covered in this book and another book I published earlier, *Islam in Australia* (Allen & Unwin, 2003). However, the audience envisaged for the present book is high school students. The two books therefore differ in detail, format, choice of topic and voice. Certain topics covered briefly in the present book can be found in some detail in *Islam in Australia*.

I would like to thank Rachel Butson for her contribution in refining the original manuscript and identifying and providing me with some of the 'stories' in the book as well as for her research assistance. Similarly, I would like to thank Professor Des Cahill of RMIT University and Professor Gary Bouma of Monash University as well as Mr Hass Dellal of the Australian Multicultural Foundation, the three chief investigators of the project that commissioned this book, for their reading of the manuscript and their comments.

I hope this book will be helpful in explaining something about the religion of a growing number of Australians and will contribute to a better understanding of Islam today.

Abdullah Saeed

MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN AUSTRALIA

A view from the 2001 Census.

Muslims in Australian cities

Which suburbs do Muslims live in?

Sydney - Auburn
(9,737 Muslims or 36% of the total population of Auburn)

Melbourne - Meadow Heights
(5,195 or 33% of the population)

Canberra - Belconnen Town Centre
(117 or 4% of the population)

Perth - Thornlie
(871 or 4% of the population)

Brisbane - Runcorn
(388 or 3% of the population)

Darwin - Karama
(82 or 2% of the population)

Adelaide - Para Hills
(150 or 2% of the population)

Hobart - Sandy Bay
(97 or 1% of the population)

Suburb with the highest percentage of Muslims

Dallas in Melbourne had the highest concentration of Muslims at 39% of the population. However, Dallas is a comparatively small suburb with only 6,346 residents.

Muslims in Australia and Citizenship

- » An overwhelming majority, 79%, of Muslims in Australia have obtained Australian citizenship (221,856 out of a total of 281,578).

Muslim Migration to Australia

- » Before 1981 approximately 41,000 Muslims had settled in Australia, making up 2% of migrants.
- » The proportion of Muslims immigrating to Australia is increasing steadily. Between 1996 and 2000 approximately 47,000 Muslims migrated to Australia. They represented 9% of Australia's total immigration intake throughout that period.
- » In 2001 a further 7,533 Muslims migrated to Australia.

Country of Birth of Australian Muslims

- » The most frequently cited country of birth for Australian Muslims is Australia (approximately 103,000). The next is Lebanon (29,321).
- » Turkey is third, with 23,479 Muslim Australians being born there.
- » Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Pakistan are the countries of origin of approximately 27,000 Australian Muslims, with approximately 9,000 people having been born in each of those countries.

Languages Spoken by Australian Muslims

- » The three main languages spoken at home by Australian Muslims are Arabic, Turkish and English.
- » Approximately 95,000 of Muslims in Australia use Arabic, 45,000 use Turkish, and 32,000 use English as their language at home.

English Language Proficiency

- » The overwhelming majority of Australian Muslims are proficient in English.
- » The age group that is most proficient in English is 21–39 (85% of the group), while the least proficient age group is aged 60+ (43% of the group).

Marital Status in Australian Muslim Community

- » 41% of Australian Muslim women are married by the age of 24, while only 12% of their male counterparts are married by the same age.
- » 51% of Australian Muslim males are married by the age of 34, while another 26% are married before they are 50.
- » De facto relationships are uncommon. 3% of males in the age group 24–35 and 3% of females in the age group 21–24 are in de facto relationships.

MUSLIMS IN AUSTRALIA

Origins of Islam in Australia

Origins of Islam in Australia

Long before European settlement, Muslims had contact with Australia and her peoples. Fishing for sea-slugs, the Macassans (an ethnic group from eastern Indonesia) began visiting the northern shores of Australia in the seventeenth century. Evidence of their presence is found in cave drawings of the distinctive Macassan boats and in artefacts found in Aboriginal settlements in the north.

Some Muslim sailors and prisoners came to Australia on the convict ships but very little is known about them as they left no traces in the history books, except for a few scattered references to their names.

During the 1870s Muslim Malay divers were recruited through an agreement with the Dutch to work on West Australian and Northern Territory pearling grounds. By 1875 there were 1800 Malay divers working in Western Australia. Most returned to their home countries.

Afghan cameleers settled in Australia from the 1860s onwards. Camels were imported and used by European explorers to help open up the dry interior and transport goods and services to different parts of the country. Due to the Afghans' knowledge and expertise with camels, they were credited with saving the lives of numerous early European explorers and were vital for exploration.

A Muslim settler

Saib Sultan was a Muslim who came to Australia after sailing on the Endeavour. He had eleven and a half acres on Norfolk Island but in 1809 he and his wife sailed as third-class passengers to Tasmania (or Van Dieman's Land as it was known back then) on the Lady Nelson. His name was changed to Jacob and records show that by 1819 he had twenty-eight acres of pasture and two acres of wheat.¹

In the early twentieth century, Muslims of non-European background must have found it very difficult to come to Australia because of a government policy which limited immigration on the basis of race. Known as the White Australia Policy it was used by the government of the day put in place strict tests designed to keep out people who had dark skin or who were from non-European backgrounds. But some Muslims still managed to come to Australia. In the 1920s and 1930s Albanian Muslims were accepted due to their lighter European complexion, which was more compatible with the White Australia Policy.

The need for population growth and economic development in Australia led to the broadening of Australia's immigration policy in the post-World War II period. This allowed for the acceptance of a number of displaced Muslims who began to arrive from Europe. Moreover, between 1967 and 1971, approximately 10,000 Turks settled in Australia under an agreement between Australia and Turkey. Almost all of these people went to Melbourne and Sydney.

From the 1970s onwards, there was a significant shift in the government's attitude towards immigration. Instead of trying to make new Australians 'assimilate' and forgo their unique cultural identities, the government became more accommodating and tolerant of differences by adopting a policy of 'multiculturalism'. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Muslims from more than sixty countries had settled in Australia. While a very large number of them come from Turkey and Lebanon, there are Muslims from Indonesia, Bosnia, Iran, Fiji, Albania, Sudan, Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, among others.

Despite the occasional outspoken politician who criticises multiculturalism, broad sections of Australians have acknowledged and welcomed the contributions made by recent immigrants. Muslim immigrants have become a part of developing Australia's culture, economy and religious knowledge.

¹ Bilal Cleland, "The History of Muslims in Australia" in Abdullah Saeed and Shahram Akbarzadeh (eds), *Muslim Communities in Australia*, Sydney, NSW: UNSW Press, 2001, 14.

Contributions of Muslims to Australia

Muslims of various ethnic groups have contributed to the development of Australia, although they have not received broad recognition for this.

The Afghans were the pioneers of the Muslim contribution to Australian life. In the nineteenth century, the Afghan cameleers were recruited to Australia to assist in the early European exploration of the continent. Camels, with their ability to endure long periods without drinking, were rightly recognised as being the best animal to use in the European exploration of Australia's vast dry interior.

The Afghan cameleers participated in many expeditions to explore Australia's outback. They largely controlled the camel transport industry in the late nineteenth century and played a vital role in the economic development of Australia at the time, from the transport of goods, assistance with laying telegraph and railway lines, to establishing settlements in the outback. The invention of the motor car, however, meant that camels were no longer needed. Due to the end of the need for cameleers and the prejudice against Afghans, which made it difficult for them to be accepted socially, many Afghans had to return home or eke out a living under the harsh regime of the White Australia Policy.

It was the Afghans and their camels that made it possible to gain access to the vast interior of the Australian continent.

On the contribution of Afghans to Australia

It was not until the arrival of the Afghan cameleers that Muslims started to make some impact. Viewed mainly as necessary adjuncts to their beasts, the role of the Afghans in opening up the interior of the continent to European settlement is only now being fully appreciated. At the time, the fear of racial contamination dominated much of the national consciousness. However, without the Afghans, the exploration of central Australia would have been impeded, the establishment of the inland telegraph would have been delayed and many of the inland mining towns would not have survived².

It was the Afghans and their camels that made it possible to gain access to the vast interior of the Australian continent. They further proved themselves during the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line in 1870–73, contributing to both the survey and construction work and carrying loads of materials into otherwise impenetrable country. When the Coolgardie gold rush occurred in 1894, the cameleers were quick to move in. The gold fields could not have continued in existence without the food and water they transported.³

In contemporary Australian life, Muslims from all over the world have helped shape the nation. They have developed trade links between Australia and several Muslim countries, particularly Middle Eastern, for instance through the export of meat that has been slaughtered in a special way (often referred to as *halal* meat). These Muslims have opened up new channels for trade between Australia and their countries of origin.

Of the thousands of international students studying in Australia, a significant number are Muslims from countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Pakistan. Many have settled in Australia under the government's 'skilled' migration program after completing studies at their own expense.

² Bilal Cleland, "The History of Muslims in Australia", 12.

³ Bilal Cleland, "The History of Muslims in Australia", 17.

Muslim doctors, engineers, lawyers, scientists, academics, tradespeople and blue-collar workers are participating fully in Australian life. Muslim small businesses abound in the major cities (for example, in Auburn and Lakemba in Sydney and in Brunswick and Coburg in Melbourne) and are another reminder of the role Muslims play in the economic life of Australia.

Muslims have promoted interfaith religious dialogue in order to encourage greater mutual understanding between people. They have also been able to provide other Australians with greater knowledge about the Muslim cultures in African, Arab and Asian nations.

The Muslim community has enhanced the debate in Australian society about the interests of minority groups, which have often had their needs and opinions ignored by mainstream society. Australian Muslims have asserted their desire to be treated equally and to be free from negative stereotypes.

Given that the community is still establishing itself, it has not so far participated in Australia's political life in a significant way. However, this may change as Muslims in Australia become more settled and interested in participating in Australian democracy.

Australian Muslims Today and Fundamental Australian Values⁴

Australian society is based on a number of very important values such as a 'fair go'; parliamentary democracy and the rule of law; being open and friendly, particularly to visitors to Australia; the freedom to question and debate things rather than accept them blindly; human rights, gender equality and egalitarianism, and looking after each other in times of need, such as during bushfires, droughts, and other disasters. It is safe to say that most Australians generally subscribe to these values and, given that they are a part of Australian society, Muslims are expected to subscribe to them. However, there are some people in Australia who believe that Muslims cannot and will not do this. This is because Muslims are seen as rejecting Western values and fundamental Australian values based on Western values.

Contrary to belief, most Muslims do not have any problems with these values. In fact, many Muslims have migrated to Australia precisely because of them. From a Muslim point of view, Australia is a generous and accommodating society that accepts people from all over the world, of all faiths, colours, languages and ethnicities. Australia gives people recognition and the freedom to practise, teach, and even propagate their religion here. Such rights and freedoms are not available in a significant number of Muslim countries. For most Muslims, the values listed here are part of Islam too, and Muslims do not see any conflict between these values and their religion.

Certainly there is a small number of Muslims who insist that Australian values, culture and society are foreign to Islam and therefore unacceptable to them. They think that the more Muslims are integrated into Australian society, the less 'Muslim' they are. Their interpretation of Islam emphasises maintaining a distinction between Islam and anything perceived to have originated outside of Islam. It is important to remember that these opinions belong to a small minority of Muslims and do not represent the mainstream Muslim opinion in Australia.

⁴ See Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2003, 198-208.

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Thirty-six percent of Australia's current Muslim population was born in Australia. Many others came here at a very young age and grew up in Australia. For these people Australia is their homeland, not a temporary stopping-place. This is where they go to school and university, make friends (with both Muslims and non-Muslims), get a job, establish a family and home. There is nowhere else they wish to go. Their understanding of Islam is in harmony with fundamental Australian values.

Two Aussie Muslims

Waleed was born in Melbourne in 1978 to parents of an Egyptian background. He grew up to love cricket and football and barracks madly for the Richmond Football Club. His brother became a surgeon, while Waleed decided to study engineering and law at university. One of his favourite traditions is the backyard Aussie barbeque with *halal* sausages and lots of rice. As a Muslim, Waleed goes to the mosque every Friday for prayers and fasts during the month of Ramadan. Sometimes he even prays in the car park of the MCG so that he doesn't miss his prayers while he is watching a Richmond game.

Rachel, a descendent of English and Irish settlers to Australia, decided to convert to Islam in the late 1990s and has been practising it ever since. Although it sometimes attracts attention, Rachel decided to wear a headscarf or *hijab* to show that she is proud of being a Muslim as well as of being an Australian. She has had to learn how to pray, speaking special words in Arabic, and one day hopes to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. Often people ask Rachel where she is from and she smiles and tells them that she was born in Australia and is a convert to Islam.

The main issue for Muslims in Australia is not whether Australia is a Muslim majority country or not; it is whether Muslims have equal rights and responsibilities with others, and whether they have the freedom to practise and teach their religion, and Australia gives them this. Muslims play an important part in making Australia a multicultural and multi-faith society, and are the third largest faith community after Christians and Buddhists.

Living as a minority

While most Muslims live in Muslim-majority countries (including Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Turkey and Egypt), many live as minorities in different countries around the world. This was the case even in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, when some of his followers fled to the Christian kingdom of Abyssinia to seek refuge from the non-Muslim Meccans who were persecuting Muslims.

Muslim population figures

- » Of the 1300 million Muslims in the world more than 80% are non-Arab.
- » A very large number of Muslims live in Muslim minority contexts. Muslims live in almost all countries of the world. Only two thirds of the world's Muslim population lives in Muslim majority countries, which number 56.
- » There are significant Muslim minorities in India, China, Russia, European countries, the United States and Canada. Australia has a Muslim minority numbering 281,578 according to the 2001 Census.

This means that Muslim minorities, such as in Australia, are not unique. In fact, throughout history, Muslims have lived in minority contexts for very long periods. Thus the sorts of problems Muslim minorities in Australia face should not be seen as unique or unsolvable.

One of the major challenges for Muslims living in Western countries is adjusting traditional Islamic norms to Western contexts. This is a challenge which Australian Muslims are facing as well. But it must be remembered that this challenge is being met remarkably well by Muslims who have spent a good part of their lives or lived all their lives in Australia. In this, they are no different from other Australian citizens. They have adjusted their lifestyles, thinking and practices to the Australian context and its basic values and systems. The theoretical discussions on this issue among Muslims are somewhat divorced from reality, as happens at times in the relationship between ideas and practice.

This is not to deny that there are some Muslims who are not comfortable with the idea of adjustment. Some Muslims think that it is their duty to establish an Islamic state and implement Islamic law wherever they are, even in a minority context. This is a misunderstanding of Islamic teaching. In a Muslim-majority country where the religion of Islam is well established, it is natural for the society to reflect the norms and values of the religion. For Muslims who live as minorities, it is their duty to implement Islamic norms and values in their individual lives as best they can. A Muslim can function as well in a minority situation as in a majority situation. Some would even argue that it is easier to live as a Muslim in democratic countries like Australia, which protect freedom

of religion, unlike in some Muslim-majority countries which are ruled as dictatorships or where religious freedom is restricted.

For many Muslims living in Australia, implementing religion on an individual level can be very important; for others being Muslim is a cultural identity rather than a religious one. Muslims who try to observe the faith may need to negotiate what is *halal* and haram (what is permitted and what is forbidden in Islam). These areas can include food, banking, dress, and taking time to pray. For example, a Muslim should avoid pig meat and alcohol when socialising with non-Muslim friends and relatives. Some Muslims may feel reluctant to apply for loans and mortgages from traditional Western interest-based banks, because many Muslims believe that charging interest is forbidden by Islam. Muslims may adopt Islamic forms of dress and appearance (such as a beard for men and a headscarf for women) and Muslim employees may ask to perform obligatory prayers at certain times during the workday. Generally speaking, Muslims who wish to observe the beliefs and practices of Islam attempt to do so where possible.

BEGINNING OF ISLAM

Muslims of the world at a glance

- » There are 1300 million Muslims in the world today.
- » 22% of the world's population is Muslim.
- » Approximately one-third of Muslims live as minorities in non-Muslim majority countries such as India, China, Russia and France.
- » Approximately 20 million Muslims live in Europe and the Americas.
- » There are 56 states with Muslim majorities.
- » The countries with the largest Muslim populations include Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Turkey, Iran, Egypt and Nigeria. Of these only Egypt is an Arab country.
- » Arab Muslims comprise approximately 20% of the Muslim population of the world.

Mecca

In the sixth and the early seventh centuries of the Common Era (CE), Mecca (in the country known today as Saudi Arabia) was a commercial town on the trade route between south and north Arabia. People of various religious backgrounds (Christians, Jews and pagans) used to pass through Mecca, and a rich religious life existed there. Most Meccans were pagans who worshipped idols but who also believed in a higher god. There were also Christians and Jews living in Mecca and the surrounding regions. In fact, several Christian and Jewish communities existed in the south, west and north of Arabia. The Meccan people were aware of concepts such as God, prophets and scripture even before the Prophet Muhammad began to teach the religion of Islam.

Like the rest of Arabia, Meccan society was composed of clans and tribes, with one tribe in particular – the Quraysh – dominating. The clans were made up of various families; some were prominent in trade and others in political and religious affairs.

The most important place of religious significance was the Ka`ba, the cube-like building which stands today in the middle of the Sacred Mosque (al-Masjid al-Haram) in Mecca. It was visited by Arabs from in and around Mecca as an important centre of pilgrimage. It is believed that the origins of the pilgrimage to the Ka`ba go back to the time of Abraham and his eldest son Ishmael. Muslims believe it was Abraham and Ishmael who built the Ka`ba.

The Meccans were Arabs. They loved their language, Arabic, particularly the art of poetry. Possessing an oral culture, the Meccans appreciated the power of language. The poet of a clan was its spokesperson, whose poetry would be learned and transmitted to others. During important trading and religious occasions, festivals were held in and around Mecca in which poetry recitations and competitions were held.

Prophet Muhammad, a native of Mecca, began to preach the religion called Islam in 610 CE. He taught that Islam's primary focus is acknowledging that there is only one God and that human beings have a duty to 'submit' to God's will. He also said that all prophets before him (such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus) taught the same thing.

Prophet Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad was born in 570 CE in Mecca. His father was Abd Allah, a Meccan merchant who died before Muhammad's birth. His mother was Aminah, who died when Muhammad was just six years old, so Muhammad was orphaned at an early age. His grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, then took on the care of Muhammad, but he too died just two years later. From then on, Muhammad was brought up by his uncle, Abu Talib.

Muhammad was known for his honesty and hard work. In his early twenties, his reputation brought him to work for a very wealthy widowed Meccan businesswoman, whose name was Khadijah. Muhammad worked for Khadijah as a merchant in the caravan trade. Because of his integrity and honesty, she eventually proposed marriage to the young man. He accepted, and they were married for 25 years until Khadijah's death in 619. Together, they had two sons and four daughters.

