Islam for Dummies Cheat Sheet

By Malcolm Clark

Gaining an Overview of Islamic Origins

In about 610 A.D., the angel Gabriel appeared to a man named Muhammad in the city of Mecca in present day Saudi Arabia. Gabriel told Muhammad that God had commissioned Muhammad as His last prophet. The revelations Muhammad received until his death in 632 constitute the Qur’an, Islam’s holy book. Muhammad believed that he was restoring and completing the original religion of humanity, and that he stood in the line of the Biblical prophets who had also been sent by God to call people to submit to God.

Muhammad’s contemporaries in Mecca worshipped many gods and rejected Muhammad’s call to worship only one God. In 622, Muhammad and his small band of believers emigrated from Mecca north to the town of Yathrib, which the Muslims renamed Medina. That year would eventually be set as the first year of the Muslim calendar. At Medina, Muhammad established the first Muslim community.

In 630, Muhammad led the army of the growing Muslim community against Mecca, which submitted peacefully. By the time of Muhammad’s death, two years later, most of Arabia had accepted Islam and become part of the Islamic community. Muhammad was succeeded by a series of rulers (caliphs) under whom Islam burst forth as a new power on the world scene. In less than 100 years, Muslim armies had incorporated most of the lands from the western border regions of northwest India in the East to Spain in the West into a single, great empire usually called a caliphate.

Gradually, the original unity of Islam was lost, never to be regained. The caliphate fell before the Mongol onslaught in 1258. Islam continued to spread in the following centuries, but new Muslim kingdoms rose and fell. By the end of the seventeenth century, the military power of Islam ebbed away and by the end of the nineteenth and on into the first part of the twentieth century, most Muslim countries came under direct or indirect control of European nations. In the second half of the twentieth century, Muslim nations gained their independence. Despite political and economic decline, the number of Muslims in the world increased rapidly in the twentieth century, and Islam became for the first time a truly global religion.

Important Prophets & Figures: Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus

Summarizing Islamic Beliefs

Muslims share many of the same basic beliefs as Christians and Jews, while differing fundamentally from Eastern religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism:

- God created the world and all that is in it.
- God established in His revealed word the principles by which to live, including concern for the poor.
- One should not worship other gods, or money, or power, or oneself.
- At the end of time, God will judge all people.
- If a person had fulfilled the divine command, he or she will go to heaven.

God calls upon all people to submit to His will, as embodied in His revealed law. In fact, the word islam means submission; Islam comes from the same root as the word for peace. Islam is often thought of as the religion of submission to God. Islam is the name of the religion. A Muslim is the name of a member of the Islamic religion. The word “Muslim” means “one who submits to God.” A Muslim isn’t a Mohammedan, and Muslims don’t belong to a Mohammedan religion, because Muhammad is only a man. Muslims worship God and not Muhammad.

Basic Islamic practice is summed up in the Five Pillars of Worship. Muslims must confess that only God is God and that Muhammad is His messenger. They stop whatever they’re doing five times a day to
pray to God. Once a year, in the month of Ramadan, they fast from dawn to dusk. Each year, they give a defined portion of their wealth to serve God’s purposes. And once in a lifetime, each Muslim who is able must make the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The city of Jerusalem is also important because it is believed to be the location in which Muhammad ascended to heaven.

**Important Rituals:** Praying 5 times a day.  
**Holy Book:** Quran/Koran (including the Old and New Testaments).  
**Place of Worship:** Mosque

**Branching out from the Islamic base**

Islam has two main branches or divisions: the Sunnis and the Shi´ites.  
- Sunnis constitute from 84 to 90 percent of the world’s Muslims. The term “Sunni” refers to the traditions followed by Muhammad and the early Muslims.  
- After Muhammad’s death, some Muslims believed that his nephew and son-in-law, ´Ali, should have succeeded him (as opposed to the first three caliphs who came after Muhammad). The term Shi´a refers to the party of ´Ali, those who believed that religious and political leadership of the Muslim community should always remain in the line of ´Ali and his wife Fatima. Because of disputes that arose about the line of succession, Shi´ites divided into a number of different groups, such as Ithna´-Ashari (or Twelvers), Isma´ilis, and Zaydis.

