

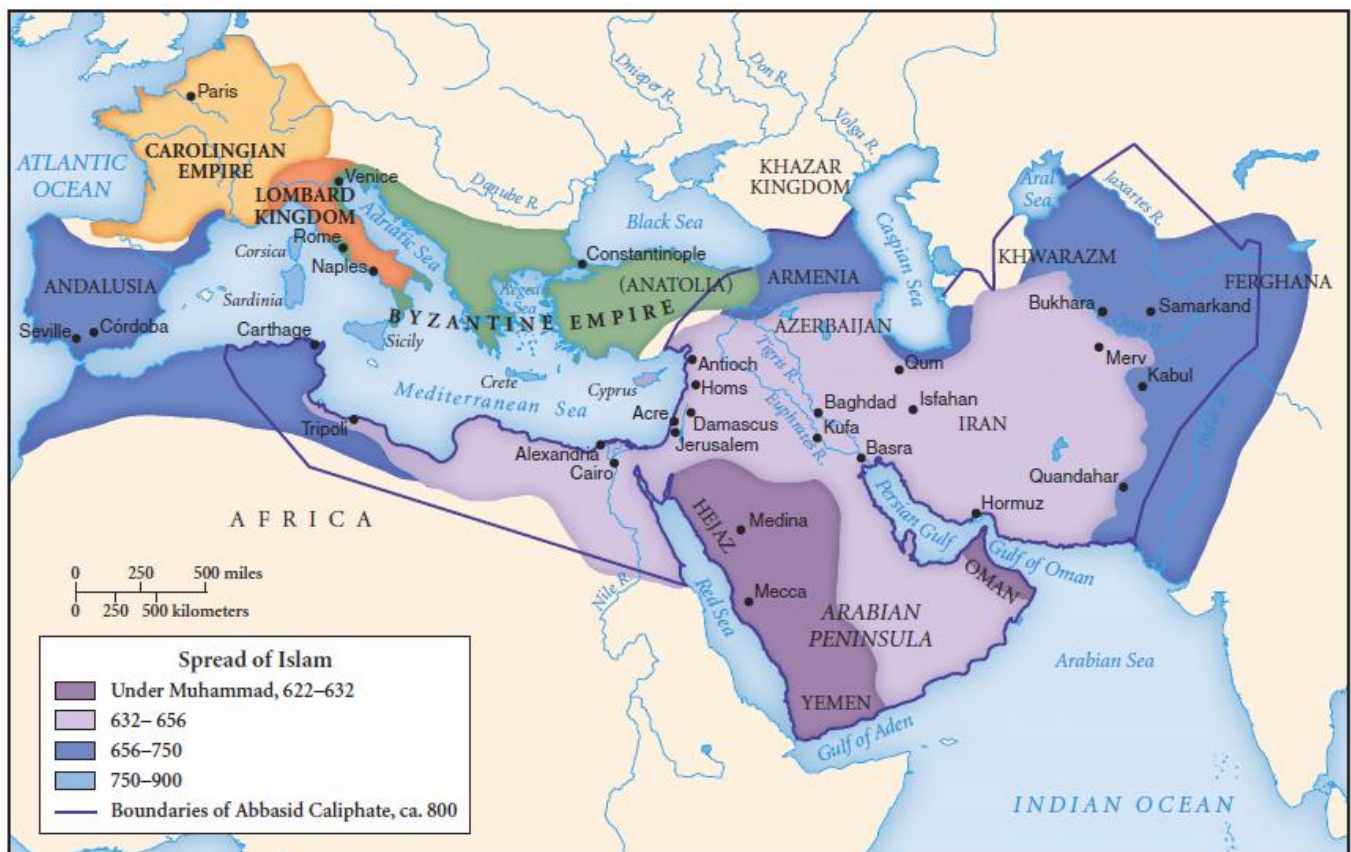
Like every other great religious tradition, Islam found expression in various forms. Its primary text, the Quran, claimed to represent the voice of the divine, God's final revelation to humankind. Other early Islamic writings, known as hadith, recorded the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad as it's early writings were begun by his second wife, Aisha. Still others reflected the growing body of Islamic law, the sharia, which sought to construct a social order aligned with basic religious teachings. Devotional practices and expressions of adoration for Allah represented yet another body of Islamic literature. All of this gave rise to differing interpretations and contending views, generating for Islam a rich and complex literary tradition that has been the source of inspiration and debate for almost 1,400 years. From this immense body of work, we present just a few samples of the voices of Islam.