Muhammad's reputation

When Muhammad was a young man, the Quraysh decided to rebuild the ancient sacred building of the Ka'ba. When it was time to replace a special stone called the 'Black Stone', a fight broke out among the different tribes who all wished for the honour of replacing the sacred stone. Finally an old man suggested that whoever next walked through the gate to enter the precinct of the Ka'ba should be asked to arbitrate the dispute.

The very next person to enter was Muhammad, and there was much relief and satisfaction with this, as Muhammad was known as 'al-Amin' or 'the trustworthy one'. When the problem was explained to him, he called for a cloak which he spread upon the ground. Then he put the Black Stone in the middle and called for each rival clan to hold onto the borders of the cloak so that all would have the honour of replacing the stone. When they had done so, Muhammad placed the raised stone into the corner of the building and the holy Ka'ba was rebuilt.⁵

Prophet Muhammad's mission

Muhammad was a person who liked to reflect and meditate. When he was in his thirties he began to spend time alone, away from the busy life of Mecca. He would go to a nearby cave called Hira, just outside Mecca. It was there, in one of those times of reflection, that he received the first revelation from God.

One day, while in the cave, he heard a voice addressing him, asking him to 'read' without saying exactly what to read. The voice asked him to read three times. Each time, Muhammad said, 'I cannot read'. The third time, the voice said:

Read in the name of thy Lord,
who has created – created Man
out of a germ-cell! Read – for thy
Lord is the Most Bountiful One
who has taught [Man] by the pen
– taught Man what he did not
know! (Qur'an 96:1-5.)

This short passage became the first revealed verses of the Qur'an, a collection of the revelations sent to Muhammad and which Muslims believe is the word of God.

Muhammad was deeply disturbed by this experience. He hurried home to Khadijah who tried to calm him down and comfort him. Soon, however, Muhammad realised what his mission was and what his obligations were.

⁵ Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on Earliest Sources*, Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1983, 42.

He began to preach his message to his family and close relatives. His wife was the first believer, followed by his children and some close relatives and friends. His teaching began to spread slowly, but the Meccan elite became alarmed at what they saw as a challenge to their influence. They began to resist Muhammad's teaching and persecute those who followed him.

Muhammad continued for thirteen years, preaching his message with little success. He had relatively few converts. Because of the persecution, he and his followers finally departed Mecca, leaving behind their homes, property and often their families, and settled in a town in the north called Yathrib, which later became known as Medina or 'City of the Prophet'. There they established their first community in 622, a date which also marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. Medina became the central place for Muslims, the capital of the first Islamic 'state'. For the next ten years in Medina, the Prophet continued to teach his message with great success. At the time of the Prophet's death ten years later in 632, Islam had spread to all corners of Arabia and a large part of the population had embraced the new religion.

Spread of Islam

With the Prophet's death, the revelations from God ended and the mission of the Prophet was completed. After the death of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, one of his earliest followers and a close friend, became his political successor and leader of the Muslim community. Within a few years, the Muslims began a series of conquests, largely directed at the Byzantine and Sassanid empires located in the north and northeast of Arabia respectively. These conquests gradually brought much of the Middle East and North Africa under the political control of Arab Muslims. The conquests and military activities were not aimed at converting non-Muslims to Islam. Rather, they were aimed at expanding the Muslim state's borders and bringing hostile neighbouring regions under the political and military control of the Muslim state. The spread of the religion of Islam (as opposed to the power of the Muslim state) was largely the result of the following factors:

- » Preaching by the Prophet and his earliest followers.
- » Missionary work of the Muslims in the lands that came under the control of the Muslim state.
- » Missionary work of Muslims outside these lands, in particular by Sufis (practitioners of Islamic mysticism) through their personal contacts.

From the Qur'anic point of view, conversion to Islam by force is against Islam and such a conversion is not valid. The Qur'an says: 'There is no compulsion in religion.' (2:256) Deciding to become a Muslim is a personal decision and can only be truly made if a person is convinced of what he or she is doing.

Within a hundred years of the death of the Prophet, Islam had reached modern-day Spain and southern France in the west, and the borders of China in the east. Over the next thirteen hundred years, Muslims founded a series of great empires and contributed significantly to world civilisation. Among the famous periods of Islamic history are:

- » The period of the Rashidun caliphs (immediately after the death of the Prophet) from 632 to 661, which saw the expansion of the Muslim state well beyond the borders of Arabia.
- » The Umayyad period from 661 to 750, which consolidated the Muslim state.
- » The Abbasid period from 750 to 1258, known as the golden period of Islamic civilisation, in which prosperity, scientific achievements and high culture were achieved.

The Golden Age

During the Golden Age, Muslim scholars made important and original contributions to mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and chemistry. They collected and corrected previous astronomical data, built the world's first observatory, and developed the astrolabe, an instrument that was once called 'a mathematical jewel'. In medicine they experimented with diet, drugs, surgery, and anatomy, and in chemistry, an outgrowth of alchemy, [they] isolated and studied a wide variety of minerals and compounds.

Important advances in agriculture were also made in the Golden Age. The Abbasids preserved and improved the ancient network of wells, underground canals, and waterwheels, introduced new breeds of livestock, hastened the spread of cotton, and, from the Chinese, learned the art of making paper, a key to the revival of learning in Europe in the Middle Ages.

The Golden Age also, little by little, transformed the diet of medieval Europe by introducing such plants as plums, artichokes, apricots, cauliflower, celery, fennel, squash, pumpkins, and eggplant, as well as rice, sorghum, new strains of wheat, the date palm, and sugarcane.⁶

Muslim contributions to civilisation

Islam encouraged Muslims to learn and to seek knowledge wherever they could. The very first revelation Prophet Muhammad received commanded him to 'read'. It also mentions 'knowledge' and 'pen'. One of the Prophet's oft-repeated encouragements to Muslims was for them to learn and teach. When he began preaching there were very few people who could read and write in Mecca and the surrounding regions, but he urged Muslims to gain literacy skills. He was so successful in this that, when he died, the skills of reading and writing became an essential part of the Islamic tradition.

From the eighth century CE onwards, Muslims established many institutions of learning, scientific laboratories and libraries. They began a major project of translating scientific works of other civilisations – in areas such as mathematics, medicine, physical sciences and philosophy – from ancient Greek, Indian and Persian sources into Arabic. Over the next few centuries, scholars of Islamic civilisation (including Jews and Christians who lived in the Muslim world) wrote commentaries on these works, criticised them, refined them and wrote independent works in many of these areas of knowledge.

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In this way, Muslims and their colleagues from other religious traditions made great contributions to the advancement of disciplines such as mathematics, astronomy, physics, medicine, geography, art, architecture, and literature. They all wrote in the lingua franca (or common language) of Islamic civilisation, which was Arabic. The works of these scholars were later translated from Arabic into Latin so they could be read in Europe. It also led to the flowering of medieval philosophical and theological thinking important in Roman Catholic centres of learning. The contribution to knowledge made by these scholars was instrumental in the new thinking that led to the European Renaissance.

⁶ <http://islamicity.com/mosque/ihame/Sec7.htm>

Mohammad bin Musa al-Khwarizmi (d. 840)

Khwarizmi was a [Muslim] mathematician, astronomer and geographer. He was perhaps one of the greatest mathematicians who ever lived, as he was the founder of several branches and basic concepts of mathematics. In the words of Phillip Hitti, he influenced mathematical thought to a greater extent than any other medieval writer. His work on algebra was outstanding, as he not only initiated the subject in a systematic form but he also developed it to the extent of giving analytical solutions of linear and quadratic equations, which established him as the founder of Algebra. The very name Algebra has been derived from his famous book *Al-Jabr wa al-Muqabalah*. His arithmetic synthesised Greek and Hindu knowledge and also contained his own contribution of fundamental importance to mathematics and science. Thus, he explained the use of zero, a numeral of fundamental importance developed by the Arabs.⁷

Did you know that . . .

- » The numbers we use today are called 'Arabic numerals'.
- » The English word 'zero' comes from the Arabic word 'sifr'.
- » Muslim scientists made major contributions to research on light.
- » Textbooks on medicine written by Muslims were used in Europe for hundreds of years until the sixteenth century.
- » Muslims made maps of the world without which Columbus might not have discovered America.
- » From the tenth to the fourteenth century, the Muslim world had the major important centres of learning in the physical sciences and other disciplines. These included centres in Baghdad, Damascus, Rayy, Spain and elsewhere.
- » Some of the great Muslim scholars, scientists and thinkers (with their names as they are known in the West and their year of death) are:
 - 850 al-Khwarizmi**
astronomer, mathematician.
 - 870 al-Kindi**
philosopher.
 - 923 al-Razi (Rhazes)**
alchemist, philosopher, physician.
 - 929 al-Battani (Albatenius)**
astronomer, mathematician.
 - 950 al-Farabi (Alfarabicus)**
philosopher, poet.
 - 998 Abu al-Wafa**
astronomer, mathematician.
 - 1013 Abu al-Qasim (Albucasis)**
physician.
 - 1030 Ibn Miskawayh**
historian, philosopher.
 - 1037 Ibn Sina (Avicenna)**
philosopher, physician.
 - 1039 Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen)**
mathematician, physicist.
 - 1111 Ghazali (Algazel)**
philosopher.
 - 1131 Omar Khayyam**
astronomer, mathematician, poet.
 - 1138 Ibn Bajjah (Avenpace)**
philosopher.
 - 1185 Ibn Tufayl**
philosopher, physician.
 - 1198 Ibn Rushd (Averroes)**
philosopher, physician.
 - 1274 Nasir al-Din al-Tusi**
astronomer, mathematician, philosopher.
 - 1406 Ibn Khaldun**
historian, sociologist.⁸

⁷ <http://www.ummah.com/history/scholars/KHAWARIZ.html>

⁸ <http://web.umn.edu/~msaumr/reference/articles/science/contributors.html>

KEY BELIEFS OF A MUSLIM

The most fundamental belief of a Muslim is that there is only one God, who is the Creator and Sustainer of everything in the universe.

Most Muslims are born into a Muslim family and grow up as Muslims. Others convert to Islam from other religious traditions such as Christianity. A person becomes a Muslim by saying ‘La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah’ or ‘there is no god except God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God’, and believing it sincerely. Once a person becomes a Muslim, he or she is expected to follow Islam.

One God

The most fundamental belief of a Muslim is that there is only one God, who is the Creator and Sustainer of everything in the universe. There are no other gods besides God. All other beliefs and practices of Islam are based on this belief. The most frequently used name of God is Allah (which means ‘the God’ in Arabic). God in Islam is not the God of Muslims only, but the God of all people, be they Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus or any other. Here are some Muslim beliefs about God:

- » Nothing that exists in the universe is like God. We cannot imagine or represent God in any way (through art, for instance) because, however we imagine Him, He is always different.
- » God has many beautiful names such as ‘Loving’, ‘Merciful’, ‘Compassionate’, ‘Forgiving’, ‘Just’, and ‘Creator’. They all refer to the one and only God.
- » God is not male or female. The pronoun ‘He’ is used because it has been the traditional way to refer to God. ‘He’ does not indicate any gender when we talk about God.
- » God existed and will exist always. God has no beginning or end. God created time, and time began with the creation of the universe. When the end of the universe comes, it will be the end of time. But God will remain forever.
- » All human beings can speak directly to God (for example through their prayers). No one needs an intermediary between God and him/herself.
- » God also has full knowledge of everything that happens everywhere in the universe.

Ghazali (1058–1111), the famous Muslim theologian, on God

God is living, powerful, compelling, constraining. Shortcoming and impotence do not befall Him. Slumber and sleep do not take hold of Him. Passing away and death do not happen to Him. He is king of the worlds, the visible and the invisible, possessor of strength and might. He has authority and sovereignty. His it is to create and to command. The heavens are folded in His right hand, and created things are securely held in His grasp. He is alone in creating and producing; He is unique in bringing into existence and innovating. He created the creatures and their works, and determined their sustenance and their appointed terms. Nothing determined escapes His grasp.⁹

Allah

Allah is the proper name in Arabic for the one and only God, the Creator of the universe and everything in it. In Hebrew language Eloh-im is also used, and in Aramaic (the language of Jesus) it is Allaha. Christian Arabs also use Allah for God. From a Muslim point of view, Allah is the name of the God of Jews and Christians as well.

Muslims use the phrase ‘glory be to Him’ after mentioning the name of Allah to show their respect. It is considered disrespectful to use the name of Allah without this phrase or a similar one.

God created the universe and everything in it

Muslims believe that the universe and everything in it (from galaxies down to microscopic bacteria) were brought into existence by a power other than itself, namely God. When Muslims say that God created the universe, they do not say how this creation occurred or how long it took. For Muslims there is no contradiction between the idea of God creating the universe and the possibility of it evolving over billions of years.

Muslims also believe that God created human beings at some point in time. Again, they do not say when this happened. It may have been thousands or even millions of years ago. For Muslims, the first human beings as we know them were Adam and Eve, who became the ‘parents’ of all other human beings. Thus, all human beings are equal before God.

⁹ William M. Watt “Al-Ghazali” *Islamic Creeds: A Selection*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994, 73-74.

Equality of Humankind: A Common View among Muslims

Allah created a human couple to herald the beginning of the life of mankind on earth, and everybody living in the world today originates from this couple. The progeny of this couple were initially a single group with one religion and the same language. But as their numbers gradually increased, they spread all over the earth and, as a natural result of their diversification and growth, were divided into various tribes and nationalities. They came to speak different languages; their models of dress varied; and their ways of living also differed widely... Islam makes clear to all men [people] that they have come from the same parents and are therefore brothers [and sisters] and equal as human beings.¹⁰

The Prophet Muhammad said in a famous sermon:

'All humankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; also a white [person] has no superiority over black nor does a black have any superiority over a white except by piety and good action.'

Prophets

Muslims believe that God sent prophets and messengers to all the peoples of the earth. No people were excluded from this, from Australian Aboriginal people to indigenous Americans and Europeans. Prophets and messengers were sent to teach people primarily about God and about treating others kindly, justly and fairly.

Muslims believe that God sent thousands of prophets to humanity before Prophet Muhammad. The first was Adam and the last was Muhammad, although the Muslim Holy scripture, the Qur'an, mentions the names of only twenty-five prophets. These prophets came with a similar message: people have a duty to recognise the Creator and submit to His will. This submission is referred to as 'Islam' in Arabic. Thus all prophets, including Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, are 'submitters' to God and therefore called 'Muslims' (those who submit to God).

The last prophet, Muhammad, did not teach a new message as such. Like prophets before him, he taught the oneness of God and how to lead a righteous life.

A blessing upon the Prophet

When the Prophet Muhammad's name is mentioned, Muslims use the phrase 'peace be upon him' to show their respect. Similarly, a blessing is given after the names of earlier Prophets as well.

Scriptures

Another important belief is that God provided certain instructions (revelations) to various prophets in the past. These revelations became Holy scriptures. Muslims believe that God gave scriptures to prophets such as Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad. The Qur'an mentions the Gospel (*Injil*) of Jesus, the Psalms (*Zabur*) of David and the Torah (*Tawrat*) given to Moses. The basic message in these scriptures is the same: to believe in God and to live life according to His will. For Muslims, the final scripture is the Holy Qur'an, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

¹⁰ Abul Ala Maududi, *The Islamic Social Order*, <http://www.islam101.com/sociology/socialOrder.htm>

Muslims treat the Qur'an with great respect, as it is believed to be literally the word of God revealed in the Arabic language. It forms the basis of Islamic law, ethics and belief, and is recited by Muslims during prayers and all the important rituals and moments in life. Pages of the Qur'an are often decorated with beautiful calligraphy. Similarly, verses of the Qur'an may decorate the walls of mosques. Because the Qur'an was first revealed as an oral recitation, Muslims try very hard to recite the verses they learn in a beautiful and melodious voice. It is a great skill to be able to recite the Qur'an and its sound has an evocative power.

Angels

Muslims also believe in beings called angels, although they do not know what they look like, how many there are, or what their functions are, because they belong to the unseen world. Each angel has been given a function by God, and, unlike human beings, angels do not have the power to disobey God.

Only a few angels are mentioned by name in the Qur'an. Two of them are Gabriel (Jibril) and Michael (Mika'il). Gabriel is the angel who takes revelations (messages) from God to His prophets. He is believed to have conveyed the revelations of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad and announced to Mary that she would give birth to the Prophet Jesus. Michael is considered to have the responsibility for death.

Day of Judgment

Muslims believe that one day life as we know it will come to an end and at some point the Day of Judgment will come. On that day each person will be accountable to God for his or her actions in this life. God will bring back to life all human beings and gather them for judgment, showing everything each person has done in his or her life. Those who lived on the whole a 'good' or moral life in line with God's instructions will be saved. Their reward will be eternal life in a place called Paradise. Those who lived a 'bad' life, or did not believe in God, or rejected His prophets' teachings, will be condemned. Their punishment will be life in Hell. People whose bad deeds outweigh their good deeds will experience Hell for a certain period of time.

The most commonly used Arabic word for Paradise is *jannah* and the word for Hell is *jahannam*. We have no way of knowing what Paradise and Hell look like, or what it will be like there. The Qur'an gives some metaphors and descriptions in order to help people understand some basic things about life after death, but only God knows what it is like in reality.

Paradise

The fruits of submission to God, of living in harmony with His will, of living the natural way, is satisfaction (*ridwan*) in this life (whatever the outward signs of difficulty and hardship or easy and plenty) and eternal happiness in the next. ...

Paradise is also a place of degrees and categories. In the lofty parts, there will be the Prophets, those who struggled and died as witness in the path of God, and those who were totally honest and truthful to their trusts in their dealings. 'God has promised believing men and women gardens, underneath which rivers flow, wherein they shall abide, and pleasant abodes in the Garden of Eden – but the pleasure of God with them is greater and that is the great success.'

Qur'an (9:72)¹¹

God's timeless knowledge

Muslims also believe that God knows everything that happens in the universe. He has full knowledge of the past, present and future, although we cannot understand how. This means that good and bad things may happen for a reason that may be unclear at the time, so patience in the face of adversity is important. What may appear to be a bad thing, in fact could be a good thing and vice versa.

¹¹ Abdul Wahid Hamid, *Islam the Natural Way*, London: MELS, 1989, 169-170.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

Call to Prayer

God is great. God is great

I bear witness that there is
no god but God

I bear witness that
Muhammad is the
messenger of God

Come to prayer

Come to felicity

God is great

There is no god but God

A Muslim is expected to perform certain duties. These are called the 'five pillars of Islam'. Throughout the Muslim world, these five duties are performed by practising Muslims. This is one of the areas of Islam that unify Muslims around the world.