Sufis are another large group of Muslims. Sufism is Islamic mysticism, rather than a sect, like Sunnis or Shi´ites. So, a Sufi is normally also a Sunni (or more rarely, a Shi´ite) Muslim.

http://www.dummies.com/religion/islam/gaining-an-overview-of-islamic_origins/
Judaism For Dummies Cheat Sheet

By Rabbi Ted Falcon, David Blatner

Followers of Judaism are called Jews.

Jewish Vocabulary: Helpful Words and Phrases

Learning and using these common Jewish words and phrases will help you through situations like meals and toasts, wishing people well, greetings, and casual conversation.

- **Chutzpah.** Brazen arrogance, guts, presumption, or gall. Usually a positive trait.
- **Kippah.** That little hat that Jewish men (and sometimes women) wear on their heads. Also called a yarmulke.
- **Kosher.** Correct, proper, or okay. Usually refers to food that conforms to the kashrut laws. Opposite is trayf.
- **L’chayim.** Literally “To life!” Said like “Cheers!” when drinking a toast.
- **Mazel Tov.** Good luck! Usually said at the end of a wedding or when responding to good news.
- **Shalom.** Hello, goodbye, or peace.

*Judaism tends to focus more on the way in which you practice and live in the world than it does on analyzing the nature of God.*

*While the idea of a complete surrender to faith, a surrender to God, is harmonious with many Christian and Muslim faiths, it’s much less comfortable for most Jews, who are traditionally taught to question in order to learn more deeply. Judaism tends to encourage individuals to explore their own personal relationship with God.*

*The one thing Jews won’t argue about, period, is that God is ultimately unknowable and, therefore, un-namable. Most traditional Jews won’t write out the word “God,” so many Jewish books and periodicals print it “G-d.”

3 Divisions of Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed.

The essence of the faith

Historically and in the present, the heart of the faith is carried and communicated through the way, the path, and the teachings of Torah.

The word Torah refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.

_The Ten Commandments, as written in the Torah, are:_

• **Worship no other God but me.**
• **Do not make images to worship.**
• **Do not misuse the name of God.**
• **Observe the Sabbath Day (Saturday). Keep it Holy.**
• **Honor and respect your father and mother.**
• **Do not murder.**

• **Do not commit adultery.**
• **Do not steal.**
• **Do not accuse anyone falsely. Do not tell lies about other people.**
• **Do not envy other's possession**

The Torah is read with a pointer called a yad (hand) to keep it from being spoiled. Each week, one section is read until the entire Torah is completed and the reading begins again.

Jewish Symbols

The six-pointed Star of David is an important Jewish symbol said to be from the shield of King David, the Israelite king who established Jerusalem as the capital city of the Israelites. It is also used as the universal symbol representing Judaism.

This is a nine-branched candlestick is a special kind of menorah used during Hanukkah, the festival of lights.

The Tallit or prayer shawl is used in worship. The fringe on the shawl reminds Jewish people to obey God's law.

The Torah scrolls contain the Jewish bible. The Torah is the Holy Book for Jews, it includes the Old Testament.
This plate contains the ritual foods that are part of the seder meal, an important ceremony on the first night of Passover celebrating the escape of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The egg symbolizes a new beginning. The roasted lamb bone is a reminder that God told the Israelites to put blood on their doorpost so that the angel of death would "pass over" their home. The horseradish which tastes bitter is a reminder of the Jewish people's time in slavery. The salts water symbolizes tears.

Many Jewish men wear a skull cap or kippah when praying. Some wear it all the time. It is a sign of being in the presence of God.

**Judaism: Festivals and Celebrations**

Jewish festivals and celebrations center around important events in the history of the Jews.

• **Rosh Hashanah** is the Jewish New Year festival which usually takes place in September or October.

• **Yom Kippur** is the Day of Atonement during which Jewish people fast, pray, and atone for their sins, asking God for forgiveness. This happens ten days after Rosh Hashanah.

• **Passover** or **Pesach** is in the Spring and marks the liberation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt, the giving of the ten commandments and the journey to Israel.

• **Hanukkah** is the festival of lights. It is held in late November or December. When the temple was rededicated after a period of persecution, the eternal light was rekindled but there was only enough oil for a few days. Miraculously, the oil lasted for eight days, until more oil could be found.

