

## Islamic Beliefs

*Summary: Islamic beliefs inform the worldview, lifestyle, and practices of Muslims worldwide. Amongst Sunni Muslims, the key tenets of faith are belief in: God, angels, revelations, prophets and messengers, the Day of Judgement, and divine decree. While Shi'a Muslims generally agree on these beliefs, they also add Imamate as a foundational tenet.*

*“The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the faithful. They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. ‘We make no distinction between any of His messengers,’ they say, ‘We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return!’” (Qur’an 2:285, trans. Abdel Haleem)*

*Iman*, or belief in Islam, is the unwavering certainty and acceptance of several key tenets of faith. Stemming from the root word which means to give security, safety, and tranquility, these key beliefs inform the worldview, lifestyle, culture, and practices of Muslims worldwide and grant tranquility during times of hardship, and safety from despair. It is what gives meaning to the very existence of human life, and upon which rests the basis of the acts of worship. At its core is recognition of one, absolute, and unequaled God. Indeed, as Ismail al-Faruqi, a contemporary Muslim theologian noted, “All the diversity, wealth and history, culture and learning, wisdom and civilization of Islam is compressed in this shortest of sentences, “*La ilaha illa Allah* (there is no god except God).”

The key tenets of faith according to Sunni Muslims are known as the “Six Articles of Faith” and include: belief in God, angels, revelations, prophets and messengers, the Day of Judgement, and divine decree.

**Oneness of God (*Tauhid*):** The Oneness of God, or *tauhid*, animates the entirety of Islam. Although in simple terms it refers to the belief that there is truly only one God, referred to in Arabic as “Allah”, its meaning extends far beyond that. Since God originated the universe and brought everything into being, He is absolutely beyond space, time, matter, and any resemblance to the created world. It is only He who regulates the universe, and shares no partners or peers in this role. He alone is attributed with qualities of mercy, love, forgiveness, justice, lordship, and wisdom, in their most perfect forms. And it is to Him

alone that all things will eventually end and return to. It is for this reason Muslims state that He alone is worthy of worship, devotion, and sacrifice. Indeed, according to Muslim belief, God is the ultimate reality, and worship of Him, the ultimate objective and very purpose of humankind.

**Angels (*Malaikah*):** Angels, referred to as “*Malaikah*” in Arabic, are beings made of light which execute God’s commands for managing the universe. They are gender-less, invisible, do not possess free will, and hence cannot disobey God’s orders. They include, for example: Mika’il who brings forth the rain, Izra’il, also known as the Angel of Death, who takes the souls from bodies at the time of death, Israfil who will sound the horn for Resurrection, Raqib and ‘Atid who record the deeds of every person, and Munkar and Nakir who will question the soul after death. The most important function however, is that of the archangel Jibril, also known as Gabriel, who is responsible for conveying God’s revelations to divinely chosen persons known as prophets.

**Divine Revelations (*Kutub*):** Since God is beyond being directly perceived by human beings, He sent His revelations to angels who then conveyed them to prophets who spread them to humanity. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was given the Qur’an, previous prophets were also given revelations from God: The Scrolls to Abraham, the Torah to Moses, the Psalms to David, and the Gospel to Jesus. However, since the Qur’an is the final scripture for all of humanity, it thus supersedes all previous ones until the Day of Resurrection. Memorizing parts or the entirety of the Qur’an is an activity that virtually all Muslims engage in.

**Prophets & Messengers (*Rusul*):** Prophets, or specially elected persons tasked with delivering God’s guidance to humanity, were sent to every nation and people. This means that there were perhaps hundreds of thousands of prophets throughout human history, however only twenty-five are explicitly mentioned in the Qur’an. These include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Though sharing prophets with other religious traditions, Muslims believe that while prophets are “perfect” and sinless human beings, they do not share any aspect of divinity with God. In addition to conveying God’s revelations, prophets also act as living exemplars on how to put God’s teachings into practice. Since

Muhammad was the last prophet, and seal of all the previous ones, he was sent to all of humanity for all times and places, and with him culminates the cycle of revelation.

**Day of Judgement (*Yawm al-Akhirah*):** According to Muslim belief, every prophet came to warn their people about the impending Day of Judgment; the time in which a person's deeds will be judged and they will thereby be placed in either Paradise (*jannah*) or Hell (*jahannam*). Hell is described as a place of intense physical and spiritual suffering, while Paradise that of eternal joy, comfort, and bliss. Entrance into Paradise is warranted by responding to God's revelations conveyed by prophets and living a pious, God-conscious life, while sentencing to Hell is warranted on the exact opposite: a rejection of God's revelations and prophets, and living an impious, immoral life. However, Muslims are apt to note that Paradise is ultimately predicated on God's mercy - He can forgive a person's sins if He so chooses, and no one will enter except by His mercy - which is why seeking forgiveness is highly encouraged. According to some Muslim theologians, Hell will eventually be emptied and come to an end, and all people sent to Paradise.

**Divine Decree (*Qadar*):** Judgement Day is predicated on the idea that people have been given free-will to decide as to how they will live their life. This however seems to contradict with the idea that God is all-knowing, including having knowledge of every person's ultimate destiny. Though this paradox has perplexed many great Muslim thinkers, Sunnis and Shi'as alike, Muslims have generally agreed that while God is all-knowing and all things are decreed by Him, both the "good" and "bad", He is also perfectly just, and therefore will not be unjust in His judgement. For Muslims, since life ultimately is a test, or a series of choices from God, each person will be judged according to the free choices they have made, albeit God is ultimately all-knowing of all possibilities. Phrases like "*insha-Allah*" (God-willing), and "*masha-Allah*" (God willed it) are reflective of this belief.

While Shi'a Muslims generally agree with Sunnis in the aforementioned beliefs, they differ primarily by the inclusion of the doctrine of Imamate.

**Imamate (*Imamah*):** Though the Prophet Muhammad, or the "living Qur'an" has passed, Shi'as do not believe this means humans are left without a guide. The Imams, a group of individuals descended from

the Prophet Muhammad's family, are those divinely-guided leaders. They are infallible, protect the revelation of God from distortion, impart esoteric knowledge, and show how to practically live God's teachings. According to Twelver Shi'as, these were twelve such individuals, and it is actually from their light and the Prophet Muhammad's light, that all of creation was derived. Although the twelfth Imam has gone into occultation, he still guides humanity through his light and will re-emerge during the End of Times to restore peace and justice to the world. For Zaydi Shi'as, these were five individuals, and their leadership has continued with successive rulers, however the Imams are not infallible. For Isma'ili Shi'as, the Nizari branch holds that the Imams have continued up until the present, with the current Imam referred to as the "Imam of the Time". Other branches hold that their leadership has continued in the form of representatives known as *da'is*, who receive spiritual instruction and guidance from them for their communities.