1. The declaration of faith

Muslims must declare and accept that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. It is usually declared by saying: 'There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God' (in Arabic *La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah*).

2. Prayer (*salat*)

A Muslim is expected to pray at least five times a day. The prayers (*salat*) have names and are performed at certain times of the day:

Fajr ~ between dawn (first light) and sunrise

Zuhr ~ from noon until mid-afternoon

Asr ~ from mid-afternoon until sunset

Maghrib ~ from sunset until about an hour later

Isha ~ from an hour or so after sunset until dawn

When prayer time comes, a ‘call to prayer’ is usually made from the local mosque (a Muslim place of worship) and is heard in the neighbourhood in Muslim countries. In Australia, because of council regulations, the call to prayer cannot be heard outside the mosque.

The call to prayer

The following is a translation of the words of the call to prayer. Any person may make the call to prayer, and the first person in Islam to do so was an Ethiopian man called Bilal. Each line is repeated twice. The last line is said only once.

God is great. God is great

I bear witness that there is no god but God

I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God

Come to prayer

Come to felicity

God is great

There is no god but God

Muslims can pray anywhere, not just at the mosque. Any place that is clean – such as an office, a classroom or even a park – is suitable. Many Muslims go to the local mosque to pray, but in Australia, because of work or the distance involved in going to a mosque, many pray at home or at work. Only on Friday (at noon) do Muslims have to pray in congregation in a mosque. This prayer must be performed in congregation, whereas other daily prayers can be performed individually.

Before prayer, a Muslim is expected to wash his or her hands, face, arms and feet. This prepares the person to meet God in prayer in a clean and pure state. Under certain circumstances, he or she may have to take a shower or bath before praying. Clothes must be clean and cover the body. Men must be covered from at least the navel to knee, and women must be completely covered except for the face and hands. Muslims often use a prayer mat to make sure the place where they pray is clean. Some prayer mats are beautifully decorated with pictures of the Ka`ba and geometrical patterns, while others are plain and simple pieces of cloth.

Worshippers then face towards Mecca (*qiblah*) and commence praying. If there is more than one person, the prayer leader (imam) stands in front of the others who form rows behind him. Men and women form separate rows.

Praying consists of a number of actions and activities: standing, bowing, prostrating, sitting, recitation of the Qur’an, and supplication. Muslims all over the world generally follow one common format for the prayers.

Apart from the five daily prayers and the Friday prayers, there are two special prayers called Eid prayers that occur during the year. One is straight after the month of fasting (Ramadan) and the other during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Muslims gather together in large numbers and pray the Eid prayers. Afterwards they share food and sometimes give each other presents. Eid is a very happy time for Muslims, when they visit relatives and friends, give charity and remember to thank God for all His blessings.

Concept of Muslim Worship

Muslims believe that worshipping God is much more than simply performing certain rituals such as prayer and fasting. Worship means recognising the existence of God, loving Him, and following His guidance in all aspects of life. It also means encouraging people to do good and avoid evil, to be just and fair, to help the poor and disadvantaged, and to contribute to the well-being of the community.

Worship includes anything a person does to seek God's pleasure. If a Muslim eats or exercises to keep fit in order to help the community, or does well at work, it is seen as worship. Even greeting someone or expressing kindness is a form of worship. The key point is that, in Islam, worship is not limited to particular rituals. A Muslim's whole life revolves around the idea of worshipping God.

3. Charity (*zakat*)

Zakat is the payment of obligatory charity. Muslims must pay *zakat* if they have savings that have not gone below a certain amount for a whole year. This amount is equal to approximately eighty-five grams of gold. Today, the value of gold is translated into the local currency and the amount of *zakat* is two and a half percent of a person's average annual net savings.

The *zakat* that Muslims pay is given to the poor and needy, the disadvantaged in the community such as orphans, poor relatives, those struggling to repay their debts, students, and general welfare projects such as educational institutions, mosques and hospitals.

In addition to the annual *zakat*, Muslims are asked to make a small donation at the end of Ramadan, in order to allow the poor to celebrate the end of fasting as well. Muslims also give voluntarily at other times. They are expected to be generous; stinginess is strongly discouraged.

Giving charity

The Prophet said, 'Every Muslim has to give charity'. The people asked, 'O Allah's Prophet! If someone has nothing to give, what will he do?' He said, 'He should work with his hands and benefit himself and also give charity [from what he earns]'. The people further asked, 'If he cannot find even that?' He replied, 'He should help the needy who appeal for help'. Then the people asked, 'If he cannot do that?' He replied, 'Then he should perform good deeds and keep away from evil deeds and this will be regarded as charitable deeds'.¹²

¹² *Sahih Bukhari*, Volume 2, Book 24, Number 524, <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/Hadithsunnah/bukhari/024.sbt.html>

4. Fasting (*sawm*)

Muslim adults are expected to fast during the month of Ramadan. This is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and is either twenty-nine or thirty days long. They eat a light meal before dawn, then go without food or drink all day until sunset. At sunset, they break their fast.

Fasting involves abstaining from food, drink and sex during daylight hours from dawn to sunset. Ramadan is not just about food and drink. During fasting, Muslims are expected to avoid bad deeds, words and thoughts. They should spend time, where possible, in prayer and meditation, and help the disadvantaged in the community. Finally, fasting is a time to forgive others for things they have done to you and make amends for your own misdeeds towards other people.

Children are expected to fast when they reach religious maturity; this is the beginning of menstruation for girls, and the onset of puberty for boys. Although all adult Muslims are expected to fast in Ramadan, there are some exemptions. Those who are too old or sick or people on long journeys do not have to fast, nor do women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or menstruating. They can fast afterwards.

No matter where Ramadan is observed, normal life continues. Muslims still go to work or school even though they are fasting.

Maryam's Ramadan

This year Maryam fasted the month of Ramadan properly for the first time. At first it wasn't easy getting up very early in the morning trying to eat some of the delicious breakfast her mother had made before praying the dawn prayer, and falling back into bed for a few more hours before getting up to go to school. Her friends had wondered why she wasn't eating lunch as usual but Maryam explained she was fasting. In the evenings, her father took the whole family to special prayers at the mosque and the nights of Ramadan seemed to go on forever.

Soon the end of the month drew close and Maryam was excited. Her mother had promised she could go shopping for a special new outfit to wear at the Eid prayers which would be celebrated after the end of Ramadan. Maryam chose a blue dress and a matching light blue scarf. When the day of Eid came, it felt weird to have breakfast during daylight hours. In just a few weeks Maryam had become used to her pre-dawn meal, but now she was again allowed to eat once the sun had come up.

Maryam washed herself, brushed her teeth and put on her new outfit. Arriving at the mosque with her family she saw hundreds of people including her best friend Layla. '*Assalaamu alaykum*' (peace be upon you) she called out to Layla and the two of them hurried upstairs to find a spot to sit and wait for the Eid prayers. Everyone was excited and chanting special prayers of praise to God. Others were collecting last minute donations of charity for the poor. Very soon the imam began to lead the Eid prayers, and Maryam joined in with the rest of the worshippers. She felt good that she had managed to keep the fast of Ramadan and thanked Allah for all the blessings He had bestowed upon her.

5. Pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*)

At least once in a lifetime, a Muslim who is physically and financially able is expected to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, called *hajj*. This takes place during the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar.

Today, nearly two million Muslims travel to Mecca to take part in this annual religious event. It takes about five days for the various *hajj* rituals to be completed in and around Mecca. Pilgrims spend their time praying, reflecting, supplicating and reciting the Qur'an. Many Muslims express a feeling of spiritual renewal following *hajj*. During the pilgrimage, they also experience a sense of oneness with humanity, as pilgrims from all around the globe gather in peace and unity to worship God. *Hajj* is considered the great equaliser, as all people (rich and poor) wear the same simple two pieces of plain cloth for the duration of *hajj*: billionaires and kings side by side with the poor and down-trodden.

Muslims believe that if their *hajj* is accepted by God, their previous misdeeds and sins are washed away and forgiven.

Lucy's Hajj

We put on our *ihram* [special pilgrimage clothes] in Riyadh, just before boarding, and it was amazing what an impact this dress had on our characters. It made us want to be more serious and devote our time to Islamic study – so any thoughts our husbands had on fast cars had to be temporarily put on hold!

As we flew from Riyadh to Jeddah, we passed the *miqat* point, the point at which you make your intention for *hajj* and from which you must recite the *talbiyah* (the special prayer for *hajj*) as frequently as possible. We all knew how important our *hajj* was, and we were determined to do it properly.

We arrived around 11.30 pm in Makkah in an underground car park, with an escalator leading to just outside the Sacred Mosque. There was a small pile-up as some women had never seen an escalator before and were understandably nervous. Above ground, we found people were sleeping all over the mosque – on windowsills, on floors, on the marble both inside and outside.

Our first priority was to perform *umra* [a minor pilgrimage]: despite being past midnight, the area around the Ka'ba was crowded with people doing *tawaf* worshipping Allah as they circled the Ka'ba seven times. I loved sharing the occasional smile with an unknown fellow Muslimah (female Muslim), creating an instant feeling of bonding. Four people carried each infirm person on their shoulders, so that the old and ill could also perform *tawaf*.

Everyone was there for one reason, supplicating to Allah. My supplications were mainly thanking God.¹³

¹³ http://www.newmuslimsproject.net/nmp/meeting_point/issue_14/lucy's_hajj1.htm

COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES¹⁴

There are over 1300 million Muslims in the world today. They come from various ethnic, cultural and linguistic communities in Asia, Africa, Europe, America and Australia. They speak many different languages: Arabic, Persian, English, Chinese, Urdu, Spanish, Japanese, German and Russian are only a few. It is impossible that all these people would think, behave and act exactly in the same way, even as Muslims.

For most people who consider themselves Muslim, there are a few basic things on which they usually agree. These things may be called the core beliefs and practices of Islam, for example:

- » Six fundamental beliefs (see p.17).
- » Five pillars of Islam (see p.21).
- » Prohibition of pork and alcohol.
- » Prohibition of murder, theft, adultery.
- » Importance of honesty, truthfulness and kindness.
- » Importance of helping the poor and disadvantaged.

There are many more such beliefs and practices. If you travel around the world and talk to Muslims, you will find that whether in Morocco, India or Australia, they will generally agree that these things are an essential part of Islam, even though they may not always practise them as they should.

A sense of unity among Muslims around the world is also achieved through various means:

- » Common beliefs and practices.
- » A common moral and ethical code based on these common beliefs.
- » A feeling that all Muslims belong to one single 'community' of believers wherever they live or reside. This is similar to the idea that all Jews or all Christians belong to one single 'community' of believers. It is not a political idea but a religious one.

Beyond the core beliefs and practices, Muslims disagree on many things. These differences can be seen in a variety of contexts.

Main divisions within Islam

Like any other religious tradition, such as Christianity or Judaism, Islam has many groups and sub-groups. Some of these divisions are related to the theological school or legal school a person belongs to; others are related to how people try to find answers to contemporary problems; still others are related to how one should interpret religious teachings. Some divisions are political while others are theological or spiritual.

Sunnis and Shi'a

The most commonly understood difference between Muslims is related to a political issue of leadership going back to the seventh century. Immediately after the death of the Prophet in 632, one of the first important problems Muslims had to face was who should be the successor to the Prophet and lead the Muslim community. Some Muslims argued that one of the family members of the Prophet should be the successor, in particular his cousin and son-in-law Ali. Those who followed this view came later to be known as Shi'a.

Other Muslims, who seemed to be in the majority, disagreed that the succession should be based on family ties. They argued that anyone who was capable of leading the Muslim community could become the successor and leader. They supported Abu Bakr, the Prophet's close friend, as his successor. Those who held this view were later known as Sunnis.

This division continues to this day. Over time, the Shi'a and Sunnis have developed their own theological and legal schools and their interpretations of various religious teachings.

Today, the vast majority of Muslims (about eighty-five percent) are Sunnis. The rest are Shi'a. The Shi'a live mainly in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon. Small communities of Shi'a exist throughout the world.

¹⁴ See also Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, 64-77.

In Australia, the majority of Muslims are Sunnis. They come from all over the world: from Turkey, Lebanon, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, to name a few countries. There is also a significant Shi`a community in Australia, mainly from Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and Afghanistan.

Different schools of law

There are five legal schools (schools of law) in Islam, which is another example of the diverse opinions held by Muslims. Most Muslims belong to one of these schools, although this is not compulsory.

The term 'legal school' refers to a particular way of interpreting or understanding Islamic teachings. For instance, a legal school says how a Muslim should perform the five daily prayers, or what rules must be followed in marriage and divorce, or who can have custody of the children when parents divorce. Since Islamic law covers many things, such as rituals, family law, contract law, criminal law, and many other areas of law, each legal school has its own position. The five main schools are prominent in different countries and regions:

Hanafi ~ India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Turkey

Shafi`i ~ Indonesia, Malaysia and Egypt

Maliki ~ North and West Africa

Hanbali ~ Arabia and the Persian Gulf

Ja`fari ~ Shi`a Muslims of Iran, Iraq and Lebanon

All Islamic legal schools are represented amongst Australian Muslims. In any mosque, you may find a practitioner of the Hanafi school praying side by side with a practitioner of the Shafi`i school. However, much of the legal debate on issues such as criminal law or contract law does not concern the majority of Australian Muslims as it is not relevant to their context.

Spirituality and Sufi orders

Those Muslims who give a high degree of emphasis to the spiritual dimension of Islam are called Sufis (mystics). Their ultimate goal is refining the soul and 'reaching' God. Sufis also differ among themselves about the best way of achieving this goal, and over the past one thousand years have developed 'Sufi orders' for this purpose. Examples of Sufi orders are the Naqshabandiyya order and Mevlewiyya order. Throughout the Muslim world (including among Australian Muslims) many Muslims would like to be associated with one of the Sufi orders as such orders are highly influential. However, there is also an opinion among some Muslims today that associating with Sufi orders and practising Sufism is not Islamic and therefore should be discouraged. This attitude has its roots in a rejection of some of the excesses committed by a small minority of Sufis who would encourage their followers to abandon religious law, or attract crowds by performing magic tricks and illusions. Because of the tendency for these extreme Sufis to move outside of what was considered legitimately Islamic, other Muslims have felt it best to avoid Sufism altogether. In the long history of the Muslim world, however, Sufism has had a legitimate place alongside other Islamic disciplines such as theology, law, philosophy and Qur`anic exegesis.

Sayings of Rabi`a, the Mystic

O God!
If I adore You out of fear of Hell,
burn me in Hell!
If I adore You out of desire for
Paradise,
Lock me out of Paradise.
But if I adore You for Yourself alone,
Do not deny to me Your eternal
beauty.
I swear that ever since the first day
You brought me back to life,
The day You became my Friend,
I have not slept –
And even if You drive me from your
door,
I swear again that we will never be
separated –
Because You are alive in my heart.¹⁵

Dealing with modern issues

There are differences among Muslims on how to deal with modern problems and challenges. Some Muslims are ultra-conservative in their approach; others are liberal. Others come somewhere between. For instance, on the question ‘Should a Muslim participate in Christmas celebrations in Australia?’, conservatives would argue not, but liberals may have the opposite view. Those in the middle may say that such participation is acceptable with certain conditions.

Observant and non-observant Muslims

Some Muslims are practising and observant Muslims. They perform the obligatory prayers, fast during Ramadan, pay *zakat*, and also observe dietary and other regulations set down in the Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet. Others may be Muslim only in name. They may identify themselves as Muslim but may not observe the rituals or regulations. They are considered ‘cultural’ or ‘nominal’ Muslims.

Cultural issues

There are Muslims who emphasise the culture of their own community. For instance, Pakistanis and Turks have different ways of dressing for and celebrating religious occasions. The food they cook will also be different. Similarly, French Muslims and American Muslims will have cultural differences in their approach to Islam. These differences are important in the life of Muslims, and include the languages they speak, the clothes they wear and other customs.

Converts

There are Muslims who are converts to Islam from another religion. For instance, in Australia, there are converts to Islam from Anglo-Saxon Christian backgrounds. Converts who grew up in Australia may be comfortable with much of Australian culture, while a Muslim who has only recently migrated from somewhere like Afghanistan may have very different attitudes to Australian culture, as well as to certain Islamic issues.

¹⁵ <http://www.digiserve.com/mystic/Muslim/Rabia/index.html>

Michael's story

Michael decided to become a Muslim about a year after marrying his Malaysian born wife Aisha. Before becoming a Muslim, Michael was pretty much your average Aussie. He liked going to the pub, watching the footy and even played guitar in a band. He and Aisha would spend hours talking about the meaning of life, and soon Michael became interested in her religion. At first he thought it was a bit strange, but soon he found himself reading books and becoming more and more fascinated with Islam.

One day Michael felt he had to make a decision. Becoming a Muslim would mean he wouldn't be able to have a couple of beers down at the pub anymore, but apart from a few small changes Michael felt that Islam was pretty compatible with what he already believed. So Michael became a Muslim. He still watches footy and plays guitar, but now he also goes to the mosque on Friday.

There is no single religious authority in Islam

Because there is no religious hierarchy in Islam (especially in Sunni Islam), there is no one person – apart from the Prophet Muhammad – whose views on Islam are considered final. Anyone with knowledge of the religion and related matters can express an opinion on a religious issue. In practice, those who have studied Islam and are knowledgeable about the religion have the strongest say. These people are called *ulama* (scholars). They may have spent many years studying the religion in schools and universities such as al-Azhar in Egypt. If they have gone through a traditional method of Islamic learning they may have a certificate, called an *ijazah*, that allows them to teach religious knowledge to others. Sometimes popular preachers become well known in the Muslim world and they may pass on their interpretation of Islamic teachings via modern media such as television, radio, cassettes and videos.

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MUSLIM FAMILY LIFE

The basic unit of society in Islam is the family. The individual within the family has obligations towards other members of the family (both immediate and extended) and to society. Islam recognises the traditional family of husband, wife and children.

Parents have a duty to care for their children, educate them, and teach them the basics of Islam. Children are expected to respect their parents, and look after them when they are old. Husbands and wives have duties towards each other. In the family, all members are dependent on one another. The mother has a particularly important place in the family.

The Prophet Muhammad on Mothers

A Companion of the Prophet asked him, 'Messenger of Allah, to whom should I be dutiful?' He replied, 'Your mother.' I asked, 'Then whom?' He replied, 'Your mother.' I asked, 'Then whom?' He replied, 'Your mother.' I asked, 'Then to whom should I be dutiful?' He replied, 'Your father, and then the next closest relative and then the next.'

Despite these teachings, the practice among Muslims varies greatly. Some believe that the wife is subservient to the husband, more or less like a servant. In some cultures, Muslim children sometimes ignore the teaching of Islam about their duties towards their parents.

