

**Title: Conversations**

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Quote:

Quotations:

"The best jihad [struggle] is (by) the one who strives against his own self," by the Prophet Muhammad. 1 More info on "jihad."

"It is a declaration of the truth and light to show the right path. It is the truth and a clear message...it is the embodiment of the fairest statements and Islamic scholar Abdur Rahman I. Doi, referring to the Qur'an 2

"[T]his is nothing but a manifestation of injustice, oppression and tyranny, the greatest of sins." Sheik Abdul-Azeez Aal ash-Sheik, grand mufti of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, head of the Council of Senior Scholars, speaking about the 9-11 terrorist attacks.

Topics discussed in this essay:

Origin of Islam

About Muhammad (pbuh)

About Islam

Important Texts

Beliefs

Origin of Islam:

The name of this religion, Islam, is derived from the word "salam," which means "peace." However "submission" would be a better translation. A Muslim is one who submits to Islam. "Muslim" is an Arabic word that refers to a person who submits to Islam. Many Muslims feel that the phrases "Islamic terrorist" or "Muslim terrorist" observed so often in the media, are oxymorons.

Most religious historians view Islam as having been founded in 622 CE by Muhammad (peace be upon him). \* He lived from about 570 to 632 CE). The religion was revealed to him by the angel Jibreel (Gabriel) read the first revelation to Muhammad (pbuh). (Muhammad (pbuh) are alternate spellings for his name.) Islam is the youngest of the world's major religions, those with over 300 million members -- which include Christianity, Islam,

\* Muslims traditionally acknowledge respect for Muhammad, Jesus and other prophets (peace upon them) by adding this phrase or an abbreviation "(pbuh)" after their names.

However, many if not most of the followers of Islam believe that:

Islam existed before Muhammad (pbuh) was born,  
The origins of Islam date back to the creation of the world, and  
Muhammad (pbuh) was the last of a series of Prophets.

Followers of Islam are called Muslims. "Allah" is an Arabic word which means God. An alternate spelling for "Muslim" that is occasionally used is "Moslim"; because it is often pronounced "mawzlem": which sounds like an Arabic word. Western writers in the past have referred to Islam as "Mohammedism"; though many Muslims, as its usage can lead some to the concept that Muhammad was in some way divine.

About Muhammad (pbuh) :

Many unusual events have been recorded about Muhammad's (pbuh) birth.

His mother said "When he was born, there was a light that issued out of the four corners of the places of Syria."

Also at the time of his birth, "...fourteen galleries of Kisra's palace crashed, the Magians' sacred fire died down and some churches on Lake Sawa sank down."

His foster family had many experiences of amazingly good luck while he was with them.

As a young child, the angel Jibreel visited the boy, ripped his chest open and extracted a blood clot from it, and returned him to normalcy. 4

While still young, he was sent into the desert to be raised by a foster father to practice at the time. He was orphaned at the age of 6 and brought up by his grandfather, who worked as a shepherd. He was taken on a caravan to Syria by his uncle (who died in 12). Later, as a youth, he was employed as a camel driver on the trade routes between Arabia and the Mediterranean. Muhammad (pbuh) later managed caravans on behalf of merchants of different religious beliefs on his travels, and was able to observe and learn about Christianity and the indigenous Pagan religions.

After marriage, he was able to spend more time in meditation. At the age of 25, he was visited in Mecca by the angel Gabriel. He developed the conviction that he was a Prophet and given the task of converting his countrymen from their pagan beliefs to what he regarded as moral decadence, idolatry, hedonism and materialism.

He met considerable opposition to his teachings. In 622 CE he moved north to Medina, increasing persecution. The trek is known as the hegira. Here he was dismissed of his message by the Jews. Through religious discussion, persuasion, military action and negotiation, Muhammad (pbuh) became the most powerful leader in Arabia, and Islam was established throughout the area.

About Islam:

By 750 CE, Islam had expanded to China, India, along the Southern shores of the Mediterranean into Spain. By 1550 they had reached Vienna. Wars resulted, expelling Muslims from Europe. Since their trading routes were mostly over land, they did not attempt to conquer the sea.

(as for example the English and Spaniards). As a result, the old world of the Christians was left to Christians.

Believers are currently concentrated from the West coast of Africa to the East. In particular, they are increasing in numbers, largely at the expense of Christians.

Many do not look upon Islam as a new religion. They feel that it is in reality a continuation of the ancient Prophets, Abraham, David, Moses and Jesus (Peace be upon them). The role as the last of the Prophets was to formalize and clarify the faith and to remove foreign ideas that had been added in error.

