

## Lecture 16

### Islamic Beliefs and Rituals

#### I) Introduction

- A) Religion as a way of life, not separate special activity
  - 1) Guidelines for every aspect of life, legal system
  - 2) In addition strongly determined by culture in which Muslim lives
  - 3) American Islam will look very different from how Muslims act in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, China, or Indonesia
- B) Islam closer to Judaism than to Christianity—what you do, ritual patterning of life

#### II) Obligations, Beliefs and Rituals

##### A) Five Pillars of Islam—Obligations of all Muslims

- 1) **Shahada**—“witness”—“there is no god but God and Muhammed is his messenger”
  - (a) La ilaha illa Allah. Muhammad rasul Allah.
  - (b) “Allah” is Arabic for “God”—Allah is not an Arabic deity
  - (c) Muslims explain they worship same God as Jews and Christians
  - (d) Core belief in divine unity, he does not beget nor is he begotten
  - (e) Utter it freely once as a believer to become a Muslim (no other ritual)
  - (f) Lapse from other Pillars but not this one
  - (g) We are nothing by ourselves, everything belongs to God
- 2) **Salat**—ritual prayer (enjoined by the Qu’ran but not details)
  - (a) Worship at fixed hours, formalized
  - (b) Five times—early morning, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, evening
  - (c) Purification, proper covering of body,
  - (d) Directed toward Mecca, all face the same central point
  - (e) Anywhere (recommended in mosque) clean and free from distractions
  - (f) Meritorious if performed in group, even if two one as “imam” prayer leader who is out in front

- (i) Women behind men, women only imam for other women
- (g) Involves complete body, ending in prostration
- (h) Friday mid-day prayer includes sermon
  - (i) No “day of rest” but some do make Friday “day off”
- 3) **Zakat**—“tax” considered an act of worship, obligatory
  - (a) Purify wealth to make it holy
  - (b) all Muslims (over 16) percentage (2.5%) of wealth (all possessions, not just income) give to “worthy cause” (Qu’ran: poor, widows, orphans); amount determined by schools of law
  - (c) family, local, global (most intimate first, preference to give directly)
  - (d) note: not to Islamic organizations (no infrastructure religion)
- 4) **Sawam**—fasting during the month of **Ramadan**
  - (a) Ninth lunar month—month Qu’ran first descended
  - (b) No food or drink (sex or smoking) from sun rise to sunset
  - (c) If pregnant or nursing, make up later
  - (d) Spiritual discipline and awareness of God
  - (e) Not somber, joyous especially after dark w/parties
- 5) **Hajj**—pilgrimage to Mecca during “pilgrimage month”
  - (a) Once in lifetime if financially and physically capable
  - (b) Can’t borrow money, must be saved (and purified by zakat)
  - (c) Prepare will before going—solemn leave taking of one phase of a person’s life
    - (i) Acceptance of God’s will whatever that may be
  - (d) Wearing special garb,
    - (i) Men white plain symbolizing purity and oneness
    - (ii) Women—brightly colored clothes from native countries—symbolizing diverse and creative characteristic of Islam as global faith
  - (e) Series of rituals, patterned after what Muhammed did in Qu’ran

- (i) Main: circumambulation of Ka' ba – housing for black stone which is sign of God's covenant with Abraham and Ishmael, Prophet touched it
- (ii) Most cannot touch, extend hand
- (iii) Stand from noon until sundown in meditation and praise in nearby small town of Mina

## B) Doctrines of Islam

- 1) **Oneness of God**—monotheism, divine unity, God is transcendent, far above what can be said about him, importance of metaphorical language, far beyond what his creatures can imagine or comprehend, his acts cannot be gauged by human measures
- 2) **Existence of angels**—messengers and helpers of God, one is evil Iblis (Satan) who was cast out of heaven after he refused God's command to bow down to Adam
  - (a) No sex, made of light
  - (b) Also supernatural jinn (jinni—plural), created of fire
  - (c) Lower life spans, created male and female, feared by humans associated with uncanny aspects of life

### 3) Prophet and Scripture

- (a) Muhammed last in long and noble line of prophets (Qur'an lists 25) who had been entrusted to bring scriptures to their peoples
  - (i) fully human, first married to a older, wealthy widow (Khadija, Khadeeja SLC mosque named after her)
  - (ii) most perfect of all God's creatures
  - (iii) Classical Arabic as sacred language
- (b) **Qur'an** (“the recitation”)
  - (i) Jews and Christians corrupted original message
  - (ii) Verbatim word of God revealed to the Prophet by the archangel Gabriel, heard first and then written down, over 23 year period from when 40 to end of life

- (iii) (also spelled Koran) purest scripture because preserved from tampering
- (iv) Range of subjects from ethics to metaphysics, illuminates the continual battle in human soul between good and evil, knowledge and ignorance
- (v) First sound heard when born and last as die
- (vi) Everything about it is sacred, don't typically touch it unless ritually clean

