

Islamic Beliefs

Revision Guide



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Islamic Ideas of God

The Shahadah states 'There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah'. Belief in one god is therefore essential to the Islamic faith.

Key Words

tawhid - The belief that there is one God (Allah).

shirk - The sin of denying Tawhid.

Muslims believe in **one** god, whom they call **Allah**. He is believed to be the same god worshipped by Jews and Christians. Muslims believe Allah is all-powerful and all-knowing. He is the **creator** of all things and will **judge** us all at the end of the world.

Tawhid is a crucial belief in Islam. This is the idea that there is one unique god. Unlike the Ancient Greeks, they do not believe in multiple gods, nor do they believe God could have a son as Christians do. This means Islam is **monotheistic** religion.

Muslims believe that Allah is so great he is beyond our comprehension. However, this does not mean we have no knowledge of Him. Muslims believe God has sent many **prophets** to mankind. The final prophet, Muhammad, is believed to have received the Qur'an from Allah. Muslims believe the **Qur'an** contains the exact word of God. It therefore acts as a guide for how Muslims should live their lives.

Allah in Scripture

'He is Allah, the One and only! Allah, the eternal absolute! He is the father of none, and none is his father. And there is none like unto him.' (Qur'an 112)

'This is Allah, Your Lord! There is no god but he, the creator of all things. Worship him, he has the power over all things. No vision can grasp him, but his grasp is over all things; he is above all understanding, yet he is aware of all things.' (Qur'an 6: 102-3)

Exam Practice!

Explain two Islamic beliefs about the nature of God.

In your answer, you must refer to scripture.

(5 marks)

Notes

Shi'a Islam Continued

There are several differences between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims.

Key Words

Akhirah - The name given to the afterlife in Islam.

Jannah - The Arabic word for heaven. In the Qur'an, heaven is described as a garden.

Jahannam - The Arabic word for hell. Muslims believe hell to be a place of fire.

Some practices unique to Shi'a Islam include:

- **Ashura** – Shi'a Muslims mark this festival differently to their Sunni counterparts. They commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn in a number of ways, such as fasting, wearing black and flagellating (hitting themselves).
- **Visiting shrines** – Muslims may visit shrines to important figures, such as Ali or Husayn.
- **Prayer** – Shi'a Muslims are required to pray five times a day. However, they often pray at three times. They say one prayer in the morning; two prayers, one after the other, in the afternoon; and two prayers, one after the other, in the evening.
- **Jummah prayers** – Shi'a Muslims are not required to pray communally on a Friday afternoon. This is because the Twelfth Imam, who should lead these prayers, is in hiding.

Despite these differences, Shi'a and Sunni Muslims still have much in common. They both believe in Tawhid, see the Qur'an as Allah's final revelation and believe in the afterlife.

Exam Practice!

Explain two features of the Ashura festival in Shi'a Islam.

(4 marks)

'There is little difference between the Islamic denominations'

Evaluate this statement.

In your answer, you should:

- refer to Islamic teaching;
- give developed arguments to support this statement;
- give developed arguments to support a different point of view;
- reach a justified conclusion.

Risalah

When people think about Islam, they inevitably think of Prophet Muhammad. However, Muhammad is not the only prophet Muslims recognise.

Key Words

risalah - The Arabic word for 'prophethood'.

Muslims believe that **Allah** has always sent **prophets** to humanity. There are 25 prophets named in the Qur'an, though Muslims believe there have been many more. Many of the Islamic prophets are also key figures in Christianity and Judaism. Muslims believe that all prophets taught the same message.

Prophet Muhammad is often referred to as the '**seal of the prophets**'. This means he is the final prophet. His role was to deliver the direct words of God to humanity. Muslims believe these words are now found in their holy book, the **Qur'an**. Muslims believe that Allah will make no further revelations between now and the Day of Judgment.

Some of the Islamic Prophets are:

- **Adam** – The first human being, Adam is regarded as a prophet because God taught him about the world and religion.
- **Ibrahim** (Abraham) – Muslims believe Prophet Ibrahim built the Ka'ba in Makkah. He is famous for his dedication to Allah, which Muslims celebrate during the festival of Id-ul-Adha.
- **Musa** (Moses) – When Muhammad visited heaven during the Night Journey, it was Moses who suggested to him that Muslims should **pray five times a day**.
- **Isa** (Jesus) – Muslims regard Isa as an important prophet. Unlike Christians, however, they do not believe he claimed to be the Son of God.

Exam Practice!

Explain two Islamic beliefs about the prophethood.