Young Muslims

Muslim youth in Australia, like any other young people, have their fair share of problems: homelessness, drugs, delinquency and crime. However, there is no research to back up the view that these problems are more prominent in Muslim communities than in other Australian communities. It seems that, of all the problems faced by Muslim youth, the drug problem is perhaps the most challenging.¹⁶

Family planning

Generally speaking, many Muslims have no objections to family planning or controlling the number of children that two parents might have. Various family planning measures are widely used. However, in many Muslim societies, it is still quite common to have large families. Even in Australia, Muslims from certain ethnic groups tend to have larger families. In Australia, as elsewhere, the size of the family depends on many factors: class, education, generation and ethnicity. This is not to deny that there are some Muslims who strongly believe that having a large family is a religious requirement encouraged by Islam.

Abortion

For many Muslims today, abortion is considered prohibited unless there is an immediate danger to the life of the mother. In some Muslim majority countries, abortion is tolerated, but in others it is strictly prohibited.

Abortion: a common view among Muslims

Abortion is the wilful cessation of pregnancy. It is a crime against a living human being. Technological advances have made it possible to show that an unborn child has attained all human characteristics within eight weeks of conception. Miscarriages due to biomedical factors are not abortions, as those happen without human interference. If, however, it is reliably established that the continuation of the pregnancy will result in the death of the mother, then the principle of choosing the lesser of two evils is followed, and an abortion is allowable. The mother's life takes precedence over that of her baby in such an instance because the mother is already established in life with many duties and responsibilities. It is thus less disruptive to family life (although just as regrettable) to sacrifice the life of the unborn child which has not yet acquired a personality nor has any duties, responsibilities or obligations.¹⁷

¹⁶ For further details see Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, 90-92.

¹⁷ Ghulam Sarwar. *Sex Education: The Muslim Perspective*. Sydney: The Muslim Educational Trust, 28.

Divorce

Marriage in Islam is highly encouraged and considered to be a life-long commitment. In fact, the Prophet said that marriage constitutes half of the religion, perhaps meaning that the tests and trials that are naturally encountered in marriage and family life help make a person a better Muslim if they can deal with them successfully. If a marriage is in trouble, the Qur'an encourages the couple to seek help and advice from others, such as elders and those who can competently give such advice. If all attempts to save the marriage fail, divorce is seen as a reasonable option, but it is not generally advocated. If a marriage is to be terminated, this should be done with honour and respect. In the event of divorce, the wife's rights are safeguarded under Islamic law.

Despite the Islamic teaching against resorting to divorce, the divorce rate among young Muslims in Australia (particularly between 16 and 29 years of age) is higher than for the overall Australian population.

Sex education

Islam does not consider sex as a bad thing. In fact, sex is considered one of God's 'gifts' and essential for the continuation of the human race. Islam encourages a healthy attitude towards sex, but insists that it be within the bounds of marriage.

Children are taught about changes to their bodies at puberty, how they should deal with those changes, and what is permissible or prohibited with regard to sex. Usually, girls are taught by their mothers and boys by their fathers. Teaching and talking about sex is a normal part of life in many Muslim societies. However, many Muslim parents in Australia appear to be concerned with the way sex education is taught in schools, and with what they perceive as encouragement to students to experiment with sex outside marriage, or an expectation that they will.

Domestic violence

Islam condemns domestic violence in the strongest terms. The relationship between a husband and wife is to be based on mutuality, cooperation and love. The Prophet said:

The most perfect believer is one who is the best in courtesy and amiable manners, and the best among you people are those who are most kind and courteous to their wives.

Even in the case of divorce, the Qur'an says:

When you divorce women, and they fulfill the term of their waiting period, either take them back on equitable terms or set them free on equitable terms; but do not take them back to injure them, [or] to take undue advantage; if any one does that; he wrongs his own soul. (Qur'an 2:231)

Despite these teachings, some Muslim men believe that it is acceptable to beat their wives, hurt them, or treat them badly. Some men may even want to justify this in the name of Islam. They may point to a Qur'anic verse which appears to give permission to men to discipline their recalcitrant wives. But today many Muslims interpret this verse in ways that do not permit any physical disciplining of the wife.

Prophet Muhammad on treating wives well

O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah's trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right, then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers.¹⁸

¹⁸ Prophet Muhammad's Last Sermon.

THE MILESTONES IN A MUSLIM'S LIFE¹⁹

Birth

When a child is born to Muslim parents, one of the first things done in many Muslim cultures is to make the 'call to prayer' in the right ear of the baby and the 'call to commence prayer' in the left ear. On the seventh day after birth, a naming ceremony called *`aqiqa* is held. The child is given a name and the child's hair is shaved. Gifts and charity are given to the disadvantaged in the community.

Circumcision of boys

Boys are circumcised early in their life. There is no particular age for this, and practices vary from culture to culture. Nevertheless, it is regarded as an occasion for celebration with presents, visits from family, and sharing of food. How this is celebrated varies from culture to culture.

Contrary to what many people believe, female circumcision is not an Islamic requirement.

Circumcision in Turkey

As an Islamic country, in Turkey all Muslim boys are circumcised between the ages 2–14 by licensed circumcising surgeons. From the social point of view, the most prominent feature of circumcision is the introduction of a child to his religious society as a new member. Circumcisions are generally made with big ceremonies in festive atmosphere. After the circumcision he will receive many gifts.

When a family determines a date for their feast, they invite relatives, friends and neighbours by sending invitation cards in advance. Depending on the economic position of families, feasts might take place in a ceremonial hall or a hotel instead of a house. They prepare a highly decorated room for the boy with a nice bed and many colourful decorative things. Boys should also wear special costumes for this feast.

In the morning of the feast, the children of guests are all taken for a tour around in a big convoy with the boy either on horseback, horse carts, or automobiles. This convoy is also followed by musicians playing the drums and the clarinet. After they come back, the boy wears a loose long white dress and is circumcised by the surgeon while somebody holds him. This person who holds him is called *kirve*, and has to be somebody close to the boy.

After the circumcision, the boy is in pain and has to be kept busy with music, lots of jokes or some other animation. Presents also are given at this time to help him forget his pains. In the meantime words from the Qur'an are recited and guests are taken to tables for the feast meal which is a special one laid with different food changing from region to region. After a few days the boy recovers and festivities end.

Today, there is a small group of people who prefer their children to be circumcised in hospitals while they are in hospital after birth, whereby ignoring the traditional side.²⁰

¹⁹ For further details see Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, 78-94.

²⁰ <http://www.zawaj.com/weddingways/turkish.html> ON 3-9-200.

Learning about religion

From early childhood, a Muslim child begins to learn about Islam, including learning how to recite the Qur'an and memorising some of its short chapters (or suras), performing prayers and learning about what is acceptable and not acceptable in Islam. This way the child learns how to be a Muslim from early childhood, mainly within the family.

Puberty

Puberty for a boy is when he starts to produce semen and for a girl it is when she starts to have her periods. When children reach puberty, they are considered to have entered the adult world for religious purposes and are expected to perform the various rituals of Islam, such as the five daily prayers and fasting during the month of Ramadan. In Islam, once a boy or girl reaches puberty, they are technically 'adults'. There are no celebratory rituals Muslim children are expected to perform on reaching puberty.

Eighteenth birthday

Muslims do not attach any religious significance to the eighteenth birthday. However, in Australia, Muslims follow the laws in place in relation to the age of eighteen, such as on voting and driving.

In Australia, many Muslims do not leave home when they reach the age of eighteen. Even afterwards, parents are obliged to support their children until they can stand on their own feet. Usually, many young Muslims only leave home when they get married. Even then, some prefer to live with their extended family.

Marriage

Theoretically, puberty is also the time when marriage becomes permissible, but nowadays it is usually deferred until at least sixteen. In many Muslim societies, early marriage is common. Even in Australia, Muslims tend to marry earlier than the overall Australian population. This is the case for both males and females. However, a much larger number of Muslim females get married earlier than Muslim males. One reason for early marriage is that Islam strictly prohibits sex outside marriage, and marrying early helps prevent young adults from falling into illicit sexual relationships.

Old age

Children have a duty to look after their aged parents. Neglecting to do this is considered a grave sin in Islam.

The Qur'an on parents

'And your Lord has commanded that you shall not serve [any] but Him, and that you be kind to your parents. If either or both of them reach old age with you, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour. And make yourself submissively gentle to them with compassion, and say: O my Lord! Have compassion on them, as they brought me up [when I was] little.' (Qur'an 17:23–24)

Death

There are no complicated or elaborate rites performed when a person is dying. When a Muslim is close to death, he or she is encouraged to utter the declaration of faith 'there is no god but God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God'. It is also common for someone present to recite verses of the Qur'an and pray for the peaceful departure of the soul.

When the person dies, the body must be handled with care and respect. Burial should take place as early as possible, usually within twenty-four hours, unless there are reasons for a later burial. The person is expected to be buried in the town or city where he or she died.

Burial Practices

When a Muslim dies, the following practices are observed by a spouse or a family member of the same sex:

- » The body is washed being careful to handle it with great care and dignity.
- » The body is wrapped in three to five pieces of cloth, preferably white in colour.
- » The body, having been prepared for burial, is taken to the cemetery and funeral prayers are performed. It is strongly encouraged that as many Muslims as possible should join the funeral procession and perform the prayers.

A simple burial is preferred. In some Muslim countries, particularly in dry, hot areas, coffins are not used. If one is used, it has to be simple and inexpensive. Similarly, headstones are not encouraged and cremation is considered prohibited.

Muslims usually have great concerns about post-mortems unless there is a valid reason. This is because, even in death, a person's body must be handled with great care and respect, and post-mortems are seen to be violent and intrusive to the body.

Following the burial, those present at the graveside perform a prayer led by an imam, and ask God to forgive the deceased and to have mercy on him or her. Members of the community are encouraged to visit the family afterwards and to provide support.

When Muslims visit graves and cemeteries they are encouraged to reflect on the belief that all people die and will one day face God. It helps them to be aware of their own future death and to try and live good lives until that time.

*The body
is washed
being careful
to handle it
with great care
and dignity.*

*In most Muslim societies,
women and men are
equal before the law.*

Many people in the West believe that Muslim women are oppressed or disadvantaged in Muslim societies. There are several reasons for this:

- » Oppressive practices that discriminate against women in some Muslim societies. For example, in some countries, women are not allowed to work outside the home except in a very limited arena, participate in the political system, become judges, work in so-called male professions, or drive cars.
- » In some places girls may also be discouraged or forbidden to go to school.
- » Images of how Muslim women have been treated in countries such as Afghanistan (under the rule of the Taliban) have been shown on television around the world, especially after September 11, 2001.
- » The wearing of a veil or other form of head covering by women is seen by many in the West as a symbol of oppression and lack of equality between women and men.
- » Certain positions taken in classical Islamic law are seen as disadvantaging women. One example is inheritance laws, where in certain situations a female is bequeathed half the share that a male receives. For instance, if a parent leaves an estate to be distributed, a son will receive double the share of the daughter.
- » The practice of polygyny in which a man can marry up to four wives (with certain conditions) whereas a woman can only marry one husband at a time.

Women's position in Muslim societies

In most Muslim societies, women and men are equal before the law. Both have access to education, employment, and participation in the political system. In several Muslim societies, women have held the highest office in the country. They have been prime ministers and heads of state in key nations such as Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Turkey.

However, in a number of Muslim societies, there is systematic discrimination against women. Much of that is related to local cultural practices, values and norms, although these are often justified on the basis of Islam. Other Muslims who do not agree with this object to such misuse of Islam and argue that Islam has nothing to do with such discrimination.

For many Muslim women, challenging oppressive practices and ideas where discrimination exists is an important part of the struggle for justice, and many find the strength and ability to do exactly that by appealing to Islamic texts, values and norms. They do not believe that Islam itself is oppressive to women, but certain interpretations of religious texts. For them such interpretations can be questioned and revised.

²² A significant part of this section relies on Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, 157-182, where further details are provided.

The dominant, patriarchal interpretations of Islam have fostered the myth of women's inferiority in several ways...

Some Muslim women point to discrimination and oppression that exists all around the world and argue that many different factors have contributed to discrimination experienced by women. They feel that when women are free from the constraints of poverty, have access to education, and can control their lives then discrimination and oppression can be fought.

Riffat Hassan on women in Islam

What I will say may surprise both Muslims who 'know' women's place and non-Muslims who 'know' what Islam means for women. It is this: I am a Muslim, a theologian, and a women's rights activist, and while I am critical in a number of ways of the life that most Muslim societies offer to women, twenty years of theological study, as well as my own deepest faith, convince me that in real Islam, the Islam of the Qur'an, women and men are equals. Liberating ideas lie at the heart of most enduring faiths, and Islam shares in these.

The dominant, patriarchal interpretations of Islam have fostered the myth of women's inferiority in several ways. They have used sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (including disputed sayings) to undermine the intent and teachings of the Qur'an, which Muslims regard as the Word of God. They have taken Qur'anic verses out of context and read them literally, ignoring the fact that the Qur'an often uses symbolic language to portray deep truths. And they have failed to account for the overriding ethical values of the Qur'an, which stresses that human beings – women as well as men – have been designated to be God's 'khalifah' (vicegerent) on earth and to establish a social order characterized by justice and compassion.²³

Role of women in Islam

It is difficult to talk about the role of women in Islam in general terms. Different Muslims see women's roles in different ways. Some are conservative, others are liberal, and others fall somewhere between, although all claim that their views are based on Islam. Wherever Muslims live, these differences will be found.

Traditionalist (conservative) view

Some Muslims of a more traditional (conservative) persuasion argue that women's roles in Muslim societies should be restricted. The primary task of women, according to this view, is to be at home as wives and mothers. Strict segregation of men and women in these communities is maintained and women may wear a garment that covers the entire body including the face.

Liberal view

Other Muslims say that the conservative position has no basis in Islam. From their point of view, women are able to play a role equal to men in all areas and there should be no discrimination against women in any area of life. They argue for absolute equality. They tend to reject religious texts or their interpretations that appear to promote any discrimination against women as outdated or not relevant today.

²³ <http://www.religiousconsultation.org/hassan.htm>

Between Traditionalists and Liberals

There is a more popular trend among Muslims which sees no conflict between Islam and the needs and aspirations of Muslim women today. Their views can be summarised as follows:

- » The Qur'an and the Prophet taught that men and women are equal in the eyes of God and in society. The rights given to women by the Qur'an and the Prophet in the seventh century were ignored by Muslims in subsequent generations.
- » Women should have equal opportunities in all areas of education, political participation, and decision making in society.
- » Women are also capable of taking responsibility for themselves, and do not need a man to support them all the time.
- » A woman is an independent person, even in marriage. She has the right to own property and retains that right after marriage. Her husband has no right to her property or wealth; in fact he should provide for her and their children even if she is wealthy.

These Muslims respect religious texts related to women in the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet but interpret them in the light of circumstances of today and emphasise texts that support equality.

Polygyny

Polygyny, which is one type of polygamy, is marriage to more than one wife at the same time. In Islam, it is believed that a man may marry up to four wives. However, there is a debate among Muslims about whether polygyny should be allowed today. Polygyny is practised in some Muslim societies, but is banned in others, for example Tunisia. In others, such as Indonesia, it is allowed with strict conditions and often requires permission from the court, which is only given once those strict conditions are met. Other countries such as Saudi Arabia allow polygyny without any constraints.

Often the attitude towards polygyny is influenced by local cultural norms and practices. In societies where polygyny has been widely practised in the past, such as Saudi Arabia or some West African countries, it can be the norm. It is easier to ban or restrict polygyny in societies where it has not been practised before. While many Muslim women find polygyny difficult to deal with, there are other Muslim women who do not object to the practice, especially in societies where it is common.

The Prophet Muhammad had a monogamous marriage with his wife Khadijah. They were happily married for twenty-five years until she passed away. In that time polygyny was not at all unusual, and after Khadijah's death the Prophet married a number of women, mostly for political and charitable reasons. The first woman he married after Khadijah, was a poor elderly woman whose husband had died and she had no one to protect her. Some of his other wives were married to cement political ties (as was the custom for Arab leaders of the time). Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad had special permission to marry these wives. They were all called 'Mothers of the Believers' and cared for after the Prophet passed away.

Many Muslim women say that polygyny was a practice permitted in seventh century Arabia, but that it is irrelevant today in many societies, as women often have equal opportunities for education, employment and earning an income. Others continue to argue that, since it is permitted in Islam, it cannot be banned no matter what other changes happen in a society.

Concept of *hijab* (veil)

As with any other issue in Islam, there are different views among Muslims on the meaning of *hijab*. For some, *hijab* means covering a woman's body including her hair and face. For others, it is covering the entire body except the face and hands. Another opinion is that *hijab* simply means covering the body modestly, not necessarily including the hair and face. Proponents of these views attempt to support their arguments by quoting from the Qur'an, the traditions of the Prophet and opinions of Muslim scholars. A literal reading of some texts may indicate that covering for a woman means the entire body, whereas a more 'liberal' reading of such texts (particularly taking into consideration their context) may indicate that the covering can be less than that.

I am a Muslim Woman

I am a Muslim Woman
Feel free to ask me why
When I walk, I walk with dignity
When I speak, I do not lie

I am a Muslim Woman,
Not all of me you'll see
But what you should appreciate
Is that the choice I make is free

I'm not plagued with depression
I'm neither cheated nor abused
I don't envy other women
And I'm certainly not confused

Note, I speak perfect English
Et un petit peu de francais aussi
I'm majoring in Linguistics
So you need not speak slowly
I own my own small business
Every cent I earn is mine
I drive my Chevy to school and work
And no, that's not a crime

You often stare as I walk by
You don't understand my veil
But peace and power I have found
For I am equal to any male

I am a Muslim Woman
So please don't pity me
For God has guided me to truth
And now I'm finally free!²⁴

*I am a
Muslim
Woman.
So please
don't pity me.*

Some people believe that 'covering' is for women only, but men are also required to cover certain parts of the body. This is usually considered to be at least 'from navel to knee'. However, in many cultures, Muslim men actually cover their entire body, including their hair. The Tuareg men in Africa even veil their faces as well. Attitudes to covering, whether for men or women, and the degree of covering, are influenced by local norms and practices. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, even men often cover their entire body including their hair, whereas in Indonesia this would be considered unusual.

²⁴ <http://www.themodernreligion.com/index2.html>

Female circumcision

Female circumcision (also known as ‘female genital cutting’ or ‘female genital mutilation’), which is the cutting away of a part of the female genitals, has no Islamic basis or justification. There is nothing legitimate in the Qur’an or the traditions of the Prophet to suggest that Muslims should engage in this practice. As a result, most Muslims around the world do not engage in it. Where it is done, it is largely a local cultural practice (at times justified on the basis of religion). In Islam, boys are circumcised, although even here it is only recommended, not an obligatory duty.

