

GCSE Islam – Practices revision notes

Key concepts:

(A questions – you must have definition & example)

Tawhid: ‘Oneness’ in reference to God. The basic Muslim belief in the oneness of God.

Prophethood or ‘risalah’: The term used of the messengers of God, beginning with Adam and ending with the Prophet Muhammad.

Halal (permitted): Actions or things which are permitted within Islam, such as eating permitted foods.

Haram (forbidden): Any actions or things which are forbidden within Islam, such as eating forbidden foods.

Jihad: Means ‘to strive’. There are two forms of jihad. The greater jihad is the daily struggle and inner spiritual striving to live as a Muslim. The lesser jihad is a physical struggle or ‘holy war’ in defence of Islam.

Mosque or ‘masjid’: A ‘place of prostration’ for Muslims, it is a communal place of worship for a Muslim community.

Shari’ah (straight path): A way of life; Muslims believe God has set out a clear path for how Muslims should live. Shari’ah law is the set of moral and religious rules that put the principles set out by the Qur’an and the Hadith into practice.

Ummah: Means ‘community’. Refers to the worldwide community of Muslims who share a common religious identity.

The Five Pillars

For Muslims actions speak louder than words and therefore every action is a form of worship which they call IBADAH. Muslims are clear that worship is a complete way of life which is reflected in the obligation to follow the five pillars of Islam.

Shahadah: the declaration of faith is the first pillar of Islam. This is when a Muslim states ‘There is no God but Allah and the prophet Muhammed is his messenger.’ This should be the first and last thing a Muslim hears when they are born and die.

SIGNIFICANCE: This declares a Muslims belief in tawhid (the oneness of God) and Risalah (prophethood). It also reflects teachings in the Qur’an such as ‘there is no deity except him’. Recitation of the Shahadah, rather than an elaborate ritual, marks a conversion from one faith or no faith into the religion of Islam. It also reflects the denial in Islam of the Christian belief in the Trinity.

SHIA DIVERSITY: Shi’a do not have this as one of their obligatory acts but still recite the shahadah with the addition of ‘and I bear witness that Ali was the friend of God’.

Salah: Prayer is the second pillar of Islam and is considered to be the most important way of worshiping God. It occurs five times daily; just after dawn, just after midday, late afternoon, just after sunset and after dark. All Muslims pray towards Mecca and perform Rakah (actions) during the prayers such as prostration (bowing) before God to show submission. Muslims must prepare themselves for prayer by spending a few moments reflecting on their niyyah (intentions). They must also ritually cleanse themselves before prayer (Wudu).

SIGNIFICANCE: Prayer can bring the ummah together especially during Jumu’ah (congregational prayers). It can also help Muslims in non-Muslim countries not to feel isolated from the wider ummah as they pray in the same direction as their Muslim brothers and sisters from all over the world. Prayer was also commanded by Allah in Muhammed’s night journey. It allows Muslims to build a personal relationship with God particularly through Du’a; a Muslims personal prayer to God which is on top of the five daily prayers. It follows the command in the Qur’an to ‘exalt (god) with praise of your Lord and be those who prostrate to him’.

SHIA DIVERSITY: Many Shia’s pray 3 times a day.

Zakah: The third pillar of Islam, Zakah, is that of giving to charity. Muslims give 2.5% of their wealth every year as they believe that it is a duty to be charitable and that God will reward them for their acts of giving. Sadaqah are extra payment soften in the form of charitable deeds.

SIGNIFICANCE: This is significant because Muslims are commanded in the Qur’an to give to those in need; widows, orphans and travellers. It is also a sign of purity as money is believed to have a corrupting influence. Muslims believe that wealth does not belong to them but is a gift from Allah as the Qur’an says: ‘Spend from that which we have provided for you’. Therefore money should be shared. Muhammed himself practised Zakah and said that ‘The one who looks after and works for a widow or poor person is like a warrior fighting for God’s cause’.

SHIA DIVERSITY: Sunnis often pay Zakah to the government whereas Shias pay their Zakah to the religious leaders as well as an additional Khum tax.

MUSLIM AID: Muslims may donate Zakah or Sadaqah to a charity such as this. Muslim aid work to provide emergency relief to those suffering from natural disasters such as the recent Iran/Iraq earthquake. They also have helped support those suffering after the Grenfell tower fire in London by providing donations to those left homeless after the fire.

