

Short Guide to Islam for CLWG

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Basic articles of faith

Muslims have six main beliefs.

- Belief in Allah as the one and only God
- Belief in angels
- Belief in the [holy books](#)
- Belief in the Prophets [e.g. Adam, [Ibrahim](#) (Abraham), [Musa](#) (Moses), Dawud (David), [Isa](#) (Jesus). [Muhammad](#) (peace be upon him) is the final prophet.]
- Belief in the Day of Judgement. [The day when the life of every human being will be assessed to decide whether they go to heaven or hell.]
- Belief in Predestination. [That Allah has the knowledge of all that will happen. Muslims believe that this doesn't stop human beings making free choices.]

Allah

Allah is the name Muslims use for the supreme and unique God, who created and rules everything. The heart of faith for all Muslims is obedience to Allah's will.

- Allah is *eternal, omniscient, and omnipotent*...
- Allah has no shape or form...
- Allah is just, rewards and punishes fairly, but Allah is also merciful.
- A believer can approach Allah by [praying](#), and by [reciting the Qur'an](#).
- Muslims worship only Allah, because only Allah is worthy of worship.

Qur'an

The Qur'an has 114 [suras](#), (chapters) which contain 6,236 [āyāt](#) (verses). The earlier suras, revealed at [Mecca](#), are primarily concerned with ethical and spiritual topics. The later [Medinan](#) suras mostly discuss social and moral issues relevant to the Muslim community. The Qur'an is more concerned with moral guidance than legal instruction, and is considered the "sourcebook of Islamic principles and values". Muslim jurists consult the [hadith](#), the written record of Muhammad's life, to supplement the Qur'an and assist with interpretation.

When Muslims speak about "the Qur'an", they usually mean the scripture as recited in Arabic. The Qur'an is perfect only as revealed in the original Arabic; translations are deficient because of language differences, the fallibility of translators, and the impossibility of preserving the original's inspired style. Translations are therefore regarded only as commentaries on the Qur'an, or "interpretations of its meaning", not as the Qur'an itself.

The Five Pillars of Islam

The most important Muslim practices are the Five Pillars of Islam. These are the obligations that every Muslim must satisfy to live a good and responsible life according to Islam:

- [Shahadah](#): sincerely reciting the Muslim profession of faith
- [Salat](#): performing ritual prayers in the proper way five times each day
- [Zakat](#): paying an alms (or charity) tax to benefit the poor and the needy
- [Sawm](#): fasting during the month of Ramadan
- [Hajj](#): pilgrimage to Mecca

Why are they important?

No matter how sincerely a person may believe, Islam regards it as pointless to live life without putting that faith into action and practice. Carrying out the Five Pillars demonstrates that the Muslim is putting their faith first, and not just trying to fit it in around their lives.

War, Death, Murder & Suicide

Life is sacred

Whosoever has spared the life of a soul, it is as though he has spared the life of all people. Whosoever has killed a soul, it is as though he has murdered all of mankind.
Qur'an 5:32

...Take not life, which God has made sacred, except by way of justice and law. Thus does He command you, so that you may learn wisdom
Qur'an 6:151

Do not take life, which Allah made sacred, other than in the course of justice.
Qur'an 17:33

Allah decides how long each of us will live

When their time comes they cannot delay it for a single hour nor can they bring it forward by a single hour.
Qur'an 16:61

And no person can ever die except by Allah's leave and at an appointed term.
Qur'an 3:145

Suicide and euthanasia are explicitly forbidden

Destroy not yourselves. Surely Allah is ever merciful to you.
Qur'an 4:29

The Prophet said: "Amongst the nations before you there was a man who got a wound, and growing impatient (with its pain), he took a knife and cut his hand with it and the blood did not stop till he died. Allah said, 'My Slave hurried to bring death upon himself so I have forbidden him (to enter) Paradise.' "
Sahih Bukhari 4.56.669

Judicial Killing (AKA Death Penalty)

Forgiveness, together with peace, is a predominant [Qur'anic](#) theme. It is a general principle in [Sharia](#) (Muslim law) of choosing the lesser of two evils.