Arabia at the time of Muhammad

The Voice of Allah

To Muslims, the Quran contains the very words of God. The term Quran itself means "recitation" in Arabic, and the faithful believe that the angel Gabriel spoke God's words to Muhammad, who then recited them. Often called "noble" or "glorious," the Quran, compiled into an established text within thirty years of the Prophet's death, was regarded as a book without equal, written in the most sublime Arabic. Copying it was an act of piety, memorizing it was the starting point for Muslim education, and reciting it was both an art form and a high honor. Organized in 114 Surahs (chapters), the Quran was revealed to Muhammad over a period of some twenty-two years. Often the revelations came in response to particular problems that the young Islamic community and the Prophet were facing. The selections that follow convey something of the Quran's understanding of God, of humankind, of the social life prescribed for believers, of relations with non-Muslims, and much more.



Map The Arab Empire and the Initial Expansion of Islam, 622–900 C.E.

Far more so than with Buddhism or Christianity, the initial spread of Islam was both rapid and extensive. And unlike the other two world religions, Islam gave rise to a huge empire, ruled by Muslim Arabs, which encompassed many of the older civilizations of the region.

The Quran

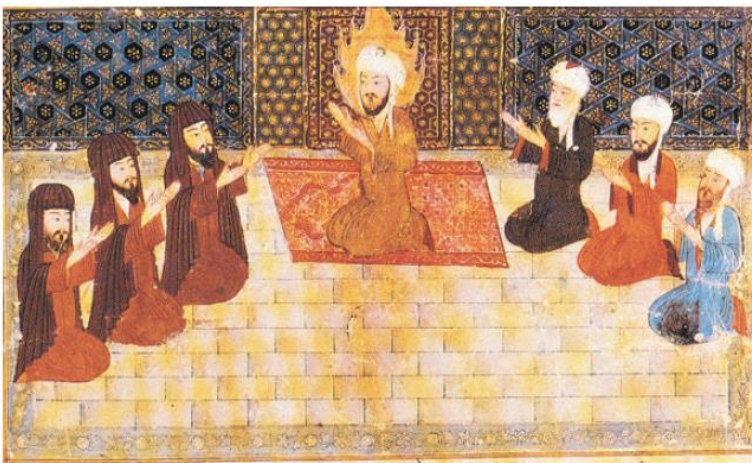
Seventh Century C.E.

Source: Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'a—n* (Bristol: The Book Foundation, 2003), Surahs 1, 2, 4, 5.

Surah 1

In the name of God, the Most Gracious and the Dispenser of Grace. All praise is due to God alone, the sustainer of all the worlds . . . Lord of the Day of Judgment. Thee alone do we worship; and unto Thee alone do we turn for aid. Guide us in the straight way, the way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessing, not of those who have been condemned, nor those who go astray.

Surah 2



Muslims, Jews, and Christians

The close relationship of three Middle Eastern monotheistic traditions is illustrated in this fifteenth-century Persian painting, which portrays Muhammad leading Moses, Abraham, and Jesus in prayer. The fire surrounding the prophet's head represents his religious fervor. The painting reflects the Islamic belief that the revelations granted to Muhammad built upon and completed those given earlier to Jews and Christians.

(Bibliothèque nationale de France)

This divine writ [the Quran]—let there be no doubt about it—is [meant to be] a guidance for all the God-conscious who believe in [the existence of] that which is beyond the reach of human perception, and are constant in prayer, and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance; and who believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon thee, [O Prophet,] as well as in that which was bestowed before thy time. . . . Verily, those who have attained to faith, as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians... — all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds — shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. . . .