Female circumcision is a procedure that is performed on girls usually before puberty. There are three types of female circumcision, which vary in degree of surgery performed. Because a part (or sometimes all) of the clitoris is surgically removed, female circumcision appears to leave women with reduced or no sexual feeling. The most dramatic form is called infibulation where the outer lips of the vagina are sewn together, leaving a small hole for bodily fluids to pass out. Infibulation is extremely painful and has many dangerous health risks.

Those who promote female circumcision believe it has health benefits and makes women more ‘beautiful’. They also see it as reducing feelings of sexual arousal in women so that they are less likely to engage in pre-marital sex or adultery. Those who want female circumcision banned argue that it leaves women permanently mutilated and vulnerable to many sexual and physical problems.

Female circumcision exists in some communities around the world, particularly in parts of Africa. If it is common in the area where they live, Muslims also tend to practise it.

Arranged marriage

In the West and in many non-Western societies, couples usually get married through a ‘love match’. The man and woman meet without any intention to marry. They begin seeing each other; they fall in love and become involved in each other’s lives. If things work out well, they may get married. Otherwise, they move on to another relationship.

In some cultures, arranged marriage is quite common. This can have many forms. One is that parents or guardians select the bride or groom, having considered social status, relationship, profession, or the wealth of both. The bride and groom may or may not have any say in this arranged marriage.

Another form of arranged marriage is planned marriage, where individuals or their parents search for a possible marriage partner (either through friends, specialised agencies, elders, or even family). Once they find a possible partner, they meet with the intention of getting married.

Under Islamic norms of marriage, 'love matches,' particularly where the individuals are involved in pre-marital sex or living together, are considered unacceptable. Arranged marriages where the consent of both parties is not sought are also considered un-Islamic. A marriage is a contract and those who enter into it must give their consent. If a young woman, for instance, is forced into a marriage which she does not want, this is considered un-Islamic. Although sex before or outside marriage is forbidden in Islam, it is considered normal for individuals to know one another before marriage.

Many Muslims therefore opt for a planned marriage. However, in many Muslim societies, in practice, love matches and arranged marriages are quite common. In Australia, planned marriage and forms of 'love match' appear to be common among Muslims, but arranged marriages appear to be rare except in certain ethnic communities.

Wedding ceremony in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

As a tradition in the UAE, the setting of the wedding date marks the beginning of the bride's preparation for her wedding. Although the groom is also put through a series of preparations, the bride's preparations are naturally more elaborate and time consuming.

In preparation for her wedding, she is anointed with all sorts of traditional oils and perfumes from head to toe. Her body is rubbed with cleansing and conditioning oils and creams, the hands and feet are decorated with henna and the hair is washed with extracts of amber and jasmine. She is fed only the best of foods and her girlfriends prepare the best dishes which they share with her.

Traditionally, she is not seen for forty days except for family members as she rests at home in preparation for her wedding day. Fine pieces of jewellery, perfumes, silk materials, and other necessary items are presented to her by the groom, from which she creates her elaborate trousseau called *addahbiya*.

The festivities usually take about one week before the wedding night. During that week, traditional music, continuous singing, and dancing take place reflecting the joy shared by the bride's and the groom's family. Nowadays, although most weddings are celebrated in less than one week, they are just as elaborate and ceremonial, if not more.

A few days before the wedding night is the henna night or *laylat al-henna* which is a very special night for the bride since it is a ladies' night only. On this night, the bride's hands and feet are decorated with henna, which is a dark brown paste made from the henna plant. When left on the skin for some time, the henna leaves a dark red stain.

The henna night is a time for all the bride's sisters, female family members, and girlfriends to get together and sing and dance. All female family members and guests also decorate their hands with henna. Another traditional element of the UAE customs is the Arabian kohl or eyeliner. The bride, as well as many other UAE women, like to line their eyes on almost all occasions.

After her eyes are lined, her hair is perfumed and her hands and feet are decorated with henna, the bride is ready for her wedding night. The back-to-back feasts and celebrations involve both men and women who usually celebrate separately. Although different areas of the country may have slight differences in their celebrations and customs, the general traditions are the same throughout the country most of which are still adhered to.²⁵

²⁵ <http://islam.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.ecssr.ac.ae/Land/wedding%2520.html>

Inheritance

One of the criticisms that are made of Islamic law is that it seems to favour men in the area of inheritance, and it is commonly believed that when it comes to inheritance a woman is only worth half of a man. In actual fact, inheritance laws are much more complex than that, and many Muslims argue the entire social fabric of an Islamic society must be taken into account when appreciating the wisdom of Islamic inheritance law.

In Arabian society before the Prophet Muhammad, women often could not inherit anything. In fact, they were sometimes thought of as 'goods' to be inherited themselves! The Qur'an changed the Arab custom and forbade the inheriting of women. Then the Qur'an stipulated that women should also receive a share of inheritance:

'From what is left by parents and those nearest related there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property be small or large, a determinate share'. (Qur'an 4:7)

Furthermore, whatever a woman inherited was hers to keep. The husband had no claim to any of her property and wealth, a right that English women did not receive until 1882. On the other hand, a Muslim man had the responsibility of looking after the female members of his family and supporting them from his means. This is why, some Muslims argue, the amount of a son's inheritance is double that of a daughter's: because he has the responsibility of looking after the female members of his family, while she may spend or keep her inheritance for herself.

However, a man's share is double that of a woman's only some of the time. At other times men and women have an equal share. For example, both the mother and the father equally receive a sixth of the inheritance of their deceased child, so Muslims argue that the division of inheritance is not simply based on gender.

It is also worth noting that there is debate in Muslim scholarship today on the application of inheritance law. Some Muslim scholars argue that the inheritance laws apply only where a person has not left a will. Another viewpoint is that a Muslim can specify that up to one third of his or her estate be given to whomever he or she chooses. Generally speaking, however, Muslims follow the pattern of inheritance laws laid down in the Qur'an, and in Australia it is important for Muslims to leave a will stating this.²⁶

*...the division
of inheritance
is not simply
based on gender*

²⁶ See <http://www.jannah.org/sisters/inheritance.html>

HOLIDAYS AND HOLY DAYS

Like any other religion, Islam has its share of festivals, holidays and holy days.

Most of these days are marked in the Islamic calendar. This is a lunar calendar, meaning that its days and months are related to the movement and phases of the moon, unlike the Gregorian calendar we use in Australia, which is based on the solar year. Australian Muslims often use both the Islamic calendar and the Gregorian calendar.

The Islamic calendar has twelve months. Each month is either twenty-nine or thirty days long. The Islamic calendar began with the migration of the Prophet Muhammad in 622 from Mecca to Medina, known as the *hijra* (indicated by AH). Therefore the first year (or 1 AH) in the Islamic calendar is equal to 622 in the Gregorian calendar.

The months of the Islamic calendar

1	Muharram
2	Safar
3	Rabi` al-Awwal
4	Rabi` al-Thani
5	Jumada al-Ula
6	Jumada al-Thaniya
7	Rajab
8	Sha`ban
9	Ramadan
10	Shawwal
11	Dhu al-Qa`ida
12	Dhu al-Hijja

Special days

Two festivals (*Eid*)

- » *Eid al-Fitr*: The first day of the month of Shawwal, which occurs immediately after the month of Ramadan.
- » *Eid al-Ad ha*: The tenth day of Dhu al-Hijja. This occurs during the pilgrimage season, in the last month of the Islamic year.

Throughout the world, Muslims celebrate *Eid* (both *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Ad ha*) with much fanfare. In the morning, they perform the Eid prayer, and then they celebrate the day. Relatives and friends visit each other, give gifts to children, wear their best clothes, and take part in festivities.

Friday

On Friday, at noon, Muslims gather in the mosque for special congregational prayers. After the call to prayer, the imam gives a sermon. They then pray in congregation. In most Muslim countries, Friday is a holiday (part of the weekend).

Islamic New Year

This is the first of the month of Muharram. In Muslim majority countries, it is a public holiday even if not a formal religious celebration.

Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad

The birthday of the Prophet, known as *mawlid al-nabiy*, is celebrated on the twelfth day of Rabi` al-Awwal. While it is not a formal religious event, many Muslims mark this day in celebration of the special place that the Prophet Muhammad has in their hearts.

Month of Ramadan

Ramadan is the most sacred month of the year. Adult Muslims fast for the whole month, every day from dawn to sunset. They believe that it was in Ramadan that the Prophet Muhammad received the first revelation from God.

SACRED PLACES

Mecca

The most sacred place for Muslims is the Ka'ba in the sacred city of Mecca in modern day Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that the Ka'ba was built in time immemorial by the Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael as a place to worship the one God. Mecca is where the Prophet Muhammad was born and lived, and began his mission. Muslims from all over the world gather there for their annual pilgrimage (*hajj*).

Medina

The second most sacred place for Muslims is Medina, the city of the Prophet, which is also in Saudi Arabia. The Mosque of the Prophet is in Medina. It is where the Prophet Muhammad and many of his immediate followers are buried. Only Muslims may visit Mecca and Medina.

Jerusalem

The third most sacred place in Islam is Jerusalem. It is believed to be where the Prophet Muhammad miraculously travelled in his famous Night Journey, and from where he 'ascended' to the heavens. There are several sacred monuments for Muslims in Jerusalem, such as the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque.

Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock

The beauty and tranquillity of the Noble Sanctuary in Jerusalem attracts thousands of visitors of all faiths every year. Many believe it was the site of the Temple of Solomon, peace be upon him, destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, or the site of the Second Temple, completely destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. For Muslims the area has a special significance, as the site of the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey, peace and blessings be upon him, and as the first *qibla* (direction of prayer) for Islam.²⁷

In 685 CE the Umayyad Caliph, `Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, commenced work on the Dome of the Rock. Essentially unchanged for more than thirteen centuries, the Dome of the Rock remains one of the world's most beautiful and enduring architectural treasures. The gold dome stretches 20 metres across the Noble Rock, rising to an apex more than 35 metres above it. The Qur'anic verse *Ya Sin* is inscribed across the top in the dazzling tile work commissioned in the 16th century by Suleiman the Magnificent.²⁸

The third most sacred place in Islam is Jerusalem. It is believed to be where the Prophet Muhammad miraculously travelled in his famous Night Journey, and from where he 'ascended' to the heavens.

²⁷ <http://www.noblesanctuary.com/HISTORY.html>

²⁸ <http://www.noblesanctuary.com/DOME.html>

The Mosque (*masjid*)

One of the most important everyday places for Muslims is the mosque, where they perform their daily prayers as well as other important prayers such as the Friday and Eid prayers. A mosque can be anything, from a place to pray, to a simple building, to a large, highly decorated structure with a dome and a tall minaret. Although the notion of a mosque as a separate building has taken deep root in Muslim communities, it does not have to be a building. In fact, any clean place may be used as a mosque, including a park or the desert.

Other sacred places

There are places considered sacred by some Muslims but not others. For example, Karbala, in Iraq, is one of the holiest places for Shi'a Muslims. It is the place where the third Shi'a Imam, the Prophet's grandson, Husayn, was killed. Shi'a Muslims from around the world visit Karbala to commemorate the death of Husayn.

Throughout the Muslim world there are tombs and shrines of mystics and other prominent religious personalities. Many Muslims consider such places as sacred as well. This is despite the fact that there are Muslims who consider such tombs and shrines and visits to them as un-Islamic.

Images of living beings and mosques

No images of living beings (people, animals) are used in mosques. Muslims believe that it is blasphemous to represent God in any form. They do not use images of the Prophet or of any other prophets such as Moses or Jesus either. Mosques are decorated only with Qur'anic verses, or with the names of God, the Prophet, and the senior companions of the Prophet in very elaborate calligraphy. Geometrical patterns are also used for decoration. Another feature of mosques is that no musical instruments are played in the worship that occurs there; the human voice is the only 'musical decoration' permitted.

SACRED TEXTS

The Qur'an

The Qur'an is the holy scripture of Muslims. It is in Arabic and is a compilation of revelations sent from God to the Prophet Muhammad between 610 and 632 CE. It has one hundred and fourteen chapters (*suras*), of unequal length. The longest *sura* has two hundred and eighty-six verses while the shortest has only three verses.

The Qur'an talks about many different things and issues. Each chapter may have several topics, and the same topic may appear in different parts of the Qur'an.

The main subjects that are dealt with in the Qur'an are:

- » God's creation of the universe.
- » God and His message to human beings.
- » Ethical and moral issues, such as the evil of injustice and the need to help the disadvantaged.
- » How Muslims should behave in certain circumstances.
- » Stories of past prophets such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Joseph, Moses and Jesus.
- » The problems and difficulties faced by the Prophet Muhammad and the first Muslim community.
- » Life after death, Paradise and Hell, and accountability in the life after death.

Muslim beliefs about the Qur'an

- » The Qur'an is literally the speech of God, not the words or opinions of Prophet Muhammad or any other human being.
- » The Qur'an was 'compiled' (or put together) soon after the death of the Prophet. This has prevented the Qur'an from being 'corrupted' or 'distorted'. Thus the Qur'an has remained unchanged for over fourteen hundred years.
- » The Qur'an remains the Qur'an only if it is in Arabic. If it is translated into any other language, it is a translation of the meanings of the Qur'an, not the Qur'an itself.

The most often recited chapter of the Qur'an is the first chapter. It is read several times a day by a Muslim, in his or her prayers.

Translation of the first chapter in the Qur'an

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace:

All praise is due to God alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds,

The Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace,

Lord of the Day of Judgement!

Thee alone do we worship; and unto Thee alone do we turn for aid.

Guide us the straight way –

The way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings,

Not of those who have been condemned [by Thee],

Nor of those who go astray! (Qur'an 1:1–7)

While all Muslims hold that the Qur'an is the Word of God, they also have different views and opinions on how it should be interpreted. Some emphasise a legalistic approach, concentrating on discovering what it has to say about how to live life. Others take a more mystical approach and try to understand deeper meanings in its metaphors and parables.

There have been many great interpreters of the Qur'an who have written commentaries (*tafsirs*). All of them had different approaches in interpreting the Qur'an and they contributed much to the understanding of the Muslim holy book.

Today many Muslims also try to interpret the Qur'an and make it meaningful for Muslims living around the world. Some Muslims feel that the Qur'an should be re-read and reinterpreted afresh by each group of people who receive it. This way, the Qur'an remains eternally relevant and meaningful.

Hadith

The second most sacred text and the source of Islamic ethics, beliefs and practices is the anecdotes that document what the Prophet Muhammad said and did. These are called the Hadith.

During the twenty-three years of the Prophet's mission (from 610 to 632), many of the things that the Prophet said and did were told and retold by Muslims and were later documented. These anecdotes are important in understanding what the Qur'an says on many issues. A good example of this is how to perform the five daily prayers. The Qur'an commands Muslims to perform daily prayers but does not give any details as to how, when, and in what form these prayers should be performed. The Prophet Muhammad explained the prayers in detail and showed Muslims how to perform them. These are reported in Hadith, and Muslims rely on such Hadith to understand how to perform the prayers.

Not all Hadith have the same degree of reliability. Some are historically reliable. Some are falsely attributed to the Prophet. A Muslim relies on historically reliable and authentic Hadith to understand the Prophet's practices and guidance.

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Islamic law

Muslim scholars over the past fourteen hundred years have developed a large body of laws, called Islamic law (also known as shari'a), based on the instructions provided in the Qur'an and Hadith. The literature on Islamic law is vast and is considered part of the sacred literature of Muslims. There are literally thousands of books that deal with Islamic law.

Muslims throughout the world consult some of these legal texts to seek guidance in their daily life. Islamic law, unlike secular law such as Australian law, covers wide-ranging issues, such as how to pray and how to wash. It is consulted in regard to family matters, criminal law, and international law. For Muslims in Australia, only a relatively small part of Islamic law really applies, mostly in the area of rituals, dietary regulations, ethical norms and some areas of marriage law. In other areas, Muslims, like other Australians, follow Australian law.

Muslims are subject to the laws in place in Australia like other Australians, and should abide by these laws. There is no reason why a Muslim cannot be a committed practising Muslim while following Australian laws in matters that govern life here such as taxation law, criminal law, traffic laws and so on.

In some countries, Islamic law – or a particular version of it – is the state law of the land. Problems tend to occur when this is imposed on the citizens without full acceptance, or where it is used as a political tool, as in Afghanistan and Nigeria. In many places of the Muslim world, Islamic law is part and parcel of the way societies have been running for centuries. There, debate tends to occur around particular interpretations of Islamic law or implementation of specific laws, rather than on the question of whether the society wants Islamic law at all.

Example of a Hadith

Anas ibn Malik who was the servant of the Messenger of Allah reported that the Prophet said, 'No one of you [really] believes [in Allah and His religion] until he loves for his brother what he loves for his own self' (narrated by Bukhari and Muslim).

DETERMINING RIGHT AND WRONG

In case of necessity, what is prohibited may be allowed, but only as long as the necessity lasts.

Muslims believe that God created human beings and gave them free will. However God does not leave us to find out right from wrong entirely on our own. God provided guidance and instructions from the very beginning, through prophets. The first prophet, Adam, taught this to his children. Similarly throughout history other prophets came and transmitted God's instructions to their people.

In addition to guidance, God also provides human beings with the faculty of reason, which also helps us to discern right from wrong. The faculty of reason is important to understand what God wants people to do.

Knowing what is right and what is wrong

Islamic norms, ethics, moral values and law are based on two sources: the Qur'an and the Hadith (reported sayings) of the Prophet. When a Muslim wants to know whether something is right or wrong, the first question to ask is 'What does the Qur'an or the Prophet have to say on this?' If there is a clear instruction in the Qur'an or in the Hadith, a Muslim will follow it. For instance, the Qur'an says 'Do not commit murder', which indicates that it is wrong to kill a person unlawfully.

Muslims understand that their actions or activities, broadly speaking, fall into two main categories: permitted and prohibited. Anything considered harmful and dangerous to the individual or to the community is usually prohibited. In reality, this applies to only a few things. Examples include murder, theft and fraud.

Those things that are considered permissible fall into four sub-categories. The first category covers the obligations, such as the five daily prayers. The next category is things that are recommended; that is, it is a good idea to do them (for example brushing one's teeth several times daily). The third category covers things that are disapproved of or disliked, such as laziness, and the fourth is things that are simply allowed, such as eating rice.

Some principles to help Muslims decide how to act appropriately

From a religious point of view, all things are allowed in Islam, except whatever is clearly prohibited by the Qur'an or by the Prophet. This means that Muslims can go about their day-to-day life without feeling that religion unnecessarily limits their freedom. Islam primarily prohibits things that are clearly harmful to people. For example, alcohol is prohibited because it is considered harmful both at an individual and at a community level.