In Islamic law, the death penalty is appropriate for two groups of crime:

- **Intentional murder:** In these cases the victim's family is given the option as to whether or not to insist on a punishment of this severity
- Fasad fil-ardh ('**spreading mischief in the land**'): Islam permits the death penalty for anyone who threatens to undermine authority or destabilise the state

What constitutes the crime of 'spreading mischief in the land' is open to interpretation, but the following crimes are usually included:

- Treason/apostasy (when one leaves the faith and turns against it)
- Terrorism
- Piracy of any kind
- Rape
- Adultery
- Homosexual activity

Whilst Islam remains firmly retentionist, there is a small but growing abolitionist Islamic view. Their argument is as follows:

- The Ulama (those who are learned in Islamic Law, constitution and theology) do not always agree on the interpretation or authenticity of the sacred texts. Neither do they agree on the social context in which these texts should be applied.
- Sharia law is often used by repressive powers that attack women and the poor.
- There are incidences of states summarily executing those accused whilst denying them access to a lawyer. This is totally contradictory to the concept of Islamic justice.

War & Jihad

War

Islam sets down clear guidelines as to when [war](#) is ethically right, and clear guidelines as to how such a war should be conducted. In brief, war is permitted:

- in self defence
- when other nations have attacked an Islamic state
- if another state is oppressing its own Muslims

War should be conducted:

- in a disciplined way
- so as to avoid injuring non-combatants
- with the minimum necessary force
- without anger
- with humane treatment towards prisoners of war
- Muslims must only wage war according to the principles of Allah's justice.

Those who believe fight in the way of Allah, and those who disbelieve fight in the way of the Shaitan.

Qur'an 4:76

Fight in the cause of God against those who fight you, but do not transgress limits. God does not love transgressors.

Qur'an 2:190

Islam is in favour of peace and against violence. Murder leads to punishment in Hell:

If anyone killed a person - unless it was for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he killed the whole people

Qur'an 5:32

The aims of war

The Qur'an emphasises that war should be fought only for [noble motives](#) without seeking any earthly reward:

Those who readily fight in the cause of God are those who forsake this world in favour of the Hereafter. Whoever fights in the cause of God, then gets killed, or attains victory, we will surely grant him a great recompense.

Qur'an 4:74

The conduct of war

Islam bans the killing of non-combatants (Qur'an 2:190, above), or of a combatant who has been captured. Muslims are forbidden from attacking wounded soldiers (unless the wounded person is still fighting). The [Prophet's](#) view of non-combatants is shown by a hadith in which

Muhammad sees a woman killed in the battlefield and condemns the action. When an enemy is defeated he should be made prisoner rather than be killed:

So when you meet in battle those who disbelieve, then smite the necks until when you have overcome them, then make (them) prisoners, and afterwards either set them free as a favor or let them ransom (themselves) until the war terminates.

Qur'an 47:4

[Abu Bakr](#) (the First Caliph) gave these rules to an army he was sending to battle:

Do not commit treachery or deviate from the right path.

You must not mutilate dead bodies.

Neither kill a child, nor a woman, nor an aged man.

Bring no harm to the trees, nor burn them with fire, especially those which are fruitful.

Slay not any of the enemy's flock, save for your food.

You are likely to pass by people who have devoted their lives to monastic services; leave them alone

Abu Bakr

A noble example of ideal Muslim conduct of war is the capture of Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187. Although a number of holy Muslim places had been violated by [Christians](#), Saladin prohibited acts of vengeance, and his army was so disciplined that there were no deaths or violence after the city surrendered. The residents were taken prisoner, but their ransom was set at a token amount.

More Belligerent Views on War

Some Muslim thinkers in the past, and some more radical Muslim thinkers today, take a different view. They say that verses in the [Qur'an](#), the so-called 'sword verses', have "abrogated" the verses that permit warfare only in defence. They use these 'sword verses' to justify war against unbelievers as a tool of spreading Islam (Qur'an 9:5, 9:29). Others take this further and regard non-Muslims, and Muslims who don't conform rigorously to the Islamic code, as non-believers and thus as "enemies of God" against whom it is legitimate to use violence. But *the idea of a total and unrestricted conflict is completely unIslamic.*

Holy war

When Muslims, or their faith or territory are under attack, Islam permits (some say directs) the believer to wage military war to protect them. However Islamic (shariah) law sets very strict rules for the conduct of such a war. In recent years the most common meaning of Jihad has been Holy War. And there is a long tradition of Jihad being used to mean a military struggle to benefit Islam.

Jihad

The literal meaning of Jihad is struggle or effort, and it means much more than [holy war](#).

