

Year 11 - Islam Revision Notes - 'Beliefs'

Key concepts in Islamic Beliefs

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.

Islam worldwide

There are an estimated 1.6 billion Muslims in the world today, making Islam the world's 2nd largest religion and fastest growing religion in the world. Islam originates from the Middle East: The Middle East and North Africa has the highest concentration of Muslim population today: 93 per cent of people in this region are Muslims. However, nearly 2/3s of the world's Muslims live in the Asia-Pacific region (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Indonesia).

Islam in Britain

In Britain today there are nearly 3 million Muslims, making up more than 4.5 per cent of the population. Up until the mid-20th century there were very few Muslims in the UK, but from the 1950s onwards significant numbers of people came from the former colonies, taking up the offer of work in post-Second World War Britain. The 2011 census shows that Britain is home to one of the most diverse Muslim communities in the world. The majority of British Muslims are Sunnis (95 per cent), with the remaining 5 per cent coming from the Shi'a tradition.

Sources of authority in Islam

Islam teaches that there is a divine law, sent by Allah, to guide human beings in the right way to live. They believe that this law is set out in the Qur'an, which is the perfect communication from Allah to humans. However, not every single area of life is covered by its teachings, so Muslims also look to a number of other sources of authority to help guide them:

The Qur'an – The word of God

The most important source of authority in Islam. It is the complete book of guidance for all and was revealed by Allah to the Prophet Muhammad (through the Angel Jibril) over a period of 23 years. It was written down in Arabic by his followers and compiled into one book shortly after the Prophet's death. *'This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those conscious of God.'*

The Sunnah: the way of the Prophet

The Prophet Muhammad is an inspiration to all Muslims, so they try to imitate the way he lived. The Sunnah is the second most important source of authority for Muslims and describes the customs, practices and traditions of Muhammad. It teaches the perfect path or model of how Muslims should live.

The Hadith: the sayings of the Prophet

Muslims love and respect the words of Muhammad, because he was such an outstanding character. He had deep devotion to

God, with enormous wisdom, kindness and compassion. The Hadith is a book which contains his sayings, as recorded by his family and companions. There are different collections of these sayings, each accepted by different Muslim groups.

Shari'ah law: moral and religious rules that Muslims must follow

The Shari'ah law sets out the moral and religious rules that Muslims must follow. It puts into practice the principles set out by the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the Hadith, so by following Shari'ah law Muslims can know that they are obeying the will of Allah. Shari'ah lays down laws about what is halal & haram. It deals with many everyday topics, including food, clothing, crime, money, sex and relationships.

In the Hadith it states that Muhammad said:

'I have left among you that which if you hold fast to, then you would never go astray, clear things, the book of God and the Sunnah of his prophet.'

History of Sunni and Shi'a Muslim communities

Sunni and Shi'a: who are they?

Sunnis form the majority of Muslims in the world today (87–90 per cent). The remaining 10–13 per cent of Muslims are from the Shi'a community (although only about 5 per cent of British Muslims are Shi'as). Sunnis and Shi'as have coexisted for centuries, living peaceably side by side, often worshipping together in the same mosques, sometimes inter- marrying.

Why did the Sunni and Shi'a split?

After the death of Muhammad a dispute arose over who should lead the Muslim community. Abu Bakr had been a close companion of the Prophet and a large group of believers chose him to become the new Khalifah (leader). After Abu Bakr's death Umar became the leader, then Uthman and then Ali. These four leaders have come to be known as the Rightly Guided Khalifahs and Sunni Muslims accept that they were God's appointed leaders.

However, there was a smaller group who believed that Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, should have become the first Khalifah. It was their belief that the Prophet Muhammad had chosen and appointed Ali as his successor and they rejected the leadership of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman. They were angry that Ali had been overlooked and when Ali was later murdered they began to separate themselves, calling themselves the Shi'a (the House of Ali). They believe that the Prophet Muhammad appointed 12 successors (**Imams**) from his own descendants, who are known as the Ahl al-Bayt, 'the Family of the House' of Muhammad.

In Sunni Islam, an imam is the leader in a local mosque, where he has been chosen by the local Muslim community to lead worship. In Shi'a Islam there were only twelve Imams. They are seen as holy figures who were all divinely appointed members of Muhammad's descendants.

Sunni & Shi'a in the UK:

When Muslims began coming to Britain, Sunnis and Shi'as often lived together as part of a single Islamic community, sharing mosques, praying and socialising together. However, as they have grown in numbers and gained confidence to explore their own heritage, these communities have begun to express their identities in different ways. This has often been fuelled by events in the Middle East, where tensions between the Sunni and Shi'a communities have become more pronounced. Recently, wars and conflict in Iraq and Syria have added to the division among these groups.

MUHAMMED: *"If I were to take a friend other than my Lord, I would take Abu Bakr as a friend."* (Hadith)

MUHAMMED: *"You [Ali] are my brother in this world and the next."* (Hadith)

The foundations of faith in Islam

The six articles of faith in Sunni Islam

The six articles of faith define Sunni's understanding of God. This teaching can be found in the Hadith, where Muhammad is recorded as saying:

'You must believe in Allah, his angels, his holy books, his messengers, in the Last Day and in fate.'