And they say, “Be Jews” —or, “Christians” — “and you shall be on the right path.” Say: “Nay, but [ours is] the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false, and was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God.” Say: “We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob, and their descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed (give or grant in a gracious or condescending manner) to Moses and Jesus; and that which has been vouchsafed to all the [other] prophets by their Sustainer: we make no distinction between any of them. . . .”

Verily, in the creation of the heavens and of the earth, and the succession of night and day: and in the ships that speed through the sea with what is useful to man: and in the waters which God sends down from the sky, giving life thereby to the earth after it had been lifeless, and causing all manner of living creatures to multiply thereon: and in the change of the winds, and the clouds that run their appointed courses between sky and earth: [in all this] there are messages indeed for people who use their reason....

True piety does not consist in turning your faces toward the east or the west, but truly pious is he who believes in God, and the Last Day; and the angels, and revelation, and the prophets; and spends his substance — however much he himself may cherish it — upon his near of kin, and the orphans, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and the beggars, and for the freeing of human beings from bondage. . . .

Fasting is ordained for you as it was ordained for those before you, so that you might remain conscious of God. . . .

And fight in God's cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression, for verily, God does not love aggressors. And slay them wherever you may come upon them, and drive them away from wherever they drove you away, for oppression is even worse than killing. And fight not against them near the Inviolable House of Worship (a mosque) unless they fight against you there first; but if they fight against you, slay them: such shall be the recompense of those who deny the truth. But if they desist, behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. Hence, fight against them until there is no more oppression and all worship is devoted to God alone; but if they desist, then all hostility shall cease, save against those who [willfully] do wrong. . . .

And perform the pilgrimage. . . [to Mecca] in honor of God; and if you are held back, give instead whatever offering you can easily afford. . . .

There shall be no coercion in matters of faith....

Do not deprive your charitable deeds of all worth by stressing your own benevolence and hurting [the feelings of the needy], as does he who spends his wealth only to be seen and praised by men. . . .

God has made buying and selling lawful and Usury (the lending of money to be paid back with Interest) unlawful. Hence, whoever. . . desists [from usury], may keep his past gains, and it will be for God to judge him; but as for those who return to it they are destined for the fire....God deprives usurious gains of all blessing, whereas He blesses charitable deeds with manifold increase.

Surah 4

[R]ender unto the orphans their possessions . . . and do not consume their possessions together with your own: this, verily, is a great crime. . . .

Men shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, and women shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, whether it be little or much. . . .

And as for those of your women who become guilty of immoral conduct, call upon four from among you who have witnessed their guilt; and if these bear witness thereto, confine the guilty women to their houses until death takes them away or God opens for them a way [through repentance]. And punish [thus] both of the guilty parties; but if they both repent and mend their ways, leave them alone: for, behold, God is an acceptor of repentance, a dispenser of grace. . . .

And it will not be within your power to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire it; and so, do not allow yourselves to incline toward one to the exclusion of the other, leaving her in a state, as it were, of having and not having a husband.

Surah 5

Do not take the Jews and Christians for your allies: they are but allies of one another—and whoever of you allies himself with them becomes, verily, one of them.

Questions

- What are the chief characteristics of Allah, to Muslims the single source of all life and being?
- What religious practices are prescribed for Muslims in these passages? What are their purposes in the life of believers?
- What specific prescriptions for social life do these selections contain? Notice in particular those directed toward the weakest members of society. How would you describe the Quran's view of a good society?
- What attitude toward Jews, Christians, and other non-Muslim peoples do these passages suggest?
- What circumstances surrounding the birth of Islam might help to explain the references in the Quran to fighting and warfare?
- The sacred texts of all religious traditions provide ample room for conflicting understandings and interpretations. What debates or controversies might arise from these passages? Consider in particular views of women, of religious practice, of warfare, and of relationships with Jews and Christians.

The Voice of the Prophet Muhammad

As an expression of Islam, the sayings and deeds of Muhammad, known as the hadiths, are second in importance only to the Quran. In various collections of hadiths, Muslims hear the voice and witness the actions of their prophet. While they do not have the authority of divine revelation, these statements have served to guide and inspire Muslims to this day.