#### **4) Final Judgment**

- (a) Faithful devotees of God and his true religion not only survive on Last Day but triumph
- (b) Often mentioned in Qur'an—Day of Doom, Day of Resurrection
  - (i) Day darkening, all living and dead (souls with bodies) assembled before God, each human given record book that will be examined, either eternal paradise (right hand) or eternal hell (left hand)
  - (ii) Hell (al-nar): punishing angels who do not allow the damned any respite from their sufferings, burning, drinking boiling water, eating bitter fruit
  - (iii) Heaven: as a garden (al-janna), drink that thrills and satisfies without intoxicating, symbolic of bliss and joy

#### **5) Divine Decree**

- (a) Tension between God's foreordaining (inscrutable, just, and sovereign decree) and humankind's choosing, incomprehension of God's will
- (b) Hadith (sayings of prophet) more towards predestination, God knows what will chose

#### **C) Ritual identity markers**

- 1) food restrictions: no alcohol, pork, halal
  - (a) importance of keeping body pure and healthy
  - (b) suicide prohibited by Islamic law and a great sin

- (c) body is not your own, it is God's
- 2) modesty of women (and men—cf. prison nudity)
  - (a) increasing
- 3) Seasonal rituals:
  - (a) *Id al-fitr*, is celebrated when the end of the month of fasting is over
    - Rites of passage
- 4) Restrictions on images
  - (a) Not in Qu'ran "He who creates pictures in this world will be ordered to breathe life into them on the Day of Judgment, but he will be unable to do so." *Hadith*, Sahih Muslim (818-875)
  - (b) avoiding idolatry, non-figurative character of religious decoration
    - (i) no images in mosques, Qu'ran not illustrated
    - (ii) constrate on abstract forms, especially of Arabic

### III) Elements of diversity shaping rituals/beliefs

A) Geographic—regional developments, isolated so surprising unity

B) History

- 1) **Problem of succession:** Who to rule? Relatives? Best friends? (cf. Joseph Smith)
  - (a) Muhammad dies in 632 with no instructions as to how to govern, no male heir, in-fighting between groups, religion and political order together
  - (b) Shi'is—supporters of cousin Ali, attitude toward governance and response to their history
    - (i) 680 massacre at Karbala tragic element
    - (ii) Ali as important spiritual leader (murdered by poisoned sword), importance of holy people
      1. Imams, leaders during first 700 years –with capital "I"
      2. God teaches and guides people through his Imams
      3. some have Imams that still rule
    - (iii) Iran, parts of Iraq—15% of all Muslims

- (iv) dynasty established in Egypt in 10<sup>th</sup> century (founded city of Cairo in 969) only survived one century
- (c) Sunnis—majority of rulers
  - (i) 85% of all Muslims
- 2) **Schools of Law** (shari'ah)—ordaining of The Way
  - (a) Not theologically based but, like Judaism, legally based
    - (i) 4 legal scholars for Sunnis (8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries)— now geographic variations, interpretations; 3 main for Shi'is (infallible leaders not subject to consensus)
  - (b) Narratives of what the prophet said (hadiths)
- 3) **Mystical response**—Sufis (*suf* wool, from coarse outfits wore)
  - (a) Desire to enliven, renew traditions c. 700
  - (b) Piety to draw closer to God, heighten God-consciousness
  - (c) Production of poetry, dance, theology, arts
  - (d) Cult of the “saints” holy people, miracles, pilgrimages, accused of idolatry
- 4) **Reformers**
  - (a) Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) – Wahhabi movement of Saudi Arabia
  - (b) Strict doctrine of Tawhid (oneness of God)—against Sufis, shrines, destroyed mosques, cemeteries—anything with symbolic markers, down play supernatural characters, hyper-monotheism, required to participate in congregational worship, rejection of rational theology
  - (c) Close associate of Muhammad ibn Sa'aud, partnership with Saudi royalty
    - (i) Shia especially considered idolatrous, sacked and massacred inhabitants of Karbal in 1802
  - (d) Missionary activities with money

#### IV) Conclusion

- A) Long history with developed ritual, legal, and theological systems

- 1) most of which are unknown by Americans
  - 2) Amazing diversity but also unity
- B) closer association with Judaism than with Christianity
- 1) law, religion touching every aspect of life—eating, dressing, marriage laws
  - 2) prophet is human being not God
- C) ideas in Christianity not Judaism
- 1) importance of End of Time and heaven and hell
  - 2) existence of supernatural (and extremely holy) being—angels, jinn, Sufi saints
  - 3) church – state unity
- D) more distinct from Enlightenment rationalism
- 1) existence of God who transcends natural order
  - 2) human beings owe existence and thus subservience to God
  - 3) importance of tradition