In your answer, you must refer to scripture.

(5 marks)

Islamic Holy Books: History

Muslims believe that many of the prophets brought holy books from God. However, only the **Qur'an** survives to this day.

Key Words

holy book - A sacred book of a religion.

Qur'an - The holy book of Islam. Muslims believe this is the direct word of Allah.

As we have seen, Muslims believe there have been many prophets. Many of these **prophets** are thought to have had **holy books** revealed to them by God. Some of these holy books are:

- **Suhuf** – This was the holy book sent to Prophet Ibrahim. It is mentioned in the Qur'an, but little is known about it.
- **Taurat** – This is known as the Torah in Judaism and also makes up the first part of the Bible. This is the book Muslims believe was revealed to Prophet Musa.
- **Zabur** – This is the holy book revealed to the Prophet Dawud.
- **Injil** – This is the holy book sent by God to Prophet Isa (Jesus). This should not be confused with the Gospels, which tell the story of Jesus' life.

Muslims believe that there are problems with each of these holy books which prevent them being a reliable account of the **word of God**. The Injil, for example, is believed to have been lost. Parts of the Taurat, meanwhile, contradict the Qur'an. Therefore, Muslims believe the original words Allah gave to Musa must have been altered (either deliberately or by accident).

Owing to these problems, humans needed a **final revelation** so that they could fully understand the message of Allah. This was given to Prophet Muhammad in the form of the Qur'an. Muslims believe that, unlike the previous revelations, the words of the **Qur'an** have been perfectly preserved. This means it is the direct and exact word of God.

Exam Practice!

Explain two beliefs about holy books in Islam.

(4 marks)

Shi'a Islam

The large majority of Muslims are Sunnis. The next largest Islamic denomination is Shi'a Islam.

Key Words

imam - Holy leaders who have authority from God.

caliph - Political leaders appointed by the Islamic community.

The split between Sunni and Shi'a Islam occurred shortly after the death of Prophet Muhammad. Shi'a Muslims believed that **Ali**, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, should have been chosen to be **caliph**. However, **Abu Bakr** was chosen to rule the Islamic community. Ali did eventually become caliph some years later.

Shi'a Muslims believe that the leader of the Islamic community, whom they refer to as the Imam, should be a man from Muhammad's bloodline. To Shi'ites, Ali was the first **Imam** and once he died this title passed to his descendants.

Shi'a Muslims believe the Imams have **special qualities** that make them the best person to lead the Muslim community. Some of these are:

- They are **infallible**. This means they cannot sin or commit any errors.
- They are incredibly **knowledgeable** and so are the best people to offer Muslims spiritual guidance.
- They are best placed to **interpret the Qur'an**.

Shi'a Muslims believe that there have been 12 Imams. Besides Ali, none of these Imams has ruled the Islamic community and many of them have been assassinated or murdered by their enemies.

Shi'a Muslims believe the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, is currently in hiding (**occultation**). They believe he will return at the end of the world to lead the Muslims against the armies of the devil. The twelfth Imam is often known as the '**Hidden Imam**'.

Islamic Views of the Afterlife

Belief in the afterlife is a one of the fundamental beliefs of Islam.

Key Words

Akhirah - The name given to the afterlife in Islam.

Jannah - The Arabic word for heaven. In the Qur'an, heaven is described as a garden.

Jahannam - The Arabic word for hell. Muslims believe hell to be a place of fire.

Muslims believe that at the end of the world there will be a **Day of Judgement**. On this day, Allah will **judge** all people equally. Those who have lived good lives will be sent to **Jannah**, whilst those who have lived poorly will be punished in **Jahannam**.

Muslims believe they that dead people remain in the grave until the end of the world. During this time, two angels called Munkar and Nakir question their souls about the religion they have followed. Muslims believe the dead will be **resurrected** for judgement by God.

The Afterlife in Scripture

'And be conscious of the Day on which you shall be brought back unto God, whereupon every human being shall be repaid in full for what he has earned, and none shall be wronged.'
(Qur'an 2: 281)

'Lo! the righteous verily will be in delight. And lo! the wicked verily will be in hell; They will burn therein on the Day of Judgement.'
(Qur'an 82: 13-15)

Exam Practice!

Explain two Islamic beliefs about life after death.

In your answer, you must refer to scripture.

(5 marks)

Islamic Holy Books: The Qur'an

There are two important stages in the history of the Qur'an – its revelation and compilation.