Muslims use the word Jihad to describe three different kinds of struggle:

- A believer's internal struggle to live out the Muslim faith as well as possible
- The struggle to build a good Muslim society
- Holy war: the [struggle to defend Islam](#), with force if necessary

Many modern writers claim that the main meaning of Jihad is the internal spiritual struggle, and this is accepted by many Muslims. However there are so many references to Jihad as a military struggle in Islamic writings that it is incorrect to claim that the interpretation of Jihad as holy war is wrong.

Jihad and the Prophet

The phrase internal Jihad or greater Jihad refers to the efforts of a believer to live their Muslim faith as well as possible. All religious people want to live their lives in the way that

will please their God. So Muslims make a great effort to live as Allah has instructed them; following the rules of the faith, being devoted to Allah, doing everything they can to help other people. For most people, living God's way is quite a struggle. God sets high standards, and believers have to fight with their own selfish desires to live up to them, no matter how much they love God.

The Five Pillars of Islam as Jihad

The [five Pillars of Islam](#) form an exercise of Jihad in this sense, since a Muslim gets closer to Allah by performing them. Other ways a Muslim engages in the 'greater Jihad' could include:

- Learning the [Qur'an](#) by heart, or engage in other religious study.
- Overcoming things such as anger, greed, hatred, pride, or malice.
- Giving up smoking.
- Cleaning the floor of the [mosque](#).
- Taking part in Muslim community activities.
- Working for social justice.
- Forgiving someone who has hurt them.

The Greater Jihad controversy

The Prophet is said to have called the internal Jihad the "greater Jihad". On his return from a battle, the Prophet said: "We are finished with the lesser jihad; now we start the greater jihad." He explained to his followers that fighting against an outer enemy is the lesser jihad and fighting against one's self is the greater jihad. This quotation is regarded as unreliable by some scholars. They regard the use of jihad as meaning 'holy war' as the more important. However the quotation has been influential among some Muslims, particularly Sufis.

What can justify Jihad?

There are a number of reasons, but the Qur'an is clear that self-defence is always the underlying cause. Permissible reasons for [military Jihad](#):

- Self-defence
- Strengthening Islam
- Protecting the freedom of Muslims to practise their faith
- Protecting Muslims against oppression, which could include overthrowing a tyrannical ruler
- Punishing an enemy who breaks an oath
- Putting right a wrong

What a Jihad is not

A war is not a Jihad if the intention is to:

- Force people to convert to Islam
- Conquer other nations to colonise them
- Take territory for economic gain
- Settle disputes
- Demonstrate a leader's power

Although the Prophet engaged in military action on a number of occasions, these were battles to survive rather than conquest, and took place when fighting between tribes was common.

Sharia Law

The *Sharia* (literally "the path leading to the watering place") is Islamic law formed by traditional Islamic scholarship, which most Muslim groups adhere to. In Islam, Sharia is the expression of the divine will, and "constitutes a system of duties that are incumbent upon a Muslim by virtue of his religious belief".^[60]

Most Muslims believe sharia is derived from two primary sources of Islamic law: the precepts set forth in the Quran, and the example set by the Islamic prophet Muhammad in the Sunnah. Fiqh jurisprudence interprets and extends the application of sharia to questions not directly addressed in the primary sources by including secondary sources. These secondary sources usually include the consensus of the religious scholars embodied in *ijma*, and analogy from the Quran and Sunnah through *qiyas*. Shia jurists prefer to apply reasoning ('*aql*) rather than analogy in order to address difficult questions.

Islamic law covers all aspects of life, from matters of state, like governance and [foreign relations](#), to issues of daily living. The Qur'an defines *hudud* as the punishments for five specific crimes: unlawful intercourse, false accusation of unlawful intercourse, consumption of alcohol, theft, and highway robbery. The Qur'an and Sunnah also contain laws of [inheritance](#), [marriage](#), and [restitution for injuries and murder](#), as well as rules for [fasting](#), [charity](#), and [prayer](#). However, these [prescriptions](#) and [prohibitions](#) may be broad, so their application in practice varies. [Islamic scholars](#) (known as *ulema*) have elaborated systems of law on the basis of these rules and their interpretations.^[61] Over the years there have been changing views on [Islamic law](#) but many such as [Zahiri](#) and [Jariri](#)^[clarification needed] have since died out.^{[62][63]}

