

AN INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM FOR JEWS

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Session 6: Being Muslim, and Today's Islamic Landscape

1. ISLAM IN PRACTICE: CORE BELIEFS

A. God's unity (tawhid)

Quran 112

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate:

Say: He is God, the One and Only;

God, the Eternal, Absolute;

He begets not, nor is He begotten;

And there is none like Him.

B. Revelation through prophets and scriptures

Qur'an 2: 136

Say: We believe in God and in what was brought down to us and what was brought down to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We do not distinguish between any of them; we are submitters [*muslimun*] to Him.

C. God's final judgement

Qur'an 39: 67-75

They do not assess the measure of God fully, when the entire earth is in His grip on the day of resurrection, the heavens rolled up in His right hand, God be praised and transcendent beyond any association they make. And the trumpet will be blown and all in the heavens and on earth will faint except those whom God wills. Then it will be blown a second time and now they will be standing, waiting. And the earth will shine in the light of its Lord and the Book will be laid out, and the prophets and the witnesses will be brought forth, and true judgement will be made among them. They will not be wronged. And every soul will be recompensed for what it did, for God knows best what they do. And those who refused to believe will be driven in crowds to hell. When they arrive, its gates will be opened and its keepers will say to them, 'Didn't your own messengers come to you and recite to you the signs of your Lord, warning you of meeting this day?' They will say, 'Yes, indeed, but the word of punishment for those who refuse to believe is just.' It will be said, 'Enter the gates of hell forever!' How miserable the dwelling of those who think themselves great. But those who were pious to their Lord will be driven to the

garden in crowds until, when they reach it, its gates will be opened. Its keepers will say to them, ‘Peace upon you! You have been good, so enter it forever!’ They will say, ‘Praise be to God who has fulfilled His promise and has bequeathed to us the earth, to dwell in the Garden wherever we desire. How wonderful the reward of workers!’ And you will see angels surrounding the throne, singing out praise of God, judged correctly, and it will be said, ‘Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds!’

D. Belief in angels and jinn

Qur’an 7: 11-18

It is We Who created you and gave you shape; then We bade the angels bow down to Adam, and they bowed down; not so Iblis; He refused to be of those who bow down.

[God] said: ‘What prevented you from bowing down when I commanded you?’ He said: ‘I am better than he: You created me from fire, and him from clay.’

[God] said: ‘Get down from this: it is not for you to be arrogant here: get out, for you are of the meanest [of creatures].’

He said: ‘Give me respite till the day they are raised up.’

[God] said: ‘Be among those who have respite.’

He said: ‘Because You have thrown me out of the way, lo! I will lie in wait for them on Your straight way: then will I assault them from before them and behind them, from their right and their left: Nor will You find, in most of them, gratitude [for Your mercies].’

[God] said: ‘Get out from this, disgraced and expelled. If any of them follow you—Hell will I fill with you all.’

E. Belief in predestination and the divine decree

Qur’an 57: 22

The keys of the unseen are with Him. No one knows them aside from Him, who knows what is on the land and in the sea, and no leaf falls without God knowing it, nor a single grain in the darkness of the earth, nothing verdant and nothing withered that is not in the clear book.

2. ISLAM IN PRACTICE: THE FIVE PILLARS

Name	Translation	Action
<i>shahada</i>	witnessing	Declaration of God’s unity and Muhammad’s status as prophet
<i>salat</i>	prayer	Formal prayer five times daily (men and women)
<i>zakat</i>	charity	2.5% per cent of liquid assets to be given to the poor and needy
<i>sawm</i>	fasting	Dawn to dusk fast during the month of Ramadan
<i>hajj</i>	pilgrimage	Pilgrimage to Mecca at least once (men and women)

Qur'an 2: 150

From wherever you go forth, turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque, and wherever you are, turn your face in its direction.

The five daily prayers

fajr – recited after dawn

dhuhr – just after noon

'asr – afternoon, midway between noon and sunset

maghrib – just after sunset

'isha – between end of sunset and midnight

The *adhan* (call to prayer)

God is most great (*allahu akbar*) (x 4)

I testify that there is no god but God (x 2)

I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God (x 2)

Come [alive] to the prayer (x 2)

Come [alive] to flourishing (x 2)

God is most great (x 2)

There is no god but God (x 1)

Video with performance and translation of the adhan (= azan)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kJExzyKG4Y>

Video about salat (formal prayer): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfFBgDtsI8A>

Qur'an 73: 20

Pray regularly and give *zakat*, and lend to God a good loan. Whatever good you put forth for the sake of your own souls you will find with God, who is good and greatest in reward. Seek forgiveness in God, for God is the most forgiving, gracious.

Qur'an 2: 185

Ramadan is the [month] in which was sent down the Qur'an, as a guide to mankind, also clear [Signs] for guidance and judgement [between right and wrong]. So every one of you who is present [at his home] during that month should spend it in fasting, but if any one is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed period [should be made up] by days later. ...