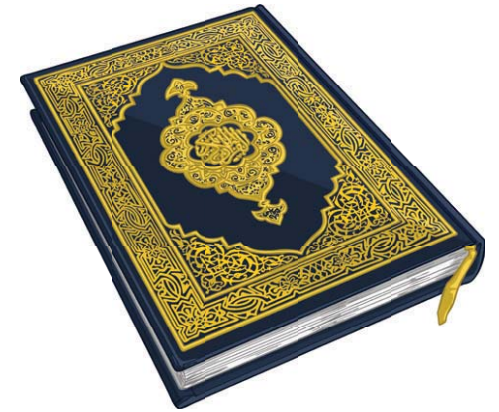
Key Words

revelation - When a human being receives knowledge from a divine source.

compilation -The way the Qur'an was made into a book.

The **revelation** of the Qur'an:

- Parts of the Qur'an were first revealed to **Prophet Muhammad** in 610CE in a cave near **Makkah**. As it is the revealed word of God, Muhammad had no role in writing the Qur'an.
- The revelation was brought to Muhammad by the **angel Jibril**. Muhammad could not read and was instead asked to recite (to repeat) the words of Allah.
- Muhammad received the rest of the Qur'an in further revelations over the next 23 years.



The **compilation** of the Qur'an:

- In the years after Muhammad's death, the Qur'an was mainly preserved orally by people who had **memorised** it in its entirety.
- It was eventually compiled as a book on the orders of **Caliph Uthman**. All further copies were made from this version. Muslims believed this prevented the Qur'an being lost or altered in the way previous scriptures had been.

This importance of the Qur'an:

- As it is the words of Allah, the Qur'an is the most important thing a Muslim can own.
- It provides them with a **guide** for how to live their lives.
- Muslims treat the Qur'an with respect. This includes keeping it in a high place and wrapping it in silk when it is not in use.

Revelation in Scripture

'Recite in the name of your Lord.'
(Qur'an 96: 1)

This shows that the Prophet is simply repeating the words of Allah.

Exam Practice!

Explain two beliefs about holy books in Islam.

(4 marks)

Angels

Belief in the existence of angels is crucial to the Islamic faith.

In the Islamic world view, angels act as Allah's agents on Earth and carry out key duties on his behalf. Angels are very different to human beings; their bodies are not physical but are **made out of light**. They also do not have **free will**.

One of the most famous angels in Islam is **Jibril**. He acts as God's messenger to human beings and delivered the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad.

Other named angels include:

- **Israfil** – who will sound the trumpet that signals the beginning of the resurrection of the dead.
- **Mika'il** – who is charged with protecting holy places.
- **Izra'il** – whose role is to separate the souls of the dying from their bodies.
- **Munkar and Nakir** – who visit the dead in the grave and ask them questions before their final judgement by Allah.

One of the most important roles of angels is to record our good and bad deeds in a book. This is then used by Allah to judge them on the Day of Judgement.

Angels in Scripture

'[Jibril] brings down the (revelation) to thy heart by Allah's will, a confirmation of what went before, and guidance and glad tidings for those who believe.' (Qur'an 2: 97)

'The Angel of Death... will take your souls: then shall ye be brought back to your Lord.' (Qur'an 32: 11)

Exam Practice!

Explain two Islamic beliefs about angels.

In your answer, you must refer to scripture.

(5 marks)

Predestination

The belief that God has predetermined what will occur in a key Islamic belief.

Key Words

free will - The idea that human beings are free to make their own choices.

predestination - The idea that God has decided every event that occurs in advance.

As we have seen, Muslims believe that God is omniscient. This means he is aware of everything that has happened and will happen in the future. Owing to this, Muslims believe that our lives are predestined or predetermined. Allah knows in advance what will happen to us and what choices we will make. Further, he knows what will happen to us in the afterlife.

The idea of predestination appears to create a problem: how can I be punished in the afterlife for my bad actions if these actions were predetermined by God?

Most Muslims reply by arguing that, though God knows how we will act, this does not mean we do not have free will. Though God has power over all things, he has loaned us the power of choice over our own action. Humans therefore chose their actions freely. Though God knows what we will do, the fact we choose our actions means we are responsible for them. This means we deserve what happens to us on the Day of Judgement

Predestination in Scripture

'No misfortune can happen... that was not set down in writing before We brought you into being – that is easy for God.' (Qur'an 57: 22)

'[Allah] is above all understanding, yet he is aware of all things.' (Qur'an 6: 103)

Exam Practice!

'Human beings do not have free will.'

Evaluate this statement.

In your answer, you should:

- refer to Islamic teaching;
- give developed arguments to support this statement;
- give developed arguments to support a different point of view;