If something is clearly prohibited in the Qur'an or by the Prophet, Muslims do not have the authority to change that rule, and vice versa. For example, murder is prohibited. Muslims have no authority to make murder permissible. In another example, Muslims are allowed to eat rice. No Muslim can declare rice prohibited.

In case of necessity, what is prohibited may be allowed, but only as long as the necessity lasts. While alcohol is prohibited, if someone happened to be locked up in a place where there was nothing to eat or drink at all and the only drink available there was wine, the person could drink the wine to stay alive.

Many things Muslims are expected to do concern consideration for others:

- » Treat others as you would like to be treated.
- » Always be honest, tell the truth.
- » Dress and behave modestly.
- » Be patient in difficult circumstances.
- » Be gentle in dealing with others.
- » Be generous and courteous.
- » Be forgiving and compassionate.
- » Be polite, good tempered and warm.
- » Be hardworking.
- » Be thankful to God and other human beings.
- » Respect your parents.
- » Show kindness and compassion towards others.

There are certain things that Muslims should not do:

- » Place any other being equal (in importance) to, or above God.
- » Tell lies or act unkindly. It is also wrong to be lazy, boastful, or jealous.
- » In economic matters, it is wrong to hoard money or to waste it. Muslims should not exploit others, give or accept bribes, or steal in any way. Gambling is forbidden, as is prostitution, erotic dancing, and black magic.
- » Both murder and suicide are sins. It is also wrong to endanger the life of an unborn baby, except if the mother's life is threatened.
- » Muslims are not allowed to be cruel to animals.
- » Sex outside marriage is forbidden. Muslims also should not invade others' privacy by looking at their genitals, regardless of whether they are of the same gender or not.
- » As in the Bible, there are rules for who can marry. For example, a man may not marry his mother, step-mother, daughter, sister, or aunt. A woman may not marry men who are their close relations.

Some Qur'anic commandments

- » Say: Come I will recite what your Lord has forbidden to you. [Remember] that you
- » do not associate anything with Him
- » show kindness to your parents, and
- » do not slay your children for [fear of] poverty- We provide for you and for them- and
- » do not draw nigh to indecencies, those of them which are apparent and those which are concealed, and
- » do not kill the soul which God has forbidden except for the requirements of justice; this He has enjoined you with that you may understand.
- » And do not approach the property of the orphan except in the best manner until he attains his maturity, and
- » give full measure and weight with justice - We do not impose on any soul a duty except to the extent of its ability; and
- » when you speak, then be just though it be [against] a relative, and
- » fulfil God's covenant; this He has enjoined you with that you may be mindful;
- » And [know] that this is My path, the right one therefore follow it, and follow not [other] ways, for they will lead you away from His way; this He has enjoined you with that you may guard [against evil]' (Qur'an 6:151-153).

Islam's attitude to evil and suffering

Many thinkers have pondered over the question: 'Why does God allow evil and suffering to exist?' In Islamic history, Muslim theologians and scholars also thought about this question. The Qur'an teaches us that life is a test, that God gives us all a measure of responsibility and that on the Day of Judgment we will be held responsible for our deeds. Because we have this responsibility, some human beings choose to follow the will of God and others reject God. It is in rejecting God that sin and suffering come into the world.

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The story of Iblis

When God created the human being Adam, He ordered the angels to bow down before Adam. They all obeyed, but there was a *jinn* among them called Iblis who rebelled against God. He did not wish to prostrate himself before Adam and he argued with God saying: 'I am better than he: you created me from fire and him from clay'. Because Iblis was arrogant and rejected God he was called 'Satan' and his pride in his own creation [or racism] became the first sin.

Muslims believe that God allows Satan to test human beings, and that the first example of this was when he tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden. According to the Qur'an, both Adam and his mate were tempted to eat the fruit of a special tree which they had been forbidden to approach. Both Adam and Eve gave into Satan's temptation and ate the fruit. However, in Islam, there is no concept of original sin, as both Adam and his mate asked for and received forgiveness from God.

For Muslims, this story teaches that we should resist the temptations of Satan to disobey God. It also teaches that God forgives us if we truly repent of our sins and make a genuine effort to do His will.

FOOD AND DRINK

Many people have heard of *halal* food these days. There are *halal* butchers, *halal* restaurants and *halal* takeaways. ‘*Halal*’ is an Arabic word which means ‘permissible’. In the context of food it means what Muslims are allowed to consume.

In general, Muslims are allowed to consume all foods (e.g. grains, vegetables, fish and meat), except those that are explicitly prohibited in Islam. Prohibited foods are very few but include:

- » Alcoholic drinks such as beer and wine.
- » Pig meat (eg. ham, pork, bacon) and by-products of the pig such as pig fat.
- » Meat of an animal that has died of natural causes, or as a result of strangling or beating.
- » Blood that is in liquid (‘drinkable’) form.

Islamic method of slaughter

This applies to all animals that Muslims may consume such as cows, sheep, goats and birds (e.g. chickens, turkeys and ducks). The animal or bird should be:

- » Free from disease which is likely to cause harm to consumers.
- » Handled with kindness. Desensitisers and restraining methods can be used but should not lead to the death of the animal before slaughter.
- » Killed quickly, with a sharp object such as a knife, to minimise pain and suffering. After that, the blood must be drained.

Many believe that God’s name should be pronounced at the time of slaughtering the animal.

It is very important to treat animals well because they are God’s creatures. If someone treats them with cruelty or kills them unjustly, then that person will have to answer to God on the Day of Judgment. Muslims should also be thankful to God when they eat of the meat of animals which have been provided for their benefit.

Can a Muslim eat beef, lamb and chicken from local supermarkets and butchers?

Some Muslims believe (following traditional Islamic law and Qur’anic instructions) that animals and birds slaughtered by Christians and Jews may be consumed by Muslims. This means that meat from a normal abattoir and bought from any supermarket or butcher is acceptable. Other Muslims are stricter on this. For them, only meat slaughtered by a Muslim may be eaten, so they will go to a *halal* butcher to buy their meat.

Many Muslims also avoid

- » Cakes, biscuits or ice cream containing animal-based products such as lard, gelatine or enzymes.
- » Packaged foods that contain ‘animal fat’ in case the fat comes from pigs.
- » Restaurants and take away shops that serve pig meat, as the utensils used to prepare such meat might also be used with other foods.

Many other Muslims view the matter differently. While they avoid pig meat or alcohol, they do not have any objections to eating at an average restaurant or take away.

MOSQUES AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

There is no official religious hierarchy in Islam, particularly Sunni Islam. Similarly, there is no figure such as a priest to act as an intermediary between a person and God. A Muslim has direct access to God through prayer, and the relationship between God and the individual is a personal one.

Even in religious worship and rituals such as prayer (*salat*), anyone with a basic knowledge of the religion and who can recite some portions of the Qur'an can be a leader. No one has to be appointed by a committee in order to perform this function. However, in practice in Australia, an imam is generally appointed at each mosque to look after the mosque, lead worship, and conduct other associated activities. This is essentially a management issue, not a religious one. The imam appointed usually has some training in Islamic religious disciplines (often with a degree from an Islamic seminary or a university). This enables the imam to help the community with matters of religious law and practice.

What does a religious leader (imam) in Australia do?

The officially appointed imam of a mosque usually:

- » Provides guidance to the community in their religious life.
- » Runs the day to day affairs of the mosque.
- » Conducts regular prayers (usually five times a day) in congregation.
- » Gives the Friday sermon.
- » Conducts religious education classes for Muslim children as well as for adults.
- » Participates in the activities of the local Muslim community.
- » Performs marriages and funerals (where licensed to do so by Australian authorities).
- » Engages in interfaith activities.
- » Represents the community at local functions.
- » Liaises with the local government where required.

Most religious leaders in Australia are from overseas. They are trained in overseas seminaries and brought to Australia to serve a particular ethnic community, for example Pakistani, Bosnian, Turkish or Lebanese. As yet, there are only a few Australian-born imams.

Mosques in Australia

There are more than one hundred mosques and a large number of other prayer facilities throughout Australia. Most mosques are in Sydney and Melbourne, but all capital cities in Australia have mosques. Most mosques are non-sectarian; that is, they do not belong to one particular religious group or legal school. Usually, any Muslim, whatever his or her ethnicity, culture, theological orientation or legal school, may go and pray in any mosque. At a typical mosque you may find a Sunni Muslim praying side-by-side with a Shi'a Muslim, or someone from Africa praying next to someone who was born in Australia.

A mosque may be run by a society dominated by one ethnic group, such as Pakistanis, Bosnians or Afghans. However, the congregation is not made up of any one ethnicity. Muslims living in that area, regardless of their ethnic background, usually attend the local mosque.

In Australia there are three different types of mosques. The largest have several facilities such as classrooms, a bookshop and offices. There are also smaller mosques that have no extra facilities, and, finally, there are prayer rooms, such as at workplaces and universities.

Islamic decoration in the art and architecture of mosques

Calligraphy: Calligraphy is considered one of the most important of the Islamic arts. Nearly all Islamic buildings have some type of surface inscription in the stone, stucco, marble, mosaic and/or painting. The inscription might be a verse from the Qur'an, lines of poetry or names and dates. An inscription also might be contained in a single panel. Sometimes single words such as Allah or Muhammad are repeated and arranged into patterns over the entire surface of the walls.

Geometric patterns: Islamic artists developed geometric patterns to a degree of complexity and sophistication previously unknown. These patterns exemplify the Islamic interest in repetition, symmetry and pattern.

Floral patterns: Islamic artists reproduced nature with a great deal of accuracy. Flowers and trees might be used as the motifs for the decoration of textiles, objects and buildings.

Light: For many Muslims, light is the symbol of divine unity. In Islamic architecture, light functions decoratively by modifying other elements or by originating patterns. Light can add a dynamic quality to architecture, extending patterns, forms and designs into the dimensions of time.

Water: In hot Islamic climates, the water from courtyard pools and fountains cools as it decorates. Water not only reflects architecture and multiplies the decorative themes; it also serves as a means of emphasising the visual axes.²⁹

²⁹ <http://www.islamicart.com/main/architecture/index.html>

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Muslims have formed a large number of Islamic societies, centres and associations in Australia. Some of these are ethnically based. In each state, many of these societies join the state Islamic council, which becomes the umbrella organisation for the societies in that state.

All Islamic councils are members of the national umbrella organisation called the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC). Not all societies in a given state join that state's Islamic council because it is entirely optional, so it is difficult to say that AFIC represents all Muslims or even the majority of Muslims in Australia.

Is there one religious leadership across Australia?

At the time of writing, there is no single religious leadership across Australia, although attempts have been made recently to develop one. Both Victoria and New South Wales have a Board of Imams (representing all or perhaps most imams of the state). Officially, the Board of Imams represents the religious views of the community. In practice, relatively few imams are actively involved on the Board. This means that, even at state level, there is no unified religious leadership.

It may take some time before a unified religious leadership emerges, if ever, in Australia. One difficulty is the enormous diversity among Muslims (ethnic, religious, theological, legal, spiritual), and it is often difficult to agree on one person or body to represent the religious views of the entire community.

ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

The Islamic weekend school (Saturday and/or Sunday school) plays an important role in the life of Muslim children in Australia. Many go to the weekend school based at the local mosque or prayer facility or even a rented property to learn about Islam, to read the Qur'an, and study the language of their parents, for example Arabic, Turkish or Urdu. In these weekend schools, teachers are often volunteers. Most mosques in Australia offer some form of weekend program.

The Muslim community also established a number of regular primary and secondary schools in Australia from the early 1980s. Most of these schools are based in Sydney and Melbourne where the vast majority of Muslims live, but there are also schools in Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane. At the time of writing, there were about twenty-four of these schools. The total number of students in these schools is still relatively small. Most Muslim students in Australia attend state (public) schools, and some go to prestigious private schools as well.

Islamic schools, like other non-government schools, receive Australian government subsidies. Fees are kept low so that parents (who are often recent migrants or from working-class backgrounds) can afford to send their children to these schools. Students learn the same subjects as taught in other public primary and secondary schools. The various state education departments monitor the curricula to ensure that basic standards are maintained. The difference is that students at Islamic schools receive Islamic religious education, and are usually taught Arabic as well. In all other respects, the curriculum of the Islamic school is like that of any other public school. Teachers in these Islamic schools come from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. Only the religious education teachers are expected to be Muslim.

Students are expected to follow Islamic rules and norms regarding dress and food while they are at school. The school attempts to provide an environment in which students can enrich their understanding of Islam.

Students are expected to follow Islamic rules and norms regarding dress and food while they are at school.

Al Zahra College

Al Zahra College is a regular Islamic school based in Sydney, run by Muslims of Shi'a background. Their aims are not much different to many other regular Islamic schools throughout Australia.

The aims of the College are:

- » To provide a centre for educational activities and studies that will result in high quality education in a caring and stimulating Islamic environment
- » To observe that the school curriculum will meet the standards set by the NSW Board of Studies
- » To provide Islamic studies based on the Holy Qur'an, the Sunnah and the teachings of the twelve Imams³⁰
- » To create a harmonious and stimulating community atmosphere in which staff are mutually supportive and care for students and in which students can grow as persons, developing a feeling of self-worth, a high level of personal integrity and a sincere respect for others
- » To ensure that appointed teachers adhere to the underlying philosophy of the school, recognising the pre-eminent position of the teacher in the educational process
- » To promote the understanding and respect of other cultures and religions within the school community
- » To actively involve families and the local community in the education of their children
- » To develop cordial relations with other educational institutions and public schools.³¹

³⁰ This refers to the 12 Shi'a imams.

³¹ <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~alzahracollege/>

ISLAMIC BANKING

In the time of the Prophet, the Arabs used to engage in a practice called *riba*, which involved lending a person some goods or money. If they could not repay the loan after a certain amount of time, then they would end up having to repay much more, sometimes double the amount or over. The Qur'an prohibited the practice of *riba* saying: 'O ye who believe! Devour not *riba* (usury), doubled and multiplied; but fear God; that ye may [really] prosper' (3:130). Because of the prohibition of *riba*, many Muslims view Western banking practices involving interest as being *riba*-based and therefore forbidden to Muslims. However, some Muslims argue that interest and *riba* are two different things and that *riba* was prohibited because it was unjust. As such, in their view, if interest is not unjust it does not need to be prohibited.

Rather than taking and paying interest, Islamic banks offer a partnership arrangement so that customers share in profits made

For those Muslims who do not wish to take or pay interest, an alternative, Islamic banking, has been set up in many places around the world, including in Australia, which is home to the Muslim Community Co-operative Australia (MCCA).³² The principles of Islamic banking are as follows:³³

- » Only ethical investments must be made. Islamic banks will not invest in companies that trade in products such as pork, alcohol, gambling, and pornography.
- » Rather than taking and paying interest, Islamic banks offer a partnership arrangement so that customers share in profits made, but also take a share of the risk if there is no profit or an investment fails. This is a bit like having shares in a company.
- » Customers can arrange with the bank to receive finance for buying major things like cars and houses. Both the customer and bank agree to a fixed amount which will be paid over time including a known amount of profit for the bank.
- » The bank and its partners have a responsibility to contribute to social development through Islamic investments and the paying of *zakat*.
- » The bank usually has a supervisory person or board to ensure that the bank is acting in accordance with Islamic principles and ethics.

³² See <http://www.mcca.com.au/>

³³ See <http://www.islamicbankingonline.com/ovrv3.htm>

ISLAM AND VIOLENCE

Many people in the West believe that Islam is a religion that teaches violence against non-Muslims and that, compared to people of other faiths, Muslims are more likely to be violent and intolerant.

This belief is largely based on negative images that existed in medieval Christian Europe about Islam and Muslims; for example, Muslims were falsely thought to be barbaric, violent and fanatical, an image that has continued to the twenty-first century.

A European convert to Islam on images of Islam in the West

And was it any wonder then, I asked myself, that, fortified by such tangible evidences of Muslim decay, so many erroneous views about Islam itself were prevalent throughout the West? These popular, Western views could be summarized thus: The downfall of the Muslims is mainly due to Islam which, far from being a religious ideology comparable to Christianity or Judaism, is a rather unholy mixture of desert fanaticism, gross sensuality, superstition and dumb fatalism that prevents its adherents from participating in mankind's advance toward higher social forms; instead of liberating the human spirit from the shackles of obscurantism, Islam rather tightens them; and, consequently, the sooner the Muslim peoples are freed from their subservience to Islamic beliefs and social practices and induced to adopt the Western way of life, the better for them and for the rest of the world.

My own observations had by now convinced me that the mind of the average Westerner held an utterly distorted image of Islam. What I saw in the pages of the Qur'an was not a 'crudely materialistic' world-view but, on the contrary, an intense Godconsciousness that expressed itself in a rational acceptance of all God-created nature: a harmonious side-by-side of intellect and sensual urge, spiritual need and social demand. It was obvious to me that the decline of the Muslims was not due to any shortcomings in Islam but rather to their own failure to live up to it.³⁴

³³ Muhammad Asad. *The Road to Mecca*. Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, p. 190.

While the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the media today has a historical basis of negative bias against Muslims, the portrayal of Islam as violent has also been encouraged by the actions of a few Muslims who have violated the most fundamental precepts of the religion. For example, terrorist activities against American or Western interests often in the name of Islam are the cause of some of the fear of Muslims. Examples of such terrorist activity include the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington in 2001 and the bombings in Bali in October 2002.

Muslims point out that, as in any religion, there are Muslims who use violence to achieve religious or political objectives. However, the vast majority do not advocate or use violence, but wish to live peacefully with other people. They argue that it is unfair to label all Muslims as violent or as terrorists because of the actions of a few extremists. They say that there are violent or fanatical groups among Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists, for example, and that the majority in those groups should not be blamed for the actions of the minority. In their view, the same should apply to Muslims.

What many Muslims think about violence

For the average Muslim, Islam is a religion of peace. It does not encourage the use of violence against non-Muslims. In fact, it encourages peaceful and harmonious relations with others.

Islam as peace

Islam is the religion of peace: its meaning is peace; one of God's names is peace; the daily greetings of Muslims and angels are peace; paradise is the house of peace, the adjective 'Muslim' means peaceful. Peace is the nature, the meaning, the emblem and the objective of Islam. Every being is entitled to enjoy the peace of Islam and the kindness of the peaceful Muslims, regardless of religious or geographical or racial considerations...³⁵

Islam does, however, condone self-defence: to defend one's life, property, homeland, and religion. This is acceptable in almost all religions and communities we know of today. In this, Muslims are no different from other religious groups.

