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Basic Islamic Beliefs & Practices

Introduction

Islam is the world religion followed by over one billion people worldwide, of which over 340,000 live in Australia. The word *islām* means “to commit oneself unconditionally and with complete devotion to God.” A person who does this is called a *muslim*. It is through this commitment and total submission of the personal will to the divine in which a person finds peace and wholeness. From a Muslim perspective, all guidance given by God to the prophets and to humankind from time immemorial is *islām*, however it is conventional to speak of the religion of Islam as the last manifestation of that guidance revealed to the Arabian prophet Muhammad (d. 632CE).

The central doctrine of Islam is belief in the oneness of God. Muslims, those who follow the religion of Islam, formally express this in the *shahādah* “testification of faith” that reads: *ash'hadu an lā ilāha illā-llāh, wa ash'hadu anna muḥammadan rasūlu-llāh*, “I testify that there is no deity except God and I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God.” Reciting the *shahādah* is considered the first of five fundamental duties for a Muslim. It is whispered in the ear of newborns and found on the lips of the pious during the last moments of dying. Publicly pronouncing the *shahādah* with belief brings a person into the fold of Islam, and the statement is reiterated in the daily prayers of observant Muslims.

Beyond this defining statement of belief in the unicity of God and the prophethood of Muhammad, Muslims draw from a wide diversity of beliefs and practices via sources such as the cultural traditions of family and friends; the preaching of local prayer leaders and religious teachers; reading books; attending meetings featuring visiting Muslim personalities from overseas; and through various media such as radio, television, videos and DVDs, and the internet. Muslims also manifest various epistemological approaches to religious truth along a spectrum between scriptural literalism and religious liberalism. Furthermore, Muslims take a number of different approaches to the role of religion in their lives and in Australian society. Some do not practice the religion in any meaningful way, but maintain a cultural connection to Islam through their (or their parents or grandparents) having migrated from Muslim-majority countries. Others practice some culturally acquired religious traditions reflexively but do not seek to proselytise their approaches. Still others knowingly attempt to contextualise and interpret Islamic attitudes and activities within the Australian environment, while others attempt to draw strong boundaries around Muslim beliefs and practices and reject perceived outside influences. These trends overlap and are referred to by different names: secularist, traditionalist; fundamentalist; contextualist; modernist; progressive and more.

With the caveat that identifying Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxy is extraordinarily difficult (as it is for other religions) the following are some of the generally held beliefs and normative practices of those who follow the religion of

Islam.

Beliefs

God

As was mentioned previously, Islam has at its core *tawhīd* “the assertion of the unity of God”: a strict monotheism that pervades the entire religion. Any belief or practice that appears to infringe on God’s right as the sole object of worship is called *shirk*, which means “to join partners with God,” the most heinous and unforgivable of sins. One who commits *shirk* is called a *mushrik* “idolator, polytheist”. The Islamic holy book, the Quran, says in translation: “God does not forgive anyone for associating something with him, while he does forgive whomever he wishes to for anything besides that. Anyone who ascribes divinity to aught beside God has indeed contrived an awesome sin!” (Q4:48). Islamic theology teaches that God alone has real existence, the essential nature of which no fallible human mind can truly comprehend. However, God created the universe--everything that has dependent existence--and endowed human beings with the ability to respond to him and worship him with volition. Creation, in contradistinction to God, is characterized by diversity. God who is transcendent and unlike anything in creation, intimately sustains creation and his attributes are reflected in it. Creation, therefore, is considered a sign that points to the reality of God.

Because human beings owe a debt of gratitude to God for their very existence, it is considered ungrateful to turn away from him and worship anything else. This ingratitude, in which the truth of the debt of worship to the one God is rejected or hidden, is called *kufr* and a person guilty of it a *kāfir* “truth-concealing ingrate”, although the word is often erroneously translated as “unbeliever” or “infidel”.