NOTE: Some Muslims argue that fasting should be standardised as Muslims in the middle east at most tend to fast for 15 hours during daylight hours whereas when fasting falls in the British summertime daylight can last up to 19 hours each day!

Sawm: The fourth pillar of Islam is fasting during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic year. During this time Muslims are expected to refrain from eating food, drinking (including water), smoking and sex from dawn to dusk. They should also avoid evil thoughts and unkind speech.

SIGNIFICANCE: This is significant because it develops spiritual discipline and self control. It falls on the same month Muhammed is believed to have received the first revelation of the Qur'an and so Muslims use this time to focus upon the word of God rather than bodily desires. It also builds the ummah as Muslim families share food together at suhur, the meal just before dawn, and iftar, the meal which breaks the fast after sundown. Muslims also use this time to focus on prayer with any Muslims gathering for night prayers at the mosque. Furthermore, it helps Muslims identify with the poor. God instructs Muslims to fast in the Qur'an which says "decreed upon you is fasting...that you may become righteous".

SHIA DIVERSITY: Shia's fast in the same way but also spend three days during Ramadan mourning the death of Ali.

Hajj: The fifth pillar of Islam is the pilgrimage to Makkah. The Qur'an only commands it as a duty for those who: have enough money to leave their homes for a lengthy period and are mentally and physically fit enough to carry out this demanding ritual. Those who have succeeded in completing it often count it as the greatest achievement of their lives. Hajji (male) or Hajjah (female) is the special title given to someone who has successfully completed the Hajj - a great honour.

SIGNIFICANCE OF MAKKAH: Makkah is considered significant as the place for Hajj because it is seen to be the holiest city. Muslims believe that it is here that: Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) was commanded by God, in a dream, to sacrifice his son, Isma'il. Also, Ibrahim overcame a test when the devil appeared, trying to trick him into denying God's word. Ibrahim threw stones to drive the devil away. Ibrahim's wife, Hajar, searched frantically for water in the desert. Miraculously an angel showed her the Zamzam well. Ibrahim built the Ka'ba as a place of worship to the one, true God. Prophet Muhammad was born. Prophet Muhammad received the first revelations from God. Prophet Muhammad returned before his death to reclaim the city for God. Therefore, the route of the Hajj pilgrimage takes believers to the sacred sites where many of these events are said to have taken place.

SIGNIFICANCE OF HAJJ: Hajj brings the Muslim ummah together for all over the world and emphasizes the equality between all Muslims through the wearing of the Ihram (white garments). It is also an opportunity for Muslims to remember the history of their faith by following the rituals carried out by the prophet Ibrahim and his wife Hajar. Muslims ask for mercy and forgiveness on mount Arafat and symbolise their own turning away from the temptations of the devil by throwing the stones at the pillars representing the devil; an event known as Jamarat. Furthermore, Muslims focus on the teaching of Tawhid by circling the Kaaba where Muhammad destroyed the idols of God. Muslims celebrate together all over the world by performing the festival at the end of Hajj; Eid Ul Adha where an animal is sacrificed and its meat often distributed to the poor.

SHIA DIVERSITY: Although Shi'a also perform the Hajj they may also perform pilgrimage to other Shi'a shrines at different times of the year such as to the grave of Ali.

Lesser Jihad: This is holy war which allows force but only for self defence. 'To those against whom war is made, permission is given to fight' (Qur'an).

Muhammad allowed his followers to fight in response to the Makkans who planned to wipe out all Muslims. The Qur'an also states that a Muslim can 'fight in the way of God those who fight against you'.

Jihad must never be aggressive and therefore Muslims cannot be the first to attack. Also, the attack can only be against those who are attacking you and therefore not against civilians.

Many would argue that it was Jihad when Muslims fought against the Christians in the Crusades.

Moderate Islam rejects the Jihad claimed by ISIS. These fighters claims that they want to restore God's rule and defend the ummah.

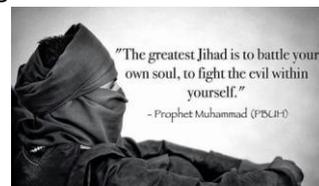
Greater Jihad: This is a struggle to: perform the five pillars with devotion, practise the path set by Muhammed, seek justice and fairness for all, to rise above greed and selfishness.