Where Islam allows violence in self-defence, for example when the community is under attack by an enemy or its homeland is occupied, it is a duty of the community to defend itself. This duty usually belongs to the state; that is, the government which represents the community. For instance, if Australia is under attack or threatened with occupation, it is the duty of the Australian community to defend itself. Since Muslims are also part of the Australian community, they are obliged religiously to defend Australia and its people.

³⁵Hammudah Abdalati, *Islam in Focus* Indianapolis, American Trust Publications, p.143.

Islam prohibits the killing of any innocent person, Muslim or non-Muslim. According to the Qur'an, killing an innocent person is like killing the entire community of human beings. According to the Qur'an, '... whosoever kills one person [unlawfully] it is as if he has killed the entire humankind' (Qur'an 5:32). Where someone deliberately kills another, Islamic law imposes capital punishment as a deterrent.

For many Muslims, suicide bombing and killing innocent people with it is also prohibited in Islam. This is also related to the idea that Islam prohibits suicide. When this is coupled with the ban on killing innocent human beings, the prohibition becomes even more severe.

Islam prohibits what it calls *fasad* (corruption on earth), which may include disruption to peace, spreading injustice, exploitation of the weak, and breaking of the law. Muslims expect decisive action by the authorities to put a stop to such activities by individuals or groups. In doing so, Islam encourages the use of force by the authorities against such individuals and groups, if all other means fail.

Jihad: a common view among Muslims today

Jihad is essentially a doctrine of self-defence. It can be used only by a Muslim state against imminent and certain aggression by an enemy. In this, jihad is equivalent to the doctrine of self-defence in a modern nation-state. It can also be declared in a liberation struggle, as was the case in Afghanistan after the Soviet occupation. It cannot be declared against a Muslim or Muslims or a Muslim state, thus denying the legitimacy of militant-extremists' declaration of jihad against other Muslims or Muslim states. A jihad cannot be declared against a person or a community just because they belong to a different religion. Thus Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and others cannot be the target of a jihad simply because of difference of religion. Neither can a jihad be declared by a group of Muslims against a nation that has peaceful relations with Muslims. Thus calls for jihad against a state like the United States are considered illegitimate, as these states are part of an international order that submits to the Charter of the United Nations and generally speaking promotes peaceful relations with others. This interpretation also rejects the idea of an offensive jihad as not in line with the Qur'anic command of non-aggression.³⁶

³⁶ Abdullah Saeed, "Changing Understanding of Jihad among Muslims", Tony Coody and Michael O'Keefe, (eds.) *Terrorism and Justice*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002, p. 85.

ISLAM AND OTHER RELIGIONS

Muslims believe that all three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, emanate from the same source – God. Their basic message and the answers they give to the fundamental questions of life are essentially the same. The Qur’an emphasises that all prophets before Muhammad were also sent by God and that Muhammad was not unique among them. In fact, believing in all prophets who came before Muhammad is an essential part of Islam.

Connection with other religions like Christianity and Judaism

From a Muslim point of view, Islam means ‘submission to God’. It is not a new religion brought by Muhammad, but one that was taught by all prophets before Muhammad, from Adam onwards.

Thus Islam is closely connected to all biblical prophets. Stories of biblical figures such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Jonah, David, Solomon and Jesus are told and retold in Muslim communities around the world. The basic message of these prophets was, according to Islam, belief in one God. There are shared ideas, beliefs and values. Muslims refer to Christians and Jews as ‘People of the Book’.

The Qur’an commands Muslims to say:

Say: We believe in God and that which was revealed to us, and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and to the Prophets from their Lord; we make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we submit (Qur’an 3:83).

Muslims’ beliefs about Abraham and Ishmael

Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad was a descendant of Abraham, through his son Ishmael. They believe that Abraham took Ishmael and his mother Hagar from their homeland to the place where Mecca is situated now. At the time, Mecca was a barren land with no water. Hagar and Ishmael, having run out of water and food, were searching in vain for water, when miraculously water began to gush out from a place which came to be known as Zamzam, which still provides water today to many Meccans. Because of this water, people came and settled there and a commercial town gradually developed. It was Abraham and Ishmael who built the Ka’ba, the holiest place for Muslims, as a place of worship of the one God. Ishmael married a woman who had settled there and from this lineage came the Prophet Muhammad.

Jesus and Muslims

For Muslims, Jesus is one of the greatest prophets of God, although he is viewed differently from the way many Christians view him. His mother Mary is a model of a great woman. There is a chapter in the Qur'an entitled 'Mary', in which the story of the miraculous birth of Jesus is narrated. The Qur'an also recounts certain aspects of Jesus' birth, life, mission and miracles. Muslims all over the world tell and retell these stories.

Muslims believe in the virgin birth of Jesus and in the miracles that Jesus performed such as healing the sick and the blind and bringing dead to life by the will of God. Many Muslims believe that Jesus will return one day before the end of time (known as the second coming of Jesus).

However, unlike Christians, Muslims do not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity: three equal persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in the One God, and the Son incarnated on earth in the figure of Jesus Christ. For Muslims, God has no partner or equal. Most Muslims also do not believe Jesus was crucified and died on the cross. The Qur'an says: 'They killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them' (4:157). Some Muslims believe that Jesus died at a later time, while others believe that he was raised up to Heaven without having died.

*Muslims believe that all three
Abrahamic religions, Judaism,
Christianity and Islam,
emanate from the same source
– God.*

The Prophet Muhammad said:

Whoever believes there is no god but God, alone without partner, that Muhammad is His messenger, that Jesus is the servant and messenger of God, His word breathed into Mary and a spirit emanating from Him, and that Paradise and Hell are true, shall be received by God into Heaven (Bukhari, *Sahih*).

Muslims and followers of other religions

The Qur'an is clear that Muslims should deal kindly and fairly with people of other religious traditions. It says:

'Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for [your] faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just' (Qur'an 60:8).

The Prophet Muhammad on protection of ‘people of the Book’ under Islamic rule in the 7th century CE

“Whenever monks, devotees and pilgrims gather together, whether in a mountain or valley, or den, or frequented place, or plain, or church, or in houses of worship, verily we are back of them and shall protect them, and their properties and their morals, by myself, by my friends and by my assistants, for they are of my subjects and under my protection.

No one is allowed to plunder their pilgrims, or destroy or spoil any of their churches, or houses of worship, or take any of the things contained within these houses and bring it to the houses of Islam. And he who takes away anything therefrom, will be one who has corrupted the oath of God, and, in truth, disobeyed His messenger.

They must not be forced to carry arms or stones; but the [Muslims] must protect them and defend them against others. It is positively incumbent upon every one of the Islam[ic] nation not to contradict or disobey this oath [sic] until the Day of Resurrection and the end of the world.”³⁷

There are many examples from the past that demonstrate how Muslims treated non-Muslims under Muslim rule. In great empires of the Islamic world, religious communities had the freedom to practise their religions, and to establish places of worship and educational institutions. Religious minorities were also governed by their own laws, not by Islamic law. This does not mean that in the history of Islam, there were no problems at all for non-Muslims under Muslim rule at certain points in time.

In the modern period, mainstream Muslims do not divide the world into the ‘world of Islam’ and ‘world of non-Islam’. In Muslim majority countries, they do not think of non-Muslims there as second-class citizens. Today for most Muslims, what matters is citizenship in a nation-state which gives equal rights to all citizens regardless of their religion, who are equal before the law. Muslims and non-Muslims are equal members of these societies. The debates among Muslims in the pre-modern period on ‘limited rights of non-Muslims’ under an Islamic state are considered outdated and have been taken over by the emphasis on equality of all citizens.

Muslims and Interfaith dialogue in Australia

Many Muslims feel it is very important to establish good relations with members of the wider Australian community. Because of this, Muslims sit on interfaith bodies such as the Women’s Interfaith Network and the Council for Chaplains in Tertiary Institutions. Muslims also participate in various interfaith forums such as the Multifaith Conference on Reconciliation and Justice and meeting with members of Catholics Involved in Interfaith Dialogue. Muslim representatives of Islamic state councils often visit schools and churches to give talks on Islam and to help build bridges with the wider community.

³⁷“The Oath of Prophet Mohammed to the Followers of Nazarene”, trans. Anton F. Haddad, New York: Board of Counsel, 1902.

Cross Cultural Coffee

After the tragedy of the September 11 bombings, Jennifer decided to approach a local mosque to visit and meet with Muslim women. She had heard that Muslims were experiencing a backlash of prejudice because of the activities of the terrorists. Before her visit, she did not know any Muslims but she felt that it was important to try and contribute something positive in building a bridge for friendship between Muslims and non-Muslims.

After meeting with some Muslim women, they decided to organise a get-together which they called 'Cross-Cultural Coffee'. The Muslim women and Jennifer invited lots of friends to meet together and introduce each other. There people could ask questions, and discuss things they wanted to share.

Today the Cross-Cultural Coffee group meet once every two months and they continue to share and build friendships with each other. They have also decided to volunteer time doing activities that will help the local community, such as organising for children to become pen-friends, and to plant trees to help the environment.³⁸

In great empires of the Islamic world, religious communities had the freedom to practise their religions, and to establish places of worship and educational institutions. Religious minorities were also governed by their own laws, not by Islamic law.

³⁸For further details, see "Conversation over cross-cultural coffee". *The Age*, March 18 2003
<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/03/17/1047749718632.html>

STEREOTYPES AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Muslims believe that in Australia there are widespread misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. The following are some of the most common ones and how Muslims often respond to such misconceptions:

Muslims worship a different God

Some people believe that Muslims worship a different god from people of other religions, a god whom they call Allah. In fact, Muslims believe that they worship the same God that was worshipped by Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The following verse of the Qur'an makes this clear:

And do not dispute with the People of the Book [Christians and Jews] except by what is best, except those of them who act unjustly, and say [O Muhammad]: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our God and your God is One, and to Him do we submit. (Qur'an 29:46)

The name Allah simply means 'the God' in Arabic. It is also the name used by Christian Arabs for God.

Muslims worship Muhammad

For Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad was the last Messenger of God. Like other messengers who came before him he was a human being, nothing more. A Muslim cannot worship Muhammad or any other human being. Muslim worship is directed to God alone. That is why Muslims object to being referred to as 'Muhammadans', which is an old English name for Muslims.

Muhammad wrote the Qur'an

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the word of God, communicated to the Prophet Muhammad in the Arabic language. Muhammad then transmitted the Qur'an to his followers, family, friends, and other people in the community. For Muslims the Qur'an is not the speech or word of Muhammad, but entirely the word of God.

Muslims hate Jesus

It is a fundamental belief of Muslims that they respect and love Jesus. It is true that Muslims do not consider Jesus to be God or the son of God. But they believe that he is one of the greatest messengers of God and one of the most honoured human beings. The Qur'an is full of references to Jesus and his birth, his miracles and mission.

Islam is a racist religion

Islam stresses that all human beings are created by God, are equal before Him, and are descended from the same parents: Adam and Eve. The Prophet emphasised many times that human beings cannot claim superiority over one another on the basis of colour, language, ethnicity or race. There are many references to this in both the Qur'an and Hadith.

The Qur'an is full of references to Jesus and his birth, his miracles and mission.

Islam is a religion for Arabs only

It is true that the Prophet Muhammad was an Arab, the Qur'an is in Arabic, and the first Muslims were mostly Arabs. But Islam spread to all corners of the world from the time of the Prophet in the seventh century. Today, less than twenty percent of Muslims are Arabs. Most belong to other ethnicities such as Indonesian, Turkish, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, European and American, to name a few. As well, not all Arabs are Muslim. There are Arab Christians and Arab Jews.

Islam was spread by the sword

In the West, there is a belief that Islam was spread by force. According to this view, Muslims from the seventh century onwards conquered non-Muslim lands and forced non-Muslims to convert to Islam. For Muslims, this is historically inaccurate. It is true that Muslims from Arabia conquered lands outside Arabia. But they were following a tradition that was practised by powerful empires of the time. They conquered these regions and brought them under the political and military control of Muslims. However, they did not require the inhabitants to become Muslims. It was not until about one hundred and fifty years after the conquests that large numbers of non-Muslims converted to Islam through their own free will. Even today, in almost all Muslim countries, there are significant groups of Christians and other minorities. The Qur'an says:

There is no compulsion in religion; truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error; therefore, whoever rejects Satan [and what he calls to] and believes in Allah, he indeed has laid hold on the firmest handhold, which shall not break off, and Allah is Hearing, Knowing (Qur'an 2:256).

Islam condones the killing of innocent people

The Qur'an clearly prohibits taking the life of an innocent person, whether they are Muslim or not. The Qur'an holds all human life as sacred. According to the Qur'an, if someone kills another human being, it is as if all of humankind had been murdered. It is against Islamic law to commit murder, and there are harsh punishments (including capital punishment) for anyone convicted of murder, whatever the religious background of the victim.

Some people point to a small number of verses in the Qur'an that seem to advocate killing of non-Muslims. These verses, however, must be taken in their correct context and not misrepresented by isolating them from other verses in the Qur'an. The Qur'an allows justified self-defence in protecting the safety and well-being of a community which is being attacked, but strictly maintains that if the warring party seeks peace, then the other party must stop military action and seek peace as well.

Islam is intolerant of other religions

First of all, Muslims believe that Islam was the religion of all prophets and messengers who came before Muhammad. Therefore, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad all taught essentially the same message. Muslims also believe that God sent prophets to all communities on earth. This is an inclusive view of religion.

It is true that the Qur'an considers certain forms of religion, such as polytheism (belief in many gods), as unacceptable, but it recognises the right of polytheists to practise their religion. The Qur'an even tells Muslims that they should not ridicule the deities of the polytheists. It also criticises views expressed by some Christians and Jews for not being in line with the teachings of Jesus or of the biblical prophets. But Islam does not criticise the religion of Christianity or Judaism. In fact, it refers to the Christians and Jews as People of the Book, and treats their Scriptures with reverence. However, some Muslims tend to interpret certain verses that are critical of some Jews and some Christians and generalise from them to all Jews and all Christians, ignoring the context in which such verses were revealed.

Muhammad's respect for a Jew

One day the Prophet was sitting with some of his companions and he stood up as a funeral procession for a Jew passed by. When asked why he stood up for the Jew, the Prophet said: Was he not a human being?

Islam recognises that different people will follow different religions and that not all people will become Muslims. The Qur'an commanded the Prophet not to force anyone to accept Islam and said that the duty of the Prophet was to convey the message, nothing more. It is up to each individual to accept or reject Islam.

Muslims cannot be friends with non-Muslims

Muslims are encouraged to act with kindness and generosity to people regardless of their religious background. It is true that Islam teaches that Muslims should not take untrustworthy people as guardian-protectors (sometimes wrongly mistranslated as 'friends'). However, that has more to do with the intentions of a person than with his or her religious background. The Prophet himself employed a trustworthy pagan to be his guide for the dangerous journey from Mecca to Medina. Furthermore, he married Jewish and Christian women and his marriages reflected his love and friendship with them.

Islam is a backward religion

There is nothing in the religion of Islam that requires a person to reject the technological and material successes of the modern world. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad encouraged his followers to travel the world in search of knowledge. Nor is there anything in Islam that requires Muslims to pretend that they are living in the seventh century. Most Muslims feel that their religion can and does adapt to all different times and contexts. While Muslims have different ideas on how to cope with living in the modern world, there is nothing in the Qur'an to say that they have to reject modernity or be backward.

Muslims point out that fundamental moral values do not change – it is no more acceptable to kill or steal now than it was fourteen hundred years ago – but sometimes our understanding of how to best live our lives might. They see a difference between the fundamentals of Islam (such as believing in one God, doing good to other people, trying to live a righteous life), which never change, and the cultural expressions of Islam (such as preference for certain types of food or dress, political systems and other customs), which can and do change.

Islam is against democratic values

When democracy was introduced into the Muslim world by the West, naturally many Muslims were hesitant to accept this Western institution and argued that it conflicted with Islamic ideas about state and rule. But today, the vast majority of Muslims argue in favour of adopting democracy, and in many Muslim countries some form of democracy exists. Although support for democracy is the norm among ordinary Muslims, it is true that, in the Muslim world, democracy is yet to take root and authoritarian regimes still rule much of the Muslim world.

Rashid al-Ghannushi, a modern Muslim thinker, on democracy

If by democracy is meant the liberal model of government prevailing in the West, a system under which the people freely choose their representatives and leaders, and in which there is an alternation of power, as well as all freedoms and human rights for the public, then Muslims will find nothing in their religion to oppose democracy, and it is not in their interest to do so anyway.³⁹

Women are inferior to men in Islam

It is true that some Muslims believe that women are subservient to men. But this view is not shared by many other Muslims who believe that men and women are equal before God (see section on women, p.35).

Muslims as a group do not fit into Australian society

Islam is seen by some people as a religion that is opposed to fundamental Australian values. These values include commitment to Australia, its interests and future, and the acceptance of the structures and principles of Australian society such as the Constitution, rule of law, parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, equality of the sexes, and English as the national language.

Mainstream Muslims argue that they are committed to these values like any other Australians. There may be some Muslims who do not hold these values, but this does not reflect the views of mainstream Muslim society in Australia. Furthermore, one of the freedoms we have in Australia is the right to debate and criticise our government and the actions it takes.

Some Muslims, like other Australians, may be critical of individual politicians and the government of the day. This does not mean that they are against Australia or that they cannot fit into Australian society. Muslims are a very diverse group of people, and like other Australians have different ideas of how the country should be run, what the government should be doing, and the direction that Australia should take in the future.

Muslims are foreigners and therefore 'outsiders'

The fact is that, by 2001, over thirty-six percent of Muslims were born in Australia, and others have spent most of their lives here. There is also a substantial number of converts to Islam from a variety of different backgrounds. Most Muslims who have migrated to Australia have made their homes here, and are unlikely to return to their country of origin. They have tried hard to make a good life for themselves and their families. Like other Australians they want the best for their children and want the material opportunities that the 'lucky country' has to provide. Australia is a multicultural society and Muslims are part of the diverse makeup of our society.

³⁹John Esposito and John Voll. 2001. *Makers of Contemporary Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 114.

Muslim institutions such as Islamic schools are an obstacle to integration

Islamic schools are like any other non-governmental faith-based schools such as those run by Jews, Catholics and Anglicans. They offer the same curricula as do other schools in Australia. The difference between these Islamic schools and other schools is that Islamic schools teach a subject called Islamic Religious Education. This should not be an obstacle to integration. Even if one accepts the view that it is an obstacle, the fact is that a minority of Muslim children go to Islamic schools and by far most Muslim students are in state schools or other private schools.