What is known about God, according to Islamic theology, comes through the revelations given to prophets and messengers, the last of which is the Quran, revealed in the Arabic language to the prophet Muhammad. The name for God used by Arabic speakers is Allah, which literally means “the deity”, although the Quranic text provides many of his other names such as al-Raḥmān “the all-merciful”, al-Ghaffār “the oft-forgiving”, al-Ḥaqq “the real”, al-Wadūd “the loving” and al-Jalīl “the majestic”. Theologians categorized the names or attributes of God in various ways, concentrating on what are known as the ninety-nine most beautiful names, into those that describe him negatively (i.e. what God is not), those that describe him positively (i.e. what God is), and those that describe his interaction with creation. This interaction is characterised in particular by his mercy, and the prophet taught: “When God decreed the creation, he pledged himself by writing in his book which is laid down with him: my mercy prevails over my wrath.” At one level, God’s merciful beneficence is extended to all creation in his continually sustaining the universe, and at another level, those who respond to him receive his compassionate loving-kindness. However, those who reject him, disobey him, and die unrepentant of worshipping something other than him, put themselves at risk of suffering severe

punishment.

Angels and the unseen realm

Muslims believe in an unseen realm that is extra to the material, physical world. Inhabitants of this world include angels, formed of light and completely obedient to God. They act as intermediaries between God and human beings and include the archangel Gabriel, who is considered the bearer of God's revelation to the messengers, and the angel who announced the birth of Jesus to Mary; the archangel Michael, one of the angels who cleansed the breast of prophet Muhammad and who aided the Muslims at the battle of Badr; the archangel Raphael, who holds a trumpet to his lips awaiting God's command to announce the day of judgement with two blasts; and the archangel Azrael, who is the angel of death. There are innumerable other angels charged with other responsibilities, some of whom are named in the Quran and traditions of the Prophet. Belief in angels is considered a necessary part of faith, and the Quran warns: "Who is an enemy of God and his angels and his messengers, as well as of Gabriel and Michael? Lo, God is an enemy of disbelievers!" (Q2:98).

Muslims also believe God created an ambiguous class of creatures called the jinn, from which the English word and legend of the genie is derived. These invisible beings, who can choose good or evil, are described as having been created from smokeless fire and exist in the unseen realm, unlike human beings who live in the material, physical reality and are thus described as having been created from clay.

The most infamous jinn, believed by some to have been an angel originally, is the Devil. The Quran narrates a creation story in which the Devil, who had been a faithful and pious worshipper of God, is ordered along with the angels to prostrate before the newly created Adam. While the ever-obedient angels did as God asked, the Devil protested and refused on the basis of racist pride in his own nature--the first act of rebellious *kufir* against God--and thus the Devil fell from God's favour and became the Satan.

The Quran describes Satan as humankind's inveterate enemy, who tempts human beings into sin. The first to fall for Satan's trickery were Adam and Eve: "Children of Adam, do not let Satan tempt you just as he turned your two ancestors out of the garden" (Q7:27). Unlike in the Biblical account, Eve is not blamed for the fall and both Adam and his mate seek and receive forgiveness for their mistake. Thus, there is no inheritance of original sin in the Islamic creation story. Instead, God reveals that it was part of the divine plan that the human being be placed on the earth as a vicegerent, and that the righteous of Adam and Eve's descendents, those who respond to God's call, will receive salvation: "When guidance shall come unto you from me, whosoever follows my guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve" (Q2:38). Upon receiving this revelation, Adam the first human, became the first prophet.

Prophethood

Belief that God has sent innumerable prophets and messengers to every nation and people--fulfilling the original promise to Adam and his descendants--is an essential part of Islamic teaching. When pious Muslims speak or hear the names of these saintly figures, they recite a blessing such as "peace be upon him". The Quran strongly rejects the notion that prophets and messengers share in the divinity of God. Instead, they are perfected human beings, protected by God from sin and immorality

Of the innumerable prophetic figures sent to humankind, the Quran gives the name of just a handful, many of whom are familiar as Biblical figures, although some of the equivalent identities are disputed. They are: Adam, Enoch, Noah, Hūd (possibly Eber) Ṣāliḥ (possibly Shelah), Abraham, Lot, Ishamel, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Shu'ayb (possibly Jethro), Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Zacharias, John the Baptist, Jesus, and Muhammad. Some theologians include the Quranic figures Dhū al-Kifl and al-Khiḍr in the list of prophets, and the famous Cordovan scholar Ibn Ḥazm argued for the inclusion of several matriarchs as prophetesses: Sarah, Jochebed the mother of Moses, Āsiya the wife of Pharaoh, and the virgin Mary. Most Muslims, however, believe that the station of prophethood was restricted to men.