Fiqh, or "jurisprudence", is defined as the knowledge of the practical rules of the religion. The method Islamic jurists use to derive rulings is known as *usul al-fiqh* ("legal theory", or "principles of jurisprudence"). According to Islamic legal theory, law has four fundamental roots, which are given precedence in this order: the Qur'an, the Sunnah (actions and sayings of Muhammad), the consensus of the Muslim jurists (*ijma*), and analogical reasoning (*qiyas*). For early Islamic jurists, theory was less important than pragmatic application of the law. In the 9th century, the jurist [ash-Shafi'i](#) provided a theoretical basis for Islamic law by codifying the principles of jurisprudence (including the four fundamental roots) in his book *ar-Risālah*

Scholars

NB – this is not a formal hierarchy like in Christian churches, these are just educated men who offer opinions and provide spiritual and/or community leadership.

Imam (Sunni term)

An Arabic word meaning "leader". Often the worship leader of a [mosque](#) and the Muslim community. Similar to spiritual leaders, the imam is the one who leads Islamic worship services. More often, the community turns to the mosque imam if they have a religious question. In smaller communities, an imam could also be the community leader.

Mullah (Shi'ite term)

name commonly given to local Islamic clerics or [mosque](#) leaders. It is primarily understood in the Muslim world as a term of respect for an educated man.

Ideally, a trained mullah will have studied Islamic traditions ([hadith](#)), and Islamic law ([fiqh](#)). They are often [hafiz](#), i.e. have memorized the [Qur'an](#). However, uneducated villagers often recognize a literate Muslim with a less than complete Islamic training as their "mullah" or religious cleric. Mullahs with varying levels of training lead prayers in mosques, deliver religious sermons, and perform religious ceremonies such as birth rites and funeral services. They also often teach in a type of Islamic school known as a [madrasah](#). These three kinds of knowledge are applied mostly in interpreting Islamic texts (i.e. the [Quran](#), [Hadiths](#), etc.) for matters of [Shariah](#), i.e. Islamic law.

Taliban Interpretations

Under the Taliban regime, [Sharia law](#) was interpreted to forbid a wide variety of previously lawful activities in Afghanistan. One Taliban list of prohibitions included: pork, pig, pig oil, anything made from human hair, satellite dishes, cinematography, and equipment that produces the joy of music, pool tables, chess, masks, alcohol, tapes, computers, VCRs, television, anything that propagates sex and is full of music, wine, lobster, nail polish, firecrackers, statues, sewing catalogs, pictures, Christmas cards.^[105] They also got rid of employment, education, and sports for all women, dancing, clapping during sports events, kite flying, and characterizations of living things, no matter if they were drawings, paintings, photographs, stuffed animals, or dolls. Men had to have a fist size beard at the bottom of their chin. Conversely, they had to wear their head hair short. Men had to wear a head covering.^[106]

Many of these activities were hitherto lawful in Afghanistan. Critics complained that most Afghans followed a different, less strict, and less intrusive interpretation of Islam. The Taliban did not eschew all traditional popular practices. For example, they did not destroy the graves of Sufi [pirs](#) (holy men), and emphasized dreams as a means of revelation.

The author Ahmed Rashid suggests that the devastation and hardship of the Soviet invasion and the following period influenced Taliban ideology.^[118] The Taliban were often "barely literate," and did not include scholars learned in Islamic law and history. The refugee students, brought up in a totally male society, not only had no education in mathematics, science, history or geography, but also had no traditional skills of farming, [herding](#), or [handicraft](#)-making, nor even knowledge of their tribal and clan [lineages](#).^[118] In such an environment, war meant employment, peace meant unemployment. Dominating women simply affirmed manhood. For their leadership, rigid fundamentalism was a matter not only of principle, but of political survival. Taliban leaders "repeatedly told" Rashid that "if they gave women greater freedom or a chance to go to school, they would lose the support of their rank and file."

The Taliban were criticized for their strictness toward those who disobeyed their imposed rules. Many Muslims complained that most Taliban rules had no basis in the [Qur'an](#) or [sharia](#). [Mullah Omar](#)'s title as [Amir al-Mu'minin](#) was criticized on the grounds that he lacked scholarly learning, tribal pedigree, or connections to the [Prophet's](#) family. Sanction for the title traditionally required the support of all of the country's [ulema](#), whereas only some 1,200 Pashtun Taliban-supporting Mullahs had declared Omar the Amir. "No Afghan had adopted the title since 1834, when King [Dost Mohammed Khan](#) assumed the title before he declared jihad against the [Sikh](#) kingdom in [Peshawar](#). But Dost Mohammed was fighting foreigners, while Omar had declared jihad against other Afghans."^[122]

Another criticism was that the Taliban called their 20% tax on truckloads of opium "[zakat](#)", which is traditionally limited to 2.5% of the [zakat](#)-payers' disposable income (or wealth).