In the several centuries following his death, an enormous number of stories about Muhammad circulated within the Islamic community. Scholars gradually developed methods of authentication designed to discover which of these stories most reliably represented the Prophet's words and actions. Considerable controversy accompanied this process, and no single collection of hadiths has ever achieved universal acceptance. One of the earliest and most highly respected of these collections was the work the Persian scholar al-Bukhari (810-870). Traveling extensively throughout the Islamic world, al-Bukhari is said to have collected some 600,000 stories, memorized 200,000 of them, and finally authenticated and published 7,275. The selections that follow suggest something of the range and variety of the hadiths.

The Hadith Eighth and Ninth Centuries

Source: Arthur Jeffery, ed. and trans., *A Reader on Islam* (The Hague: Mouton, 1962), 81-86.

The Apostle of Allah. . . was asked which [good] work was the most excellent, and he answered: "Belief in Allah and in His Apostle." He was asked: "And then which?" He replied: "Jih-ad in the way of Allah." He was again asked: "And then what?" and he replied: "An acceptable pilgrimage." . . .

If a slave serves honestly his [earthly] master and worships earnestly his [heavenly] Lord, he will have a double recompense.

He who shows concern for the widows and the unfortunate [ranks as high] as one who goes on Jih-ad in the way of Allah, or one who fasts by day and who rises at night [for prayer].

A [true] believer views his sins as though he were sitting beneath a mountain which he fears may fall on him, but as evil-doer views his sins as a fly that moves across his nose.

In this world be as a stranger, or as one who is just passing along the road.

In two things an old man's heart never ceases to be that of a youth, in love of this world and in hoping long. . . .

To look at a woman is forbidden, even if it is a look without desire, so how much the more is touching her.

Said he—upon whom be Allah's blessing and peace — "Avoid seven pernicious things." [His Companions] said: "And what are they, O Apostle of Allah?" He answered: "Associating anything with Allah, sorcery, depriving anyone of life where Allah has forbidden that save for just cause, taking usury, devouring the property of orphans, turning the back on the day of battle, and slandering chaste believing women even though they may be acting carelessly." No one who enters Paradise will ever want to return to this world, even could he possess the earth and all that is on it, save the martyrs who desire to return to this world and be killed ten times so great is the regard in which they find themselves held.

To be stationed on the frontier for one day during Holy War is better than (to possess) this world and all that is on it. A place in Paradise the size of one of your whip-lashes is better than this world and all that is on it. . . .

If a man sees something in [the conduct of] his ruler which he dislikes let him put up with it patiently, for there is no one who separates himself even a span from the community and dies [in that separation], but dies a pagan death. . . .

Said the Prophet. . . : "I had a look into Paradise and I saw that the poor made up most of its inhabitants, and I had a look into Hell and saw that most of its inhabitants were women. . . .

Treat women-folk kindly for woman was created of a rib. The crookedest part of a rib is its upper part. If you go to straighten it out you will break it, and if you leave it alone it will continue crooked. So treat women in kindly fashion. . . ."

Said the Apostle of Allah...: "O band of youths, let him among you who is able to make a home get married, and let him who is not able betake himself to fasting for he will find in that a quencher [of his passions]."

The worst of foods is that of a feast to which the rich have been invited and the poor overlooked. . . .

Said the Apostle of Allah—upon whom be Allah's blessing and peace—: "Do not wear silks and satins, and do not drink from gold and silver vessels nor eat from dishes made thereof, for these things are theirs in this world but ours in the world to come." . . .

Said the Prophet—upon whom be Allah's blessing and peace—: "He who drinks wine in this world and repents not of it will be forbidden it in the world to come." . . .

Al-Aqra said: "I have ten sons but never have I kissed any one of them." The Apostle of Allah—upon whom be Allah's blessing and peace—looked at him, and then said: "He who does not show tenderness will not have tenderness shown him."