Sometimes, as in the case of Moses, Ishmael and Muhammad, a bearer of God's revelation was both a messenger and a prophet: receiving a message from God as well as a legal code to impart to their followers. For Muslims, Muhammad was the last in the long line of these prophetic figures bearing revelation, and the Quran describes him thus: "Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of God and the seal of the prophets; and God is aware of all things" (Q33:40). In the last sermon delivered during the pilgrimage shortly before the prophet Muhammad's passing, he warned: "O people, no prophet or messenger will come after me and no new faith will be born."

The Quran provides snippets of stories about the prophets, usually to explain some moral teaching, scattered throughout the text of the scripture, and there is some expectation that the audience already should be familiar with the narratives. For this reason, early Muslim commentators often looked to the Biblical and extra-Biblical texts of the Jews and Christians to flesh out the skeletal narratives offered in the Islamic holy scripture.

However, at times the Quran departs from the Biblical accounts, such as with the role and status of Jesus. He is categorically rejected as being divine, either as God or as the son of God. In addressing the Christians, the Quran says: "The messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the messenger of God, and his word that He conveyed to Mary, and a spirit from him. So believe in God and his messengers, and say not 'three.' Cease, it is better for you! God is only one God. Far is it removed from his transcendence that he should have a son" (Q4:171). Furthermore, the Quran denies that Jesus was crucified, and therefore Muslims reject the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement. On the other hand, Islam confirms some doctrinal beliefs about Jesus, such as his miraculous birth to the virgin Mary, his ascension into heaven, and his return before the day of judgement.

As with denying the divinity of Christ, Muslims do not believe the prophet Muhammad was an incarnation or manifestation of God either. He is, however, believed to be the most perfect human being worthy of emulation, which the Quran confirms: "You have indeed in the messenger of God, an excellent exemplar for any one whose hope is in God and the final day" (33:21). His wife 'Ā'ishah described him as the "walking Quran," and Muslims down the centuries have attempted to model their pattern of living after his, down to the smallest detail. This pattern is known as the sunna, the knowledge of which is carried in hadiths, the related sayings recalled by his family and companions.

The Imamate

Shiite Muslims believe that God appointed the prophet's cousin and son-in-law 'Alī, and thereafter 'Alī's descendents, to succeed Muhammad after the latter's death. This doctrine of the divinely appointed imamate is rejected by Sunni Muslims, who developed a different attitude to the succession in the notion of the caliphate, however for Shiite Muslims belief in the imamate is an important distinguishing feature of their theology. The biggest group of Shiite Muslims, known as Twelver Shiites due to their recognition of a line of twelve divinely appointed imams, believe that humankind must always have the guidance of an infallible, divinely appointed religious leader. Those who reject the imam of the age are considered misguided in their rejection. For Twelver Shiites, the current imam of the age is the son of eleventh imam Ḥasan al-'Askarī (d.874CE), referred to as Muḥammad al-Mahdī. The young boy is believed to have entered occultation after the death of his father. He will emerge in the last days and will establish a period of peace and justice in the world. Alternatively, Sunni eschatology posits a different, as yet unknown, personality as the Mahdi.

Revelation

God's method of communicating the divine will to humankind primarily takes the form of sending messengers with scriptures. These holy books include the Torah given to Moses; the Psalms given to David; the Gospel given to Jesus; and the Quran given to Muhammad. There is also reference to the Scrolls of Abraham and Moses.

The Quran, which means "the recitation", was revealed in piecemeal fashion to the prophet over a period of twenty-three years. It is divided into 114 chapters, called suras, and each sura is divided into portions called *āyāt* "signs". Islamic belief asserts that at the end of the prophet's life, the angel Gabriel directed him as to the final ordering of the Quranic text, which is not in chronological order of revelation. As such, the first sura encountered is the canonical prayer of Islam, and then the suras are arranged roughly in length order with the second sura being the longest, with 286 *āyāt*. Many of the chronologically earliest *āyāt* are found at the end of the text.

The essential message that underlies all revelation is that of reminding humankind of the oneness of God. However, the Quran also teaches that different

religious communities were given different social teachings depending on the particular historical context of that community. "We have given each of you a code of law and a clear way. Had God willed he could have made you one community, but that he might test you in what he hath given you: so vie one with another in good works. Unto God you all must return; and then he will make you truly understand that on which you were wont to differ." (Q5:48). Muslims believe, however, that as Muhammad was the last of God's messengers, only the Quran has been preserved as the intact word of God still extant among humankind. Previous scriptures have been lost, or their message altered and obscured by the insertion of erroneous doctrine.