Muslims have their own dress code and want to be different

The wearing of a headscarf or other garment by some Muslim women is given as an example of Muslim difference. Not all Muslim women wear the scarf, however. Even if they do, they are exercising their Australian freedom to wear whatever they want. If Muslims want to cover more than other Australians, this should not be seen as problematic. Just as Jewish men, in keeping with their religious beliefs, may choose to wear a skull cap, or Sikh men may choose to wear a turban, Muslim women should be able to wear a headscarf. Those wearing the veil or scarf do so primarily because they believe it is their religious duty to do so. Covering less or more of one's body does not conflict with fundamental Australian values. This is similar to the case of Australians who are vegetarians. Vegetarians make a personal choice, and Muslim women who wear a veil or scarf are also making a personal choice.

Some people also believe that women are forced to wear a veil by their husbands or fathers. Except in a small number of cases, this is not true in Australia. Most Muslim women who wear a headscarf or veil are doing so out of their personal conviction, not because they are forced to. In fact, the headscarf is usually viewed in a very positive light by many Muslim women, even if they do not wear it themselves.

Recently an Australian politician questioned whether the traditional Islamic dress called a chador should be banned in public places on the basis that it might be possible for the person wearing it to conceal weapons or bombs. Many Australian leaders and spokespeople were rightly outraged at the suggestion. They felt that this attitude questioned a fundamental right of Australians to practise the religion of their choosing, and to express themselves in their choice of clothing. Some even pointed out that, if the suggestion was taken seriously, a whole range of items would have to be banned, including cars, handbags, briefcases and baby carriages. Muslims felt that their right to peacefully practise their faith was being questioned, and that a link was unjustly being made in the public mind between terrorism and Muslim women.

Muslims marry only Muslims

This is generally not true, nor is marrying a person of one's own faith a particularly Muslim problem. Many different ethnic or religious groups have members that prefer to marry within that group, and it is the same with Islam. Muslims do marry non-Muslims, and spouses are not required to convert to Islam. This is particularly the case with Muslim men marrying Christian or Jewish women. The Christian or Jewish wife is not required to convert to Islam. More importantly, Muslims come from more than sixty different countries and there are converts to Islam from all sorts of backgrounds.

That is not to say that some families may put pressure on their children to marry within the religion, or on a non-Muslim spouse to consider conversion. Muslims are like any other group of people, and some families are more tolerant than others. Generally speaking, though, interfaith marriages with Muslim partners can and do work.

Those who argue that it is preferable to marry a partner of the same religion point to the idea that this provides a common, shared system of values and beliefs which offers stability to the marriage partners and their future children. Others point out that, even when people marry within the same religion, problems can arise over having different points of view. Having the same religion does not guarantee that marriage partners will think in the same ways, even if that is preferable.

Muslims want to have their own system of law

Most Muslims in Australia appear to be comfortable with the legal system here, and there is no legal barrier to practising religion as an individual in Australia. It is primarily in the family law area that Muslims have some difficulties (such as questions of divorce, child custody, intestacy and so on) but Australian law on the whole accommodates some of those needs. Again, this is not just a Muslim problem. Mainstream Muslims do not call for implementing Islamic law in Australia nor do they call for having a separate system of law for Muslims here. Their main interest is freedom to practise their religion, and this is provided in Australia.

Muslims live separately from other Australians in Muslim ghettos

Muslims do not live in ghettos. Their choice of suburb is more likely to be determined by their economic circumstances. Professionals and wealthy Muslims live in areas they think are appropriate to their requirements. Working class Muslims live in working class areas. Services such as mosques and Islamic schools are established where Muslims live, not the other way around. Most Muslims live in average suburbs with other Australians. Given the ethnic diversity among Muslims, the emergence of a Muslim ghetto in Australia is highly unlikely.

Muslims are potential terrorists and therefore a threat to Australia's future

The media's association of Islam and Muslims with violence, terrorism and extremism is based on the actions of a very small minority of people who exist mostly overseas. Given the security clearance needed to migrate to Australia, it is unlikely that a large number of Muslim criminals can migrate. In terms of crime, Muslims do not appear to be over-represented in Australian prisons. Not only are Muslims generally law-abiding, but the religion also forbids criminal acts. Muslims are citizens of this country, and like other citizens, most Muslims do what they can to stop criminal behaviour. Mainstream Muslims do not wish to see terrorism in their own country, Australia.

People who leave Islam (apostates) will be killed

There is a perception among some people that if a person wishes to leave the religion of Islam (either to stop being a Muslim or to become a member of a different religion) they could be killed for becoming an apostate. In fact, Australia has laws protecting freedom of religion, which means that a person can freely choose to leave Islam.

From a religious point of view, the Qur'an stipulates that 'there is no compulsion in religion (2:256), and a person can neither be forced to become a Muslim nor to stay in the religion. In the past, apostasy was often linked with state treason, and for that reason some Muslim rulers imposed the death penalty on apostates. Also, in some parts of the Muslim world today, the threat of punishment for apostasy exists and is often used as a political tool against people by their opponents. However, many Muslims argue that this is abusing a fundamental principle in Islam that each person answers only to God in regard to their faith or lack thereof.

In the time of the Prophet, if a person left Islam because of their own religious choice, then in general there were no repercussions. This is because the Qur'an instructed the Prophet that his duty was to preach the message of Islam but that 'If then they turn away, We have not sent thee as a guard over them. Thy duty is but to convey [the Message]' (42:48).

ISLAM, STATE AND AUSTRALIAN CITIZENSHIP

For centuries most Muslims lived in a state under the control of a ruler called ‘caliph’ or a ‘sultan’. Although there were regional centres of power, many Muslims often came under the ultimate authority of one person who led the community (*ummah*) particularly in the first two centuries of Islam (7th and 8th centuries CE). While the first four caliphs after the Prophet Muhammad are acknowledged to have ruled the Muslims with wisdom and justice, soon there arose in the Muslim world leaders who created huge dynasties and passed the role of the caliph on to their descendants, who were often despotic. In the twentieth century the last major Muslim dynasty, the Ottoman Empire, came to an end and the office of caliph was dissolved in 1924. Since that time there has been no caliph for the worldwide community of Muslims. Like many other issues, Muslims have different opinions on the idea of an Islamic state.

A conservative view

There is a view among some Muslims that it is important to have a caliph who rules under the authority of God. For them, a country with a majority of Muslims does not mean it is an Islamic state, even if it puts some of the shari‘a laws into effect. These Muslims believe that there are four conditions that must be fulfilled before there is an Islamic state:

- » Sovereignty belongs to God with all law being derived from the Qur’an and traditions of the Prophet. If human beings make up laws to run their society they are going against the will of God.
- » Authority is with Muslims, which means that an Islamic state cannot be ruled by anyone who does not believe in Islam.
- » There is only one caliph, who rules the entire *ummah*.
- » The caliph is the only one with power to implement laws in society.⁴⁰

A liberal view

Many Muslims believe that there is no one right model for an Islamic state, and that Islam can encompass modern political principles such as democracy, equality, and universal human rights. According to one famous Muslim thinker of the twentieth century, Rashid al-Ghannushi, a re-reading of the Qur’an supports the idea that Muslims could organise a society based on the ideas of freedom of belief (including Muslims who wish to change their religion); equal citizenship and taxation and the right of non-Muslims to hold public office (except for the religious positions of imam).⁴¹

Muslims and Australian Citizenship

Although many Muslims still have fond memories of the lands of their birth and may feel ties of loyalty to those countries, mainstream Muslims (particularly those who have taken citizenship in Australia) consider that their loyalty should be primarily to this country.

Citizenship in Australia gives certain rights to Muslims and places obligations on them as well. We cannot say that Muslims should be interested in the rights which citizenship confers but not the obligations. Citizenship in Australia gives people safety and security, freedom, justice, equality, freedom of belief, personal privacy and welfare. All of these rights have corresponding obligations.

⁴⁰ See <http://www.islamic-state.org/khilafah/>

⁴¹ See Abdullah Saeed, “Rethinking Citizenship Rights of Non-Muslims in an Islamic State: Rashid al-Ghannushi’s contribution to the evolving debate” in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1999, 307-323.

Citizenship is considered a contract between the Muslim and Australia. Under Islamic norms, Muslims should abide by its terms and conditions. This contract requires:

- » Commitment to fundamental Australian values upon which the Australian society is based.
- » Tolerance towards other religious traditions and followers of other faiths. This is also in line with Islamic ideas about religious tolerance and dealing with others on the basis of fairness and justice.
- » Commitment and loyalty to Australia. This means that a Muslim is under obligation to do his or her best to protect this country from those who may want to harm it, and to defend it against outside aggression, as defence of one's homeland is required under Islamic norms.

Differing views: loyalty to Islam or Australia?

A few Muslims may argue that their primary loyalty is to Islam. Where the requirements of Islam clash with the requirements of loyalty to Australia, they say that they have to follow their loyalty to Islam. These Muslims often feel that the values, norms and environment of Australia are not sufficiently Islamic and the systems in place are not based on Islamic norms and values and therefore they cannot be loyal to Australia. Their loyalty to Australia, in their view, clashes with their loyalty to Islam.

However, mainstream Muslims (many of whom were born and have lived in Australia for a long time and made Australia their permanent home) will say that there is no real conflict between the two. Loyalty to Australia means primarily three things, none of which clashes with Islamic norms and principles: abiding by the law, commitment to fundamental Australian values, and protecting and defending the homeland.

From their point of view, the only way their loyalty to Australia and their loyalty to Islam clashes is if the Australian authorities prevent Muslims from practising their religion; that is, preventing them from performing the basics of their religion, oppressing them or persecuting them because of their religion. Since Australian society is based on the idea of equality, rule of law and freedom of religion, such a clash is unlikely.

For most Muslims, there is no question that loyalty to Islam and loyalty to Australia can co-exist. They feel even the suggestion of the alternative is a little bit like asking a Christian to choose between being a Christian or an Australian, or to ask a Jew to choose between his or her Jewish faith and being Australian.

APPENDIX ONE

Key Mosques in Australia⁴²

Queensland

Darra Mosque

47 Ducie St
Darra 4076

Kotku Eagleby Mosque

262 Fryer Rd
Eagleby 4207

Kuraby Mosque

1408 Beenleigh Rd
Kuraby 4112

Gold Coast Mosque

2 Allied Dr
Arundel 4214

Holland Park Mosque

309 Nursery Rd
Holland Park 4121

Lutwyche Mosque

33 Fuller St
Lutwyche 4030

Mackay Mosque

3 Tom Thumb Crt
Bakers Creek 4740

Rochedale Mosque

2674 Logan Rd
Eight Mile Plains 4113

Townsville Mosque

153 Ross River Rd
Aitkenvale 4814

Mareeba Mosque

Cr Walsh & Lloyd Sts
Mareeba 4880

West End Mosque

12-14 Princhester St
West End 4101

Woodridge Mosque

Cnr Third Ave and Curtisii Crt
Kingston 4114

New South Wales

Al Hijra Mosque

45 Station St
West Tempe 2044

Al Jihad Mosque

12 South Creek Rd
Dee Why 2099

Al-Imam Ali Mosque

65-67 Wangee Rd
Lakemba 2195

Auburn Gallipoli Mosque

15-17 North Parade
Auburn 2144

Erskineville Jami

13 John St
Erskineville 2043

Global Islamic Youth Centre

& Prayer Hall
265 George St
Liverpool 2170

Masjid-e-Abu Bakar

2 Winspear Ave
Bankstown 2200

Redfern Mosque

328 Cleveland St
Surry Hills 2010

Rooty Hill Mosque

Cr Woodstock & Duke Sts
Rooty Hill 2766

Rydalmere Mosque

465 Victoria Rd
Rydalmere 2116

Smithfield Mosque

30 Bourke St
Smithfield 2164

Suburban Islamic

Association of Campbelltown

44 Westmoreland Rd
Lumeah 2560

UNSW Islamic Centre

The Religious Centre UNSW
University of NSW 2052

Wyong Islamic Centre

13A Howard St
Wyong 2259

Zetland Islamic Centre

932 Bourke St
Zetland 2017

⁴²http://www.islamaustralia.com.au/Mosques/Aust_List/mosques_in_aust.htm

Victoria

Islamic Council of Victoria

66-68 Jeffcott St
West Melbourne 3003

Coburg Islamic Centre

31 Nicholson St
Coburg 3058

Turkish Cypriot Community

of Australia
Lot 1 Ballarat Rd
Deer Park 3023

Islamic Society of Footscray

50 Raleigh St
Footscray 3012

Islamic Society of Victoria

90 Cramer St
Preston 3072

Broadmeadows Mosque

45-55 King St
Broadmeadows 3047

Brunswick Islamic Centre

660 Sydney Rd
Brunswick 3056

Campbellfield Mosque

46 Mason St
Campbellfield 3061

Carlton Mosque

765 Drummond St
North Carlton 3054

Croatian Mosque

36 Studley St
Maidstone 3012

Dandenong Mosque

10-12 Dalgety St
Dandenong 3175

Doncaster Mosque

72 George St
Doncaster East 3109

Fitzroy Mosque

144 Palmer Dr
Fitzroy 3065

Footscray West Mosque

294 Essex St
Maidstone 3012

Geelong Mosque

Cnr Orr & Bostock Sts
Manifold Heights 3218

Heidelberg Mosque

Cnr Lloyd & Elliot Sts
West Heidelberg 3081

Jaame Masjid Afghan

14 Photinia St
Doveton 3177

Lysterfield Mosque

1273 Wellington Rd
Lysterfield 3156

Maidstone Mosque

36 Studley St
Maidstone 3012

Mildura Mosque

49 Tenth St
Mildura 3502

Newport Mosque

1 Walker St
Newport 3015

Noble Park Mosque

18 Leonard Ave
Noble Park 3174

Prahran Mosque

16 Kent St
Prahran 3181

Shepparton Mosque

8 Acacia St
Shepparton 3630

Springvale Mosque

68 Garnsworthy St
Springvale 3171

Sunshine Mosque

618 Ballarat Rd
Sunshine 3020

Thomastown Mosque

157 Station St
Thomastown 3074

South Australia

Adelaide Mosque

20 Little Gilbert St
Adelaide 5000

Park Holme Mosque

658 Marion Rd
Park Holme 5043

Al-Khalil Mosque

Cnr Audley St & Torrens Rd
Woodville North 5012

Gilles Plains Mosque

52-56 Wandana Ave
Gilles Plains 5086

Whyalla Islamic Society

5 Morris Crs
Whyalla Norrie North 5608

Western Australia

Geraldton Mosque

67 George Rd
Geraldton 6530

Katanning Mosque

24 Britannia St
Katanning 6317

Newman Mosque

Lot 1536
Abydos Way
Newman 6753

Perth Mosque

427 William St
Perth 6805

Port Hedland Mosque

34 Trumpet Way
South Hedland 6722

Rivervale Islamic Centre

7 Malvern Rd
Rivervale 6103

Australian Capital Territory

Canberra Islamic Centre

29 Goldfinch Cres
Theodore 2905

Canberra Mosque

130 Empire Circuit
Yarralumla 2600

Tasmania

Hobart Islamic Centre

166 Warwick St
Hobart 7000

Northern Territory

Alice Springs Islamic Centre

Lot 8130 Lyndavale Dr
Alice Springs 0871

Darwin Mosque

53-59 Venderlin Dr
Casuarina 0810

APPENDIX TWO

Key Muslim Organisations

The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils

Mail Address
PO Box 1185
Waterloo DC NSW 2017

932 Bourke St
Zetland NSW 2017

Islamic Council of New South Wales Inc.

405 Waterloo Rd
Chullora NSW 2190

Islamic Council of Victoria

66-68 Jeffcott St
West Melbourne VIC 3003

Islamic Council of Queensland

Compton Rd (cnr Acacia Rd)
Karawatha QLD 4117

Islamic Society of South Australia

658 Marion Rd
Park Holme SA 5043

Islamic Council of Western Australia

7 Malvern St
Rivervale WA 6103

Islamic Council of the Northern Territory

53-59 Vanderlin Dr
Casuarina NT 0810

Islamic Council of Tasmania

166 Warwick St West
Hobart TAS 7000

Islamic Council of Christmas Island

PO Box 132
Christmas Island WA 6798

Islamic Foundation for Education and Welfare

PO Box 111
Bonnyrigg NSW 2177

Islamic Society of Victoria

90 Cramer St
Preston VIC 3072

Federation of Australian Muslim Students and Youth (FAMSY)

PO Box 451
Newport VIC 3015

Suite 2/108 Haldon Street
Lakemba NSW 2195

Muslim Aid Australia

Suite 15-16
168 Haldon St
Lakemba NSW 2195

Muslim Women's National Network of Australia

PO Box 213
Granville NSW 2142

Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria

169 Fitzroy St
Fitzroy VIC 3065

APPENDIX THREE

Key Muslim Schools⁴³

New South Wales

Al Noori Muslim Primary School
75 Greenacre Rd
Greenacre NSW 2190

Arkana College
344 Stoney Creek Rd
Kingsgrove NSW 2208

Malek Fahd Islamic School
405 Waterloo Rd
Greenacre NSW 2190

Noor Al Houda Islamic College
2b Third Ave,
Condell Park NSW 2200

Qibla College
44-48 Westmoreland St
Minto NSW 2566

King Abdul Aziz College
420 Woodstock Ave
Rooty Hill NSW 2766

Al-Amanah College
2a Winspear Ave
Bankstown NSW 2200

Liverpool Campus
55 Speed St Liverpool 2170

Al-Faisal College
149 Auburn Rd
Auburn NSW 2144

Al-Zahra College
3-5 Wollongong Rd
Arncliffe NSW 2205

Victoria

Werribee College
201 Sayers Rd
Hoppers Crossing VIC 3029

Darul-ulum College of Victoria
Baird St
Fawkner VIC 3060

King Khalid Islamic College
Head Office
Merlynston Secondary Campus
56 Bakers Rd
Coburg North VIC 3058

Coburg Primary Campus
653 Sydney Rd
Coburg VIC 3058

Minaret College
Main Campus
36 Lewis St
Springvale VIC 3171

Noble Park Campus
18 Leonard Ave VIC 3174

Ilim College
30 Inverloch Cres
Dallas VIC 3047

Queensland

Brisbane Muslim School
6 Agnes St
Buranda QLD 4102

Islamic School of Brisbane
45 Acacia Rd
Karawatha QLD 4117

South Australia

Islamic College of South Australia
52 Wandana Ave
Gilles Plains SA 5086

Western Australia

Al-Hidayah Islamic School
Hedley St
Victoria Park WA 6100

The Australian Islamic College
17 Tonbridge Way
Thornlie WA 6108

The Australian Islamic College
81 Cleveland
St Dianella WA 6062

The Australian Islamic College
President St
Kewdale WA 6105

⁴³ http://www.islam-australia.com.au/Schools/schools_in_aust.htm

APPENDIX FOUR

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