Questions

- What portrait of Muhammad emerges from this record of his sayings and actions?
- How do these hadiths reflect or build on the teaching of the Quran in the previous Document?
- What religious and social values do these hadiths highlight?
- In what ways do these hadiths reflect common themes in many of the world's "wisdom traditions," and in what respects are they distinctly Islamic?

The Voice of the Law

While Christian scholarship emphasized theology and correct belief, learned Muslims gave more attention to law and correct behavior. That law was known as the sharia, an Arabic term that referred to a path toward water, which is the source of life. To many Muslims, that was the role of law – to construct the good society within which an authentic religious life could find expression.

The sharia emerged as the early Islamic community confronted the practical problems of an expanding empire with a very diverse population. But no single legal framework developed. Rather, four major schools of Islamic law crystallized, agreeing on fundamentals but differing in emphasis. How much weight should be given to the hadiths and which of them were most reliably authentic? What scope should reason and judgment have in applying religious principles to particular circumstances? Despite disagreement on such questions, each of the four approaches to legal interpretation sought to be all embracing, providing highly detailed guidance on ritual performance, personal behavior, marriage and family matters, crime and punishment, economic transactions, and political action. The selections that follow, drawn from various legal traditions, illustrate this comprehensive nature of Islamic law and its centrality in an evolving Islamic civilization.

The Sharia Ninth Century

Source: John Alden Williams, trans. and ed., *The Word of Islam* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 71, 80-82, 88-89, 94-95, 98-101, 104-5.

On Prayer

The five prayers are obligatory for every Muslim who has reached the age of puberty and has the use of reason, except for women who are menstruating or recovering from childbirth.

If Muslims deny the necessity of prayer through ignorance, one must instruct them; if they deny it willfully, they have apostatized. . . .

If Muslims abstain from saying the prayers from negligence, one should ask them three times to repent; if they repent, it is well, and if they refuse, it is lawful to put them to death.

On Zakat (alms for the poor)

The obligation pertains only to a free Muslim who has complete ownership of the property on which it is due. . . . Zakat is due only on animals, agricultural products, precious metals, objects intended for sale, the products of mines, and treasure troves.

Whoever has the obligation to pay zakat and is able must pay it; if not, they commit a fault for which they must answer. If anyone refuses to pay it and denies its obligatory character they have committed apostasy and may be put to death. If they refuse it from avarice, they shall have the amount taken from them and be given a sentence at the judge's discretion.

On Marriage

[Marriage] is contracted by means of declaration and consent. When both parties are Muslims, it must be contracted in the presence of two male or one male and two female Muslim witnesses who are free, sane, and adult. . . .

It is not lawful for a man to marry two women who are sisters or to cohabit with two sisters who are his slaves. . . .

A man may not marry his slave-girl unless he sets her free first, and a woman may not marry her slave, since marriage has as its object that the children belong equally to both parents, and ownership and slavery are not equal states.

Similarly, marriage with an idolatress is forbidden, until she accepts Islam or a religion of the Book.

It is not lawful for a man already married to a free woman to marry a slave....However, a man may lawfully marry a free woman after a slave.

A free man may marry four women, free or slave, but no more. It is unlawful for a slave to marry more than two women. . . .

On Government

There are ten things a Caliph (successor to Muhammad as political leader of the Islamic community) must do in public affairs:

- 1) Maintain religion according to its established principles.
- 2) Apply legal judgments for litigants so that equity reigns without aiding the oppressor or weakening the oppressed.
- 3) Protect the flock... so that people may gain their living and move from place to place securely.
- 4) Apply the hudud, or punishments of the Law, so as to secure God's prohibitions from violation.
- 5) Fortify the marches so that the enemy will not appear due to neglect, shedding the blood of any Muslim or protected person.
- 6) Wage jihad against those who reject Islam so that they become either Muslims or protected people.
- 7) Collect the zakat and taxes on conquered territory. . .without fear or oppression.
- 8) Administer treasury expenditures.
- 9) Delegate loyal and trustworthy people.
- 10) Directly oversee matters and not delegate his authority seeking to occupy himself with either pleasure or devotion. . . .