The inimitability of the Quran as the inerrant word of God is a challenge the text itself makes. Consequently, it is a point of doctrinal belief that Muslims categorically reject that Muhammad was the author of the Quran. As well, Muslims believe that only the Arabic text of the Quran constitutes the actual word of God, and translations into other languages are considered to be imperfect extrapolations of the meanings of the holy scripture. For this reason, only the original Arabic is recited in formal ritual prayers, and the Arabic manuscripts are treated with great reverence.

One of the earliest debates that Muslim theologians had was on the nature of the Quran as the speech of God. Mainstream Sunni theology settled on the belief in the uncreated nature of the Quran, which followed logically from the doctrine that God could not be separated from his attributes, and that neither God nor his attributes are subject to alteration and change. That is, there never was a moment when God did not possess the attribute of speech, and thus the words of the Quran--if not their physical manifestation in the form of a literal text--must have existed from beyond time immemorial. The Islamic scripture alludes to the existence of the Quran in the realm of the unseen when it says: "Indeed this is a glorious recitation, preserved in a well-guarded tablet" (85:21-22) and "We have made it an Arabic recitation that you may understand. And, it is inscribed in the mother of the book which we possess, sublime and wise" (Q43:3-4).

Day of Judgement

Aside from the assertion of the oneness of God, the Quran has more to say about the day of judgement, also referred to as the day of resurrection, than almost any other topic. Islamic eschatology teaches that at the end of time, all will stand before God to answer for their choices. If a person has believed in God and lived a righteous life, they will be rewarded with paradise. On the other hand, if a person has rejected God and lived a sinful life, they will be punished with hell. For those who believed in the oneness of God, but lived a life of sin, they may spend some time in hell before eventually being admitted into paradise. "Do they not think that they will be raised to life, for a formidable day, a day when all people will stand before the lord of the worlds?" (Q83:4-6). Many of the Quranic passages on the topic contain metaphors and allusions, and so eschatology is a controversial and disputed theological topic, with many details being drawn from traditions and even references in Biblical and extra-Biblical texts. Belief in the day of judgment, however it is interpreted, is

considered an essential part of faith.

Before the day of resurrection, human beings who die move to a realm called the grave. If a person is a believer who lived a good life, his or her soul is gently removed from the body, and questioned by two angels. Being able to answer correctly that their lord is God, their prophet is Muhammad, and their religion is Islam, allows the righteous person to enjoy a comfortable and restful state in preparation for their final reward. For the disbelieving and sinful, their souls are roughly dragged out, and failure to answer the angels' questions causes them to exist in a state of misery and torture, awaiting final punishment.

Nearing the end of time, there will be many signs of the impending day such as natural catastrophes; wars; the dwindling numbers of true believers and an increase in sin and iniquity; the rising of the sun in the west; the appearance of the antichrist; the return of Jesus and the appearance of the Mahdi; an apocalyptic battle between the followers of darkness, and God's faithful; the appearances of a beast from the earth, and Gog and Magog; the two blasts of the angelic trumpet that will cause every creature to swoon, except whom God wills, and then be resurrected and gathered together.

Salvation is achieved by all who believe in God and live righteous lives. Each person has a book, in which the record of his or her life is inscribed. Those who are given their book in the right hand are saved, whilst those who are given their book in the left hand are lost to hell. The Quran also describes the scales of justice being weighed, with a good person's deeds weighing heavy. Prophets and messengers will be given permission to intercede for their followers on the day of judgement. Islamic eschatology anthropomorphises human deeds and body parts, which will testify for or against an individual depending on how they lived. Everyone will be required to walk across a bridge spanning over the fires of hell. Sinners will find the razor-sharp, hair-thin bridge too difficult to cross and fall into the fire.

Timeless knowledge of God

Perhaps the most difficult of Islamic doctrines to grasp is that of *qadar* "the measuring out" or belief in the timeless knowledge of God that encompasses all things. "Whether you hide what is in your breasts or reveal it, God knows it. He knows all that the heavens and the earth contain; and he has power over all things" (Q3:29). Along with the nature of the Quran, one of the earliest debates held among Muslim theologians was that of free will versus predestination. At one extreme, some Muslims adopted a fatalistic vision in which human beings have no capacity to act, everything being already predetermined by God. At the other extreme, a group of Muslims believed that human beings must have free will even to the extent of constraining God, making human beings co-creators of acts. Mainstream theologies settled somewhere between the two extremes, although differences of opinion were reflected in different theological schools. The largest school taught that while God has knowledge of, and decrees, all that has come to pass and will come to pass, human beings acquire from God the ability to act based on their intentions.