- 1) **Allah (God)**: the unity and oneness of God is called Tawhid- monotheism
- 2) **Malaikah** (angels): God created angels to interact with human lives, bringing his divine message.
- 3) **Holy books**: God has revealed his word to humans in the Qur'an, outlining the correct way to live life.
- 4) **Risalah** (prophethood): God has spoken through numerous prophets including Adam, Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus). However, Muhammad is the greatest prophet – the seal.
- 5) **Akhirah** (the afterlife): Belief in the final judgement - this life is a preparation for the eternal life that follows.
- 6) **Al-Qadr** (God's predestination): God is responsible for everything and has set out a divine destiny for all things.

The five roots of religion (Usul ad-Din) in Shi'a Islam

All Muslims believe that there is one God (Allah) & that Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets, to whom God revealed the Qur'an. However, there is diversity in how to practice and understand the faith.

- 1) The oneness of God (Tawhid): There is one God who has no equals; he is a divine unity - "*He is God, who is One, God, the Eternal Refuge.*" **Qur'an**
- 2) The justice of God (Adalah): God is perfect justice, fairness and wisdom. He does not wrong anyone and he will not tolerate wrongdoing.
- 3) Prophethood (Nubuwwah): God has appointed prophets and messengers to guide human beings, showing them how to live in peace and submission to God. Muhammad was the Seal of the Prophets.
- 4) Leadership (Imamate): Shi'as believe that after Muhammad's death God appointed 12 infallible Imams to guide the Muslim community, leading them on the path set by the Prophet Muhammad. They believe that the 12th Imam is still alive (Mahdi), but is in hiding (occultation), waiting to reappear and rule on earth with justice.
- 5) Resurrection (Qayamat): The belief that, on the Day of Judgement, there will be a resurrection, when all human will be rewarded or punished: '*So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.*'

The Nature of Allah in Islam

The oneness of Allah – Tawhid

Islam is a monotheistic faith; it teaches that there is only one God. There are no other divine beings and it is a sin to compare God to other 'false' gods. Muslims reject the Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God. The single most important belief in Islam is **Tawhid**, the oneness and unity of God. There is one God (**Allah**) who is the universal God of all humanity. This is reflected in the **Shahadah**, which states, '*There is no God but Allah*' This is a belief stated in the **Qur'an** – '*There is no deity except him*'

The nature of Allah

Immanent: The Qur'an says that God is closer to each one of us than the veins in our necks.

Transcendent: God is beyond all things, not limited by the rules of nature. **Omniscient**: God is all-knowing. **Beneficent**: God is all-loving. **Merciful**: God is always fair; he forgives us if we are sorry.

Judge: on the last day, God will be our judge. **Creator**: God is the beginning; he is the cause of all that exists.

The al-Fatihah

The al-Fatihah is the first surah (chapter) in the Qur'an which helps highlight Allah's nature. The al-Fatihah states that Allah is "*merciful*", the '*Lord of the Worlds*', '*beneficent*', the one who '*guides us on the 'straight path*'.

The 99 names of Allah

In Islam, God is not to be confused with any living creature; he is beyond all things and cannot be pictured as a physical being. Allah is transcendent, but for Muslims he lies at the very centre of everything they think and do. The Qur'an and the Hadith have many different 'names' for God, not as a person, but using words that describe his qualities and attributes. They use names like: King, Protector, Wise, Eternal, Light, etc. These are known as the 99 beautiful names of God. Islam rejects picturing God in human form, known as 'anthropomorphism', as this could lead to idolatry.

The sin of shirk

Islam warns of the sin of **shirk**. This is when a person worships something else other than God. There is one God and there can be no pictures to represent him. Muslims must worship the true God, not the image of him, created by human hands. For most Muslims, it is a sin of 'shirk' to show a picture of the Prophet Muhammad.

Prophethood in Islam – Risalah

Why is Prophethood important?

Prophets are important as they are chosen to carry guidance from God to people, but their wisdom does not come from within themselves; it comes from God. '*And it was not for a messenger to come with a sign except by permission of God*' (Qur'an). It is believed that they are '*bringers of good tidings and warners*'.

Why is Muhammad important?

The message brought by Muhammad is essentially the same message as had been preached by all the prophets back to Adam: the need to worship the one, true God - Allah, who will be the judge of all, but due to the teachings of these prophets becoming corrupt, a new prophet was needed. Muslims believe that the greatest of revelations was given to Muhammad during 'Laylat-ul-Qadr' – 'The Night of Power' in the Cave of Hira – Angel Jibril appeared before him and ordered him to recite the words of the Qur'an. Over a 23 year period, Muhammad recited the divine words of Allah to form the Qur'an – therefore providing guidance on how to live a moral life to please Allah. Muslims also believe Muhammad to be the last and final prophet – the 'Seal of the Prophets', highlighting his importance. Muslims also view Muhammad to be a role model because of the moral and prayerful way he lived his life. Muslims see him as an example of a perfect human being. Therefore, Muslim authors put PBUH (peace and blessings be upon him) after his name to show a deep level of respect. Muslims believe that God chose Muhammad as a prophet because he was a humble, honest man; a man he could trust with such a special message. Muhammad also made it possible for all Muslims to return to Makkah and destroy the idolatry and wickedness occurring there, where they forgive their enemies and established Islam as a permanent religion.