Qur'an 3: 96-7

The first House [of worship] appointed for men was that at Bakka [Mecca]: full of blessing and of guidance for all kinds of beings: in it are signs manifest, the Station of Abraham; whoever enters it attains security; pilgrimage thereto is a duty men owe to God, those who can afford the journey ...

Video about the Hajj pilgrimage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMWgeSuHKhs>

3. THE ISLAMIC LANDSCAPE OF TODAY

(based on an article by Abdullah Saeed, 'Trends in Contemporary Islam: A Preliminary Attempt at a Classification', *The Muslim World*, 97 (2007).

1. Legalist traditionalists

- Religious professionals ('*ulama*'), concerned with preserving traditional four schools of Islamic law (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali); basis of *madrassa* systems across the world
- Emphasize *taqlid* (following legal precedent) and reject *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning), oppose any reform of Islamic law
- Favour putting classical areas of Islamic law (family, inheritance) into practice, but do not favour political action or rebellion against ruling establishment; often oppose Islamist groups
- Often appointed by political establishment and support it, e.g. '*ulama* at al-Azhar University in Cairo; one prominent figure is Yusuf al-Qaradawi (now in Qatar).

2. Political Islamists

- Propose to return to 'authentic' Islam of the Prophet, reject historical adaptation; view of Islam as monolithic, bounded, unchanging system; disregard historical and geographical variety of versions of Islam
- Islamic states should be founded, governed exclusively by Islamic law, and should enforce Islamic practice
- Claim Islam is totally independent of Western thought and philosophy
- Regard 'the West' (seen as homogenous) and its allies in the Muslim world as enemies
- Opposed to mysticism and Sufism (on theological and political grounds)
- Conservative and essentialist attitudes to women
- Sunni and Shi'a versions – for Shi'a, *ulama* are in charge
- Attitudes to violence vary, from disapproval to support
- Groups include: Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat-i Islami (Pakistan), Hizb ut-Tahrir, political wings of Hamas and Hizbullah

3. Militant extremists

- Emphasis on attacking 'the West', but are increasingly attacking other Muslims
- Small and secretive networks, no mass support
- Motivated by a deep sense of injustice and feeling of powerlessness; often refer back to the Crusades as a model of today's 'Western aggression'
- Convinced that 'the West' intends to obliterate Islam
- Regard *jihad* as a duty of every Muslim individual, rather than as a communal duty
- Often aspire to reintroduce a caliphate, ruling a worldwide Islamic state
- Little interest in developing workable plans for a future 'Islamic state'
- Regard Muslims who do not share their ideas as *kufar* (infidels)

- Groups include: al-Qa'ida, ISIS, armed wings of Hamas & Hizbullah (Shi'ite), Islamic Jihad

4. Theological puritans

- Some groups related to Wahabism, but wider in extent and sometimes opposed to it.
- Oppose all *bid'a* – innovation – and 'culture', on the grounds it is not 'authentic Islam'
- Often puritanical: insist on strict gender segregation, prefer *niqab* for women; no music, dance, or clapping; polygamy accepted
- Often missionize (Muslims and non-Muslims); feel they are the one true Islam
- Emphasis on correct belief, esp in *tawhid* – the oneness of God.
- In West linked to identity quest of young Muslims who don't want the 'culture based' Islam of parents, and seek for 'pure' and 'authentic' Islam
- Groups include: movements, such as Deobandi and Tablighat Jama'at (India and Pakistan), Salafists

5. Progressive ijtihadis

- Includes Muslim modernists, liberals, feminists, and reform-minded traditionalists
- Many are based in the West
- Advocate substantial reform of many areas of Islamic law to make them relevant
- Support *ijtihad*, don't follow a particular *madhhab* (legal school)
- Many combine traditional Islamic scholarship with Western thought and education
- Important figures: Ziauddin Sardar, Amina Wadud, Khaled Abou el-Fadl
- Groups include: Muslim Canadian Congress, British Progressive Muslims/British Muslims for Secular Democracy, Muslims for Progressive Values, Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan; small, localized movements, often in West

6. 'Cultural' Muslims

- Probably the majority of Muslims in the world
- Learn from their families and societies and reproduce what they do
- 'Traditional' rather than ideologically convinced, may have minimal Islamic education
- Level of practice may vary enormously
- Still very 'Muslim'; major part of identity
- Often alarmed by or opposed to more ideological and violent versions of Islam

7. Secular liberals

- Regard Islam as a matter of private, personal belief (as in West)
- Against Islamic states and the imposition of Islamic law
- Favour individual freedom, democracy, freedom of speech, gender equality, religious freedom, and will often condemn Islamic infractions of these
- Prominent figures: Aayan Hirsi Ali, 'Ibn Warraq', Irshad Manji