Bar mitzvah and Bat mitzvah ceremonies mark a child's thirteenth birthday (in some traditions, a girl's twelfth birthday).

**Sacred Spaces and Places**

Israel itself is a very sacred place to Jewish people. Jews who do not live there try to visit at some point in their lives. In particular, Jerusalem is important because it is the ancient capital of Israel and the site of the original temple. Jerusalem is also important because it the site believed that the Messiah will come to. The Western Wall of the ancient temple remains. This is where the tablets that Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments were stored in a golden box called the Ark of the Covenant. Jewish people make pilgrimages to this wall. It is also called the Wailing Wall because people grieve the destruction of the temple and other persecution of the Jews.

Synagogue services are led by a rabbi - the title of their spiritual leader - and usually a cantor, who sings traditional and contemporary melodies. There are prayers, songs, chants and readings, as well as a sermon or discussion by the rabbi or members of the community. Some Jewish people go to the synagogue daily, some weekly on Shabbat, and some periodically on Shabbat and on special holy days.

Some rituals, like the blessing said at the Shabbat meal and the observance of Passover, take place in Jewish homes.

*This web site attempts to introduce young people to the wonder and diversity of the world's religions and spiritual traditions. We have tried to present simple, straight forward, accurate information about the world's five major religions and many other smaller religions and spiritual traditions. We recognize the complexity and challenges of this task. Please feel free to email us at communications@uri.org with your suggestions.*

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Christianity For Dummies Cheat Sheet

By Richard Wagner, Kurt Warner

Followers of Christianity are called Christians.
Christians agree on these ideas of salvation:

- God loves and wants a relationship with each person.
- Everyone is born with a tendency to sin. And this sin, whether it’s large or small, separates people from God.
- God came to earth in human form (as Jesus Christ) and paid the costly penalty for sin by dying on the cross for all people. He rose from the dead three days later, triumphing over death.
- God offers forgiveness to everyone.
- Anyone who accepts this gift of forgiveness and believes in Jesus Christ receives salvation.

Important Prophets and Figures: Abraham, Moses, and Jesus

Sacred Spaces and Places
Christians worship in churches. It is customary to worship on Sunday, the Sabbath, and on other special festivals and celebrations. Some people, especially monks and nuns, attend church daily. In addition, most Christians pray or worship at home through individual or family devotions.
Church services are most often led by an ordained priest or minister.
The center of this service is the sharing of bread and wine, representing Christ's body and blood, which he sacrificed for God's people on earth. The model for the Holy Eucharist is the Last Supper, Jesus' last meal with his disciples. At this meal, Jesus instructed his disciples to share bread and wine together as a way of remembering him.
Churches tend to be built in the shape of a cross. Common features include:

- Bell tower
- Nave or seating area
- Altar where the gospel book and the bread and wine for the Eucharist are placed
- Pulpit for sermons
- Lectern holding a Bible for the readings
- Choir loft or seating for the choir
- Stained glass windows
- Candles, incense burners
- A precious cross over or on the altar
- Baptismal font for baptisms (holds the water)

Jerusalem: Important because it is the location in which Jesus died and was resurrected.

3 Divisions of Christianity: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant.

Christians believe that Jesus died for humanity, that God raised him from the dead, and that Jesus will come again at the end of time. In addition, Christians believe in the Trinity, or the three parts of God: God the Father or Creator, God the Son (Jesus) or Redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit or Sanctifier. The Holy Spirit is God's presence in the world.
The essence of Jesus' teaching comes from his summary of the Jewish law he grew up with:

- Love God with all your heart, soul and mind.
- Love your neighbor as yourself.
- Christians also seek to follow the ten commandments God gave Moses to give the Israelites:
  - Worship no other God but me.
  - Do not make images to worship.
  - Do not misuse the name of God.
- Observe the Sabbath Day (Sunday, for Christians). Keep it Holy.
- Honor and respect your father and mother.
- Do not murder.
- Do not commit adultery.
- Do not steal.
- Do not accuse anyone falsely. Do not tell lies about other people.
- Do not envy other's possessions.

What are the sacred texts of Christianity?
The sacred text of Christianity is the Holy Bible. The Christian Bible has two parts: the Old Testament which is essentially the Hebrew scriptures of Jesus' time; and the New Testament which contains writings about Jesus Christ and about the early church.