Because of the belief that everything is ultimately dependent on the will of the Creator, Muslims preface their statements about the future with the phrase *in shā' allāh* "God-willing". Likewise, upon hearing good news, Muslims say *mā shā' allāh* "God willed it", and upon hearing bad news or expressing regret, the phrase *qadar allāhu wa mā shā' fa'ala* "God decrees, and what he wills he does" is used.

Practices

Islamic practices, both individual and communal, are derived from the attempt of Muslim scholars to understand and interpret the sharia, the sacred law of Islam, from various sources including the Quran, the traditions of the prophet, the agreed consensus of previous religious authorities, independent reasoning and a number of minor jurisprudential techniques. Interpretation of sacred law is divided into two realms: rulings concerning matters of worship (ritual purification; prayer; fasting; charity tax; and pilgrimage) and rulings concerning social interaction. Furthermore, actions are categorised into two groups: that which is permissible, called *halal*, and that which is forbidden, called *haram*. These are then further subdivided into obligatory, meritorious, neutral, disliked, and prohibited.

Conversion to Islam

Conversion to Islam is a relatively simple affair. Theoretically, all a prospective convert is required to do is pronounce the *shahādah* with belief in front of at least two witnesses, after which they perform a major ablution, where the entire body is washed, and all the rights and duties of a Muslim are incumbent upon them. Muslims believe that when an individual embraces Islam, God forgives all their previous sins and they start afresh with a blank slate.

In Australia, there is no formal system for embracing Islam and so conversion experiences vary. Some Muslims make an appointment with an imam or religious teacher to formally pronounce the *shahādah* in public and may receive a conversion certificate--an administrative formality required by Saudi Arabian authorities if a Muslim convert wishes to travel to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage. Others take a more private conversion route, with some gradually adopting various Islamic practices until they reach a point at which they identify themselves as Muslims. There is little scrutiny over the authenticity of a person's conversion, and so long as he or she observes the proper etiquettes they may easily join in the prayer services at whichever mosque they wish.

Alternatively, there is no formal procedure for leaving Islam, an act traditionally disapproved of and when coupled with treason against the caliph (i.e. by a Muslim soldier absconding to join an opposing army) warranted the death penalty. Punishment for treasonous apostasy is a controversial topic within Islamic jurisprudence and there is much debate over the nature of apostasy as a crime in which context, and if so what punishments it warrants. In Australia, Muslims are free to join or leave Islam as they wish, and religious conversion away from Islam may evoke a variety of reactions, similar to those expressed by members of other

religions in their approach to the topic of apostasy. Those Muslims who have a more exclusivist approach to religion may express pity and distaste in the face of a person's conversion away, whilst those with more inclusivist and pluralist approaches may acknowledge freedom of religious choice more positively.

Prayer

After the *shahādah*, the most important practice for Muslims is performing obligatory ritual prayer or *ṣalāh*. The Quran says: "Worship at fixed hours has been enjoined on the believers" (Q4:103). So fundamental to Islamic practice is ritual prayer, that to omit its performance is considered a grave sin, and to deny the necessity of *ṣalāh* takes a person outside the fold of Islam. Having said that, there are many Muslims who do not pray or who pray irregularly. Nevertheless, from the perspective of traditional Islamic religious requirements, the *ṣalāh* is compulsory for all Muslims from puberty onwards, with the exception of women who menstruating or experiencing post-partum bleeding, or anyone who is mentally incapacitated. Those who are physically unable to perform some or all of the required recitations and postures still need to perform the *ṣalāh* to the best of their ability.

Types of obligatory ritual prayer include the five daily prayers; the Friday communal service (compulsory for Sunni men) and funeral prayers for the dead (compulsory for at least some from the Muslim community to perform). It is strongly recommended for men to pray in congregation at the mosque for their obligatory *ṣalāh*. In Australia, the Friday services are a busy time at the mosque, as during major festivals, but usually only a small number of the most pious attend regularly at other times.