It is necessary therefore to cause the masses to act in accord with divine laws in all the affairs, both in this world and in the world to come. The authority to do so was possessed by the prophets and after them by their successors.

On Things Disliked in the Law

It is not permitted to men or women to eat or drink or keep unguents(ointments) in vessels of gold or silver. . . .

It is not permitted for a man to wear silk, but it is permitted for a woman. . . .

It is not permitted for a man to wear gold or silver, except for silver on a ring, or on a weapon.

It is not permitted for a man to look at a strange Woman (a woman from outside one's immediate Family)... A woman frequently needs to bare her hands and face in transactions with men. Abu Hanifa said it was also permitted to look at her feet and Abu Yusuf said it was permitted to look at her forearms as well....However, if a man is not secure from feeling lust, he should not look needlessly even at the face or hands, to avoid sin. He is not allowed to touch her face or hands even if he is free from lust, whether he be young or old.

On the Economy

It is disliked to corner the market in food for humans or animals if it occurs in a town where this may prove harmful to the people. It is disliked to sell weapons in a time of trouble.

There is no harm in selling fruit juice to someone who will make wine of it, since the transgression is not in the juice but in the wine after it has been changed. . . .

Earning a living by changing money is a great danger to the religion of the one who practices it.... It is the duty of the muhtasib (an inspector of the markets) to search out the money changers' places of business and spy on them, and if he finds one of them practicing usury or doing something illegal. . . he must punish that person. . . .

Owners of ships and boats must be prevented from loading their vessels above the usual load, for fear of sinking. . . . If they carry women on the same boat with men, there must be a partition between them.

Sellers of [pottery] are not to overlay any that are pierced or cracked with gypsum. . . and then sell them as sound.

Rumi
Poem
Thirteenth Century

Source: M. M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966), 2:838.

I searched for God among the Christians and on
the Cross and therein I found Him not.
I went into the ancient temples of idolatry; no
trace of Him was there.
I entered the mountain cave of Hira and then went
as far as Qandhar but God I found not. . . .
Then I directed my search to the Kaaba, the resort
of old and young; God was not there even.
Turning to philosophy I inquired about him from
ibn Sina but found Him not within his range....
Finally, I looked into my own heart and there I
saw Him; He was nowhere else.

Rumi
“Drowned in God,” Mathnawi
Thirteenth Century

Source: From Kabir Helminski, ed., *The Pocket Rumi Reader* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001), 89.

Dam the torrent of ecstasy when it runs in flood,
So that it won't bring shame and ruin.
But why should I fear ruin?
Under the ruin waits a treasure.
He that is drowned in God wishes to be more drowned.
While his spirit is tossed up and down by the waves of the sea,

He asks, “Is the bottom of the sea more delightful or the top?”
Is the Beloved's arrow more fascinating, or the shield?
O heart, if you recognize any difference between joy and sorrow,
These lies will tear you apart.
Although your desire tastes sweet,
Doesn't the Beloved desire you to be desire less?
The life of lovers is in death:
You will not win the Beloved's heart unless you lose your own.

Questions

- How would you define the religious sensibility of Rumi's poetry?
- How does it differ from the approach to Islam reflected in the sharia?
- What criticisms might the orthodox legal scholars (ulama) have made regarding the Sufi understanding of Islam?

Final Questions

Using the Evidence: Voices of Islam

- 1. Defining differences within Islam:** In what different ways do the various voices of Islam represented in these documents understand and express the common religious tradition of which they are all a part? What grounds for debate or controversy can you identify within or among them?
- 2. Comparing religious traditions:** How would you compare Islamic religious ideas and practices with those of other traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity?
- 3. Considering gender and Islam:** How do these documents represent the roles of men and women in Islamic society? Pay particular attention to differences in emphasis.
- 4. Seeking additional sources:** Notice that all of these documents derive from literate elites, and each of them suggests or prescribes appropriate behavior. What additional documents would you need if you were to assess the impact of these prescriptions on the lives of ordinary people? What specific questions might you want to pose to such documents?