Important texts:

There are two main texts consulted by Muslims:

The Qur'an (Recitation) are the words of God. Muslims believe that it was revealed to the archangel Jibril (Gabriel). This was originally in oral and written form. It was put together into a single book, the Qur'an. Its name is often spelled "Koran" which is not recommended, as some Muslims find it offensive.

The Hadith, which are collections of the sayings of Muhammad (pbuh). The Sunnah (lived example) of Muhammad. The Quran gives legitimacy to the Prophet. He does not say aught of his own desire. It is no less than inspiration sent down from God. However, the writings are not regarded as having the same status as the Qur'an. They are considered to be God's word. The great Islamic scholar Yahya bin Sharaf al-Nawawi compiled a collection of 43 sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It is known as "Al-Nawawi's Forty Hadiths" 5

Islamic beliefs:

Islam considers six fundamental beliefs to be the foundation of their faith:

A single, indivisible God. (God, the creator, is just, omnipotent and merciful. Muslims refer to God; it is the Arabic word for God.)

The angels.

The divine scriptures, which include the Torah, the Psalms, the rest of the Bible (which was originally revealed) and the Qur'an (which is composed of God's words, revealed by the angel Gabriel to Muhammad).

The Messengers of God, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad, the last prophet; (peace be upon them). Muhammad's message is considered the final message for all of humanity.

The Day of Judgment when people will be judged on the basis of their deeds. They will either attain reward of Heaven or punishment in Hell. They do not believe that an individual can atone for another person's sin. Hell is where unbelievers are punished. One translation of the Qur'an, 98:1-8, states: "The unbelievers among the nations and the pagans shall burn for ever in the fire of Hell. They are the vilest of all nations." The Book refers to Christians, Jews and Muslims). Paradise is a place of pleasure where the sinless go after death.

The supremacy of God's will.

Other beliefs include: God did not have a son.

Jesus (pbuh) is a prophet, born of the Virgin Mary. They regard the Christ as blasphemous; it is seen as a form of polytheism.

Jesus (pbuh) was not executed on the cross. He escaped crucifixion and went to Paradise.

The existence of Satan who drives people to sin.

Muslims who sincerely repent and submit to God return to a state of sinlessness.

All people are considered children of Adam. Islam officially rejects racism.

All children are born on Al-Fitra (a pure, natural state of submission to God). Sometimes parents sometimes make him Christian, Jewish, etc.

When a child reaches puberty an account of their deeds is opened in Paradise. Their eventual destination (Paradise or Hell) depends on the balance of good deeds (helping others, testifying to the truth of God, leading a virtuous life) and bad deeds (Alcohol, other drugs, eating of pork, etc. should be avoided).

Gambling should be avoided.

#### Practices:

A Muslim's duties as described in the Five Pillars of Islam are:

To recite at least once during their lifetime the shahadah (the creed: "There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is his Prophet"). Most Muslims repeat it at least daily.

To perform the salat (prayer) 5 times a day, if possible. This is recited with the qibla (the shorter of the two great circle routes towards the Kaaba at Mecca). 3 The five prayers are: Fajr (Morning Prayer) which is performed at the break of dawn and just before sunrise.

Zuhr (Noon Prayer) offered from just after midday to afternoon.

'Asr (Afternoon Prayer) offered from late afternoon until just before sunset.

Maghrib (Sunset Prayer) offered between sunset and darkness.

Isha (Night Prayer) offered at night time, often just before sleeping. 1

To donate regularly to charity through zakat. This is a 2.5% charity tax on the wealth of middle and upper class Muslims. Believers are urged to make additional donations if they feel moved.

to fast during the lunar month of Ramadan. This is believed to be the month in which Muhammad received the first revelation of the Qur'an from God.

if economically and physically able, to make at least one hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca.

Jihad (struggle) is probably the most misunderstood religious word in existence. On Western TV and radio during news about the Middle East, where it is often used to mean "holy war" - a call to fight against non-Muslims in the defense of Islam. Muslims have an entirely different definition of Jihad. It is seen as a personal, inner struggle. The goal may be achievement in a profession, self-purification, the conquest of a territory, or the attainment of some other noble goal. 2 More details.

Calendar: Muslims follow a lunar calendar which started with the hegira (migration) when Muhammad (pbuh) relocated from Mecca to Medina. Al-Hijra/Muharrar is the first Year, the beginning of the first lunar month. The beginning of the year 1444 is 2002-MAR-15 of the Gregorian calendar.