Islam and animals

There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings, but they are communities like you...

Qur'an 6:38

Muslims believe that:

- all living creatures were made by Allah
- Allah loves all animals
- animals exist for the benefit of human beings
- [animals must be treated with kindness and compassion](#)

Muslims are instructed to avoid:

- treating animals cruelly
- over-working or over-loading animals
- neglecting animals
- hunting animals for sport
- hunting for food is permitted if the animals are killed humanely
- cutting the mane or tail of a horse
- animal fighting as a sport
- factory farming

Using animals is permitted

The Qur'an explicitly states that animals can be used for human benefit.

It is God who provided for you all manner of livestock, that you may ride on some of them and from some you may derive your food. And other uses in them for you to satisfy your heart's desires. It is on them, as on ships, that you make your journeys.

Qur'an 40:79-80

Muhammad and animals

There are many stories and sayings of the [Prophet](#) that demonstrate his concern for the welfare of animals.

Once someone travelling with the Prophet took some eggs from a nest, causing the mother bird great grief. The Prophet saw this and told the man to return the eggs. When the Prophet was asked if Allah rewarded acts of charity to animals, he replied: "Yes, there is a reward for acts of charity to every beast alive."

The Prophet said "Whoever kills a sparrow or anything bigger than that without a just cause, Allah will hold him accountable on the Day of Judgment." The Prophet explained that a killing would be for a just cause if it was for food.

Ritual slaughter

Muslims are only allowed to eat meat that has been killed according to Sharia law. This method of killing is often attacked by animal rights activists as barbaric blood-thirsty ritual slaughter. Muslims disagree. They say that Islamic law on killing animals is designed to reduce the pain and distress that the animal suffers.

Islamic slaughter rules

These are the rules for Islamic slaughter:

- the slaughterer must be a sane adult Muslim
- the slaughterer must say the name of God before making the cut
- The name of God is said to emphasise the sanctity of life and that the animal is being killed for food with God's consent
- the animal must be killed by cutting the throat with the single continuous back and forth motion of a sharp knife
- the cut must sever at least three of the trachea, oesophagus, and the two blood vessels on either side of the throat
- the spinal cord must not be cut
- animals must be well treated before being killed
- animals must not see other animals being killed
- the knife must not be sharpened in the animal's presence
- the knife blade must be free of blemishes that might tear the wound
- the animal must not be in an uncomfortable position
- the animal must be allowed to bleed out

Is this a cruel way to kill an animal?

Some experts say that the animal killed in this way does not suffer if the cut is made quickly and cleanly enough, because it loses consciousness before the brain can perceive any pain. Other experts disagree and say that the animal remains conscious long enough to feel severe pain.

Pre-stunning to prevent pain

Secular animal slaughter involves pre-stunning animals so that they are unconscious before they are killed. Until recently Muslim law has not permitted pre-stunning. Muslims feared that pre-stunning might reduce the amount of blood that could drain from the carcass and also because they thought that the animal was sometimes killed by the stunning.

But recently (2004) Masood Khawaja, president of the Halal Food Authority, stated that it was not against halal practice to "immobilise" animals, provided they were not actually killed before their throats are cut.

Halal meat imported to the UK from New Zealand is stunned before slaughter. Masood Khawaja said that this was acceptable to Muslims, provided the religious rites were observed.

It is acceptable as long as the animal is not dead prior to slaughter, all flowing blood has been drained, and a Muslim has done the ritual slaughter.

Masood Khawaja (President, Halal Food Authority), 2004

Experiments on animals

According to Al Hafiz B A Masri, using animals for research may be permitted in Islam. The animals must not suffer pain or mutilation and there must be a good reason for the experiment:

Actions shall be judged according to intention. Any kind of medical treatment of animals and experiments on them becomes ethical and legal or unethical and illegal according to the intention of the person who does it.

Masri, B.A., Al-Hafiz. Animals in Islam. Great Britain: Athene Trust. 1989