Muslims must therefore: control their own desires, battle against laziness, encourage what is right and respect the beliefs of others.

'If anyone kills a person...it would be as if they have killed the whole of mankind' (Qur'an)

'To you be your religion and to me be mine' (Qur'an)

'God, I seek your protection against...laziness' (Muhammad)



"The greatest Jihad is to battle your own soul, to fight the evil within yourself."
- Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

Festivals:

Islam believes in practicing moderation and therefore religious festivals are not about excess and partying but community, thanksgiving, remembrance and celebration. They are occasions to worship and remember the presence of God.

MINOR FESTIVALS

Mawlid an-Nabi: The birth of the prophet

This is a public holiday in many countries with joyful procession through the streets and chanting of stories in praise of Muhammad's life.

Laylut ul Qadr: The night of power

This holy day remembers the night in which Muhammed first received the Qur'an during the month of Ramadan. During this time Muslims stay up all night reciting the Qur'an, praying and remembering God's mercy and forgiveness.

Laylut ul Miraj: The night journey

This event remembers when Muhammad ascended to Jerusalem to meet with Allah and the prophets. This is celebrated by events at the mosque, special prayers and telling the story to children.

MAJOR FESTIVALS

1. Eid-UI-Adha: The festival of sacrifice and the most important event in the Muslim calendar. It marks the end of Hajj and is a chance for all Muslims across the world to worship and celebrate together especially as in many countries it is a public holiday. For the Hajjis/Hajjahs who have just completed their pilgrimage it is a celebration of five days of intense worship but is also special for those who have not attended the Hajj. At the time Muslims remember the story of Ibrahim who was commanded to sacrifice his son Ishmael to God. Ibrahim was obedient despite temptation from the devil but prevented from the sacrifice at the last moment when God called out to him and offered a sheep for the sacrifice instead. Today a sheep or goat is killed and the meat shared among family and friends as well as distributed to the poor. In Britain it is illegal to sacrifice an animal so a Muslim may ask a butcher to do this on their behalf. The Qur'an is clear that the sacrifice of the animal is not in itself pleasing to God but a symbol of a Muslim sacrificing himself to the will of God. The Qur'an says 'Their meat will not reach God...but what reaches him is piety from you'. To celebrate Eid-UI-Adha Muslims may also buy/make new clothes, visit friends and family go to the mosque buy gifts, prepare special food.

2. Eid-UI-Fitr: Id-ul-Fitr is a joyful three day celebration at the end of Ramadan where Muslims enjoy breaking their fast. It is seen as a reward for the completion of a month of fasting and for showing self control during this time. The festival begins with the sight of the new moon, however, in Britain where it is cloudy, Muslims rely on other countries for knowing when the fast can begin. On the day Muslims will decorate their homes, dress in their finest new clothes, gather early in the mosques for communal prayers, send greeting cards, visit family and friends, give gifts visit the cemetery to remember loved ones, give generously to the poor, share a meal with loved ones. During this time Muslims also pay Zakat-ul-Fitr, an additional tax to the poor to allow those, even in poverty, a generous meal during the festival.

3. Ashura: This is a Muslim day of sorrow and is most significant in Shi'a Islam although important for all Muslims.

SUNNI: It is a day of fasting established by the prophet Muhammad and an occasion to thank God for saving the Israelites from Pharaoh (ie. the story of Moses). They remember the fast that Moses made in gratitude for God parting the red sea allowing the Israelites to escape from Pharaoh.

SHIA: It is a day of mourning over the death of Husayn, the grandson of Muhammad, in battle. This event triggered the split between Shia and Sunni Muslims that remains to this day. Shi'a believe that after Ali and his oldest son Hasan, Husayn was the rightful successor to be Caliph (leader) of Islam yet he and his followers were betrayed and massacred in battle.

It is celebrated by Shi'a Muslims dressing in black and marching through the streets slapping their chests and chanting. Sometimes plays re-enact the death of Husayn. In some circumstances men may beat themselves with chains or cut their heads with swords. Most Muslims will fast and pray during this day and in some British cities Shi'as gather in large crowds and take part in marches, sometimes slapping their chests violently and chanting.

NOTE: please make sure you also revise the ten obligatory acts of Shi'a Islam