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10 Frequently asked questions about Islam

1. What are the major beliefs of Muslims?

The six major beliefs in Islam, as understood by the majority of Sunni Muslims, are:

- belief in God;
- belief in angels;
- belief in God's prophets/messengers;
- belief in God's revelations in the form of holy scriptures sent to the messengers;
 - belief in an afterlife that follows the Day of Judgment on which people will be held accountable for their actions and compensated accordingly in the afterlife; and
 - belief in God's divine will and His knowledge of what happens in the world.

2. Were there female prophets?

Some Muslim scholars hold the view that there were female prophets. Two of the women regarded by these scholars as prophets are Asiyah, the wife of Pharaoh, and Mary the mother of Jesus, because they both received revelation from God. Whether one takes the position that they were prophets who brought a specific message to their people or not, Muslims revere them as two amongst the many righteous and saintly women mentioned in the Qur'an.

3. Why do Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet?

The majority of Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet on the grounds that the Qur'an and hadith state so.

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4. What do Muslims believe about Jesus?

Muslims overwhelmingly revere Jesus and believe that he was born to the Virgin Mary through an act of God, just as Adam is believed to have been created by God without a father or mother. The Qur'an describes his conception and birth, as well as his many miracles such as healings of the sick. The Qur'an also emphasizes that Jesus was a great prophet of God, as well as a messenger who received revelation from God, but that he was, like all other prophets, only a human being.

5. What is the Ka'bah?

The Ka'bah is the cube-shaped building covered with a black cloth in Mecca that is believed by Muslims to have been the first house of worship to God. Muslims throughout the world face towards the Ka'bah when they perform each of their daily prayers.

6. How will God determine who goes to heaven and hell?

We believe that only God knows where a person will end up in the afterlife, since only God knows a person's intentions, deeds, circumstances, and limitations. We also believe that God will judge human beings according to His complete justice on the Day of Judgment based on both their beliefs and actions, taking into account the opportunities and abilities that He gave them. In the Qur'an, God's ninety-nine names include "the Judge" and "the Just."

7. What is the main difference between Sunnis and Shi'as?

The majority of both Sunnis and Shi'as share the core beliefs of Islam—the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad—and adhere to the Five Pillars.

The main differences between them today are their sources of knowledge and religious leadership. In addition to the Qur'an and hadith, the Shias and the many sects that comprise them rely on the rulings of their Imams and resulting variations in beliefs and practices.

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Historically, the difference originated from the question of succession after the death of the Prophet Muhammad and is related to differing views about appropriate leadership for the Muslim community. Shi'as believe that succession to the spiritual and political rule of the Muslim community lies only with the family and certain descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Sunnis believe that the Muslim community was free to choose the most qualified person as ruler. Shi'as believe that God chose Muhammad's cousin Ali, who was married to his daughter Fatima, to be the Prophet Muhammad's successor, and that Muhammad formally announced this before his death. Shi'as also view Ali as the first in a line of Imams, or preeminent religious leaders, whom they regard as the spiritual and political successors to Muhammad. In contrast, Sunnis believe that Muhammad did not appoint any particular person as his spiritual or political successor.

8. What is hijab?

The Arabic word *hijab* literally means "curtain." When used to refer to dress, it either implies modest dress that includes a head scarf or refers only to a head scarf.

"Hijab" is often incorrectly used interchangeably with the terms *burqa* and *niqab*. "Hijab" is generally used to refer to a headscarf, "burqa" to a covering of the entire body including the face, while "niqab" refers to a face covering that conceals most of the face but exposes the eyes. Some Muslim women wear hijab while others do not and expressions of hijab vary greatly by culture, individual taste, and conviction.

9. Are men and women equal in Islam?

Many Muslims, in America and elsewhere, advocate and demand complete equality between men and women. Women hold and have held many positions of authority and leadership in the American Muslim community. In Muslim-majority countries women today work as physicians, businesswomen, engineers, and lawyers and have served as heads of state.

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In other Muslim communities, depending on social, historical, and cultural conditions, the position of women is very different and is not equal either in theory or practice.

10. What is the Islamic view of terrorism?

Along with the vast majority of Muslims, we unequivocally condemn terrorism. Terrorism, defined as the use of violence and threats to intimidate, coerce, or exact retribution, especially for political purposes, flagrantly violates at least three interrelated Islamic principles: respect for life, right to due process, and individual responsibility. The principle of respect for life prohibits the targeting of innocent civilians even during a state of war.