'People, no prophet or messenger will come after me, and no new faith will emerge.' (**Muhammad's last sermon, Hadith**)

'I leave behind me two things, the Qur'an and the example of my life (the Sunnah). If you follow these you will not fail.'

Muhammad's final sermon

Malaikah (angels)

What are angels like?

Angels are heavenly, immortal beings, God's first creation, made out of light. They are God's messengers, the channels through which we can become aware of his laws and his purposes. They have no free will and are without sin and so they are able to enter into God's divine presence. Angels have no knowledge of their own as the Qur'an states,

'Glory to thee, of knowledge we have none, save what Thou hast taught'. (2:32).

Although invisible, angels exist everywhere - they are always in contact with humans, especially when someone prays or thinks about God. They have no physical bodies, but the Qur'an describes them as having wings and being male.

In the Islamic tradition there are countless angels. Jibril (Gabriel) is the angel of revelation, responsible for revealing the Qur'an to Muhammad and brings messages to God's chosen ones. Israfil (Raphael) is the archangel who will blow the trumpet on the Day of Judgement to announce the resurrection. In general, Sunnis and Shi'as share common beliefs about angels. Sunnis believe that God created the angels from light and they have no free will. Shi'as, however, accept that angels do have a limited free will, although this will never lead them to sin or act against the will of God.

Akhirah – The Afterlife

For Muslims, human existence will continue after death; our earthly life is just a preparation for the eternal life to come. Our mortal lives are a test and we will be judged according to how we have lived. As humans, we have been given free will, so we are able to make choices about what to believe and how to treat others. We will be held responsible.

Signs of the end of the world

The Madhi will return, coincided with the second coming of Isa (Jesus). A false messiah will also attempt to deceive the people. Other signs include: abundance of earthquakes, the spreading of killing, rejection of Islam, increase in dishonesty, drunkenness, obscenity, nakedness and fornication. Society will be full of terrible corruption and chaos.

Day of Judgement: the test

On the Day of Judgement, the dead will be raised from their graves and all people will stand before God to be sentenced according to the way they have lived their lives. A book which represents everything an individual has done, is presented to each of them. If the person's good deeds outweigh the bad, then they will receive the book in their right hand and pass into heaven. If it is placed into their left hand, they will be among the damned. No one knows when this day will come, apart from Allah, so Muslims must be prepared.

*On the Day of Judgement the Book of Deeds will be read, in which 'every small and great thing is recorded'. (Qur'an 54:52)
'Every soul shall have a taste of death'*

How are people judged?

God judges each person's actions, but intentions (**niyyah**) are also taken into consideration. The two terrifying judging angels, Munkar and Nakir, will question each person, testing their faith. In order to give the correct answer to their questions, it is not enough just to learn to recite the Shahadah. If the person has not truly lived a life of submission to God, following the Five Pillars, they will be incapable of giving the right response on the day. Muslims believe that, for those who die before that day, the angel of death, Azrail, will come to take their souls to await the day. They will be kept in a state of **barzakh** (waiting) until the sound of the final trumpet is heard.

Heaven & Hell

Heaven and hell are described as very real places, but some Muslims interpret these descriptions symbolically, since what exists beyond death must exist in a different dimension from our own world.

Heaven (Janna): a state of joy, happiness and peace. After judgement, people will pass over the very narrow Bridge of As-Sirat. This will include those who have lived faithful and moral lives, those who have been persecuted for their faith in God and those who have fought for God. Muslims believe that heaven is a reward for living a good life, so everything that one longs for on earth will be found in paradise: beautiful gardens, delicious food, gently flowing rivers, lovely serving maidens and reclining couches.

Hell (Jahannam): a state of torment and suffering. The wicked, those whom God has damned, will fail to pass over the As-Sirat Bridge. In trying to cross they will fall into hell. Hell (Jahannam) is a place of terror, where the damned will face boiling physical torment, those condemned to hell will suffer because they are separated from God, without hope of return.

But those who disbelieved will have cut out for them garments of fire. Poured upon their heads will be scalding water'

Some Key Terms to try to remember:

Fitrah - Islam teaches that we are all born with an instinctive **need for God**. It is the natural spirituality that connects us to our creator, making Muslims aware of God's presence and drawing them to worship him.

Taqwa, awareness of God - the desire for a personal connection with God. The Qur'an refers to taqwa as the highest quality of a Muslim, leading them to show worship and submission to God.

Hanifs, the devout people - The hanifs rejected idol worship; they believed in one Supreme God and creator of the universe. It is said by some Muslims that Muhammad's grandfather was a hanif and through him Muhammad learnt the practice of spending time alone in the desert to fast and pray.

REMEMBER ALSO TO USE YOUR BOOKS TO REVISE PREDESTINATION, PROPHETS BEFORE MUHAMMAD, PART D QUESTION PREPARATION AND FOR EXTRA QUOTES ☺