Separation of church and state: Originally, in Islamic countries, there was no separation of church and state.

religious and civil law, between Islam and the state. Muhammad and his religious and political leaders. Turkey became a secular state during the controversial move in conservative Islamic circles.

Proselytizing: Muslims are not required to actively recruit others to Islam. Muhammad said that "You certainly cannot guide whomever you please; It is Allah's will. He best knows those who accept guidance." (28:56). Muslims are ex-

followers of other faiths, but it is up to Allah to guide those whom he wishes. Suicide: This is forbidden. The Qur'an clearly states: "Do not kill yourselves. We are very merciful" (4:29). Only Allah is to take a life. Since death must be left to Allah, assisted suicide is not allowed. On the other hand, Muslim physicians are not to artificially prolong the misery [of a person who is] in a vegetative state.

Islamic holy days:

The main holy days are listed below. They are scheduled according to a lunar calendar that happens about eleven days earlier each month.

Al-Hijra/Muharram is the Muslim New Year, the beginning of the first lunar month. 'Ashura recalls an event circa 680-OCT-20 CE in Iraq when an army of the Umayyads martyred a group of 70 individuals who refused to submit to the Caliph. One of them was Husain, the youngest grandson of Prophet Muhammad.

Mawlid al-Nabi is a celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, 570 CE. "The Mawlid al-Nabi was first observed around the thirteenth century as a month of celebration. The actual day of Muhammad's birthday included processions, litanies, honoring of religious dignitaries, gift giving, and a feast. The festival is observed in the Muslim world and is celebrated in many countries today. However, some (including the Wahhabiyah) consider the celebration to be idolatrous."

Ramadan is the holiest period in the Islamic year; it is held during the ninth month of the year. This was the month in which the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet. The events of Ramadan are listed above. It is a time at which almost all Muslims observe to fast from sunrise to sundown.

Id al-Fitr (a.k.a. "Id") is the first day of the 10th month -- i.e. the day after the end of the time of rejoicing. Houses are decorated; Muslims buy gifts for relatives.

Id al-Adha (a.k.a. the Feast of Sacrifice or Day of Sacrifice) occurs during the twelfth Islamic year. This is the season of the Haj (pilgrimage to Mecca). It recalls the story of Abraham intended to follow the instructions of God, and sacrifice his son Ishmael. Muslims believe that Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his elder son Ishmael; Judaism believes Isaac was involved in the near sacrifice).

The dates for the current year are listed elsewhere on this web site.

Beliefs about Jesus (pbuh), within Islam and Christianity:

Traditional Christians and Muslims have certain beliefs in common concerning Jesus. Both accept that:

His birth was miraculous.

He was the Messiah.  
He cured people of illness.  
He restored dead people to life.

However, they differ from Christians in a number of major areas. Muslims

In original sin (that everyone inherits a sinful nature because of Adam and Eve).  
That Jesus (pbuh) was killed during a crucifixion. Muslims believe that he was resurrected and later reappeared to his disciples without having first died.

That Jesus (pbuh) was resurrected (or resurrected himself) circa 30 CE.  
Salvation is dependent either upon belief in the resurrection of Jesus (pbuh) or upon belief that Jesus (pbuh) is the Son of God (as in the Gospel of John).

Schools within Islam:

There are different schools of jurisprudence within Islam. The main divisions are:

**Sunni Muslims:** These are followers of the Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali and Maliki schools. They constitute a 90% majority of the believers, and are considered to be mainstream traditions. They are comfortable pursuing their faith within secular societies, they have been able to adapt to a variety of national cultures, while following their three sources of law: the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the consensus of the Muslim community.

**Shi'ite Muslims:** These are followers of the Ja'fari school who constitute about 10% of the Muslim population. They split from the Sunnis over a dispute about the successor to Muhammad (pbuh). They promote a strict interpretation of the Qur'an and close adherence to its teachings. They believe in twelve heavenly Imams (perfect teachers) who led the Shi'ites in succession. The twelfth Imam, the Mahdi (guided one), never died but went into hiding waiting for the end of the world to reappear and guide humans towards justice and peace.

**Sufism:** This is a mystic tradition in which followers seek inner knowledge through meditation and ritual and dancing. They developed late in the 10th century as a reaction to the formalism and laws of the Qur'an. There are Sufis from both the Sunni and Shi'ite traditions. However, some Sunni followers do not consider Sufism as a valid Islamic tradition. Sufism has borrowed ideas from Neoplatonism, Buddhism, and Christianity. They emphasize personal experience of the divine. In the Middle East, some Sufi traditions are considered to be a part of the mainstream. In North and sub-Saharan Africa, Sufism is more a style and an approach rather than a formal school.

Islam does not have denominational mosques. Members are welcome to all. There is no separate land.

The Egypt Air tragedy:

An Egypt Air airliner crashed off the east coast of New England, with the loss of all on board. The cause of the crash is unknown; some people suggested that the pilot had committed suicide, thus murdering all of the occupants. The co-pilot allegedly died shortly before the plane descended. Shahada means "testimony." It states that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger." This was described by some uninformed people.

Muslim death prayer." It is not. The Shahada is a prayer recited by many affirms the unity of God, and that Muhammad (pbuh) is His Prophet. It is is the Christian Lord's prayer.

There is a very strong prohibition against suicide within Islam. A pilot who commits suicide would realize that he was operating beyond God's mercy, and would not recite the Shahada.

Deviations from Islam:

There are over 70 other groups which originated within Islam and broke away from Shi'ite faith communities. Some are:

Baha'i World Faith: This religion attempts to integrate all of the world's religions. It is a break-away sect from Islam but has since grown to become a separate religion.

Ahmadis: Followers of the Ahmadiyya Movement believe that God sent a new messenger of His in this age who has claimed to have come in the spirit of Jesus. He has come to call all people around one Faith, i.e. Islam..."

The movement's founder was Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908). He was born in India. He felt that he had a mandate from God to correct a serious error in Christianity. Christians believe that Jesus (pbuh) is a member of the Godhead. "...because Jesus was sent as a Messiah to the Israelites was taken for a God, Divine jealousy prevented [Ahmad] should be sent as Messiah so that the world may know that the founder is more than a weak mortal."

After his death, the community elected a series of Khalifas (successors). The 4th Successor (Khalifatul Masih IV), to the Promised Messiah was chosen in 1982. "Tahir Ahmad" on 1982-JUN-10.

The Ahmadiyya Community currently has more than 10 million members worldwide. They call themselves "Muslims of the Ahmadiyya sect." They are very heavily persecuted. They regard themselves as a reform movement within Islam. 3

Black Muslim Movement (BMM): This is largely a black urban movement in the US. Its force was a rejection of Christianity as the religion of the historically oppressed. It started by Wallace Fard who built the first temple in Detroit. Elijah Muhammad established a second temple in Chicago and later supervised the creation of new cities with significant black populations. They taught that blacks were racially superior and that a racial war is inevitable. The charismatic Malcolm X was perhaps the most famous spokesperson; he played an important role in reversing the BMM's anti-white stance. Over the years, the movement deviated significantly from traditional Islamic beliefs (including racial tolerance the status of the BMM leaders as prophets). This deviation led to the BMM's

Criticisms of Islam:

Islam is growing rapidly and is now followed by more than 20% of the world's population. It is not growing; its popularity has been stuck at about 33% of the world's population.

decades. It is in decline in the United States (in terms of "market share") and criticisms are inevitable. Most criticisms are not well grounded in reality:

Islam is often blamed for female genital mutilation. But it is obvious that this is a tradition, not religious belief, in those countries where it is practiced. It is practiced by Animists, Christians, and Muslims.

A number of anti-Islamic books have been written recently, criticizing some aspects of religious tolerance, equality for women, lack of democracy, etc. One of the books is "Why I am Not a Muslim" by Ibn Warraq, an ex-Muslim. Many reviews of controversial books are available on-line from the Amazon.com web site. A book by Jeremiah D. McAuliffe, Jr., titled "Trends and Flaws in Some Antislavery Arguments Exemplified by Ibn Warraq" is at <http://istatet/~balboa19/warraq/warraq1a.html>

Some conservative Christian web sites include attacks on Islam. They base their arguments on the inerrancy of the Bible, and their belief that Christianity is the only valid religion. Llewellyn <http://www.seafox.com/sislymcalm> He makes heavy use of emotional and judgmental terms, such as: false religion, false doctrines, dubious beginnings, accursed, religious bondage, cults, wicked doctrines, etc. It is our belief that such attacks are counter-productive. The main result of these web pages is to demonstrate the ignorance and hatred held by their Webmasters; this does not reflect well on Christianity.

The media has historically disseminated a very negative image of Islam. This is based on the beliefs and practices of the most conservative wing of the religion. Many people are unaware that a moderate wing even exists in Islam. A number of anti-defamation groups are organized to combat these negative portrayals. CAIR, The Council on American-Islamic Relations, is a leader in this field.