Before any *ṣalāh* can be performed the worshipper must be in a state of ritual purity, which is achieved by either washing and wiping parts of the body in the case of relieving minor impurities, or by washing the whole body to relieve major impurities. If pure water is unavailable at the time the *ṣalāh* must be performed, a symbolic washing is performed with clean earth, sand or stone. The different schools of interpretation have various rules as to what breaks ritual purity and requires either a minor or major ablution. Generally, substances exiting the body through the genitals require the believer to perform ablutions, as does deep sleep, unconsciousness and apostasy.

Both the immediate place where the prayer will be performed and the clothes the worshipper will wear when praying must be clean and free from ritual impurities. For this reason, many Muslims keep small rugs and special prayer clothes specifically for the performance of *ṣalāh*, in their homes and offices, and remove their shoes before entering Muslim homes and places of worship. Before praying, Muslim men and women must make sure they are dressed appropriately, covering themselves with loose, opaque clothing such as what is worn in public.

Shiite Muslims and some Sunni Muslims will only prostrate on earth or natural materials that have not been manufactured into rugs or clothing. For this

reason Shiite Muslims in particular use a small clay tablet when praying, upon which they rest the forehead whilst prostrating.

If an individual is praying in a public place, the immediate area that will be used for the *ṣalāh* is demarcated as inviolable by placing a barrier of some sort in front of the spot where the worshipper will prostrate. This could be a portable object, or a worshipper may pray behind a wall, pillar or any structure that would disallow someone from walking immediately in front of the praying Muslim.

The rhythm of the day is divided into distinct time periods known by the prayer that is specific to that time. In Muslim-majority countries it is common to refer to the passing of time by the names of the prayers, although it is not usual practice in Australia, where most Muslims follow the Western 12-hour clock. Because of this, many Australian Muslims use calendars published by local Islamic societies and organisations with the prayer times pre-calculated, in order to determine the start and finish of each prayer time.

Sunni Muslims divide the day's prayer times into five distinct periods: dawn; midday; afternoon; sunset; and night. Shiite Muslims perform the five prayers within three distinct periods, collapsing the midday and afternoon periods, and the sunset and night periods.

Table 1: Prayer times for Australian capital cities, on 1 Muḥarram 1429 AH / 10 January 2008 CE.

City	Dawn prayer	Midday prayer	Afternoon prayer	Sunset prayer	Night prayer
Adelaide	4:29am	1:23pm	5:10pm	8:34pm	10:11pm
Brisbane	3:32am	11:56am	3:26pm	6:48pm	8:13pm
Canberra	4:15am	1:11pm	4:59pm	8:22pm	10:00pm
Darwin	5:12am	12:54pm	4:18pm	7:19pm	8:32pm
Hobart	3:34am	1:18pm	5:22pm	8:52pm	10:53pm
Melbourne	4:18am	1:28pm	5:21pm	8:46pm	10:30pm
Perth	4:44am	1:24pm	5:05pm	8:27pm	9:58pm
Sydney	4:14am	1:03pm	4:48pm	8:10pm	9:45pm

Before the daily prayers commence, the *azan* or call to prayer is recited, either by an individual worshipper who is praying alone, or a *muezzin*--a person specifically commissioned to give the call to prayer--if the prayer is to be performed by a congregation at a mosque. Traditionally, the *muezzin* would call the *azan* from the minaret of the mosque, however in Australia, the practice is mostly prohibited by local councils and concerns about noise-levels are among objections cited in opposition to the building of new mosques. Consequently, in Australian mosques,

the azan is usually called inside the building or at the mosque door without amplification.

After a short period of time during which individual voluntary prayers are offered, a second quieter call to prayer is made and the worshippers line up in rows behind the imam, the prayer leader, standing out in front if the *ṣalāh* is being offered in congregation. The direction that Muslims face whilst praying is towards Mecca, and mosques in Australia usually have lines on the carpets marking out the correct orientation. The congregation is segregated by gender with men in the rows immediately behind the imam. If women are praying in the congregation they form rows behind the men, or more usually pray in a separate area such as a balcony or a side-room. It is not obligatory for women to attend the mosque for prayer, and attitudes towards facilitating women’s access to mosques are determined by the cultural expectations of the dominating ethnicity.

When the *ṣalāh* is about to commence, the imam and worshippers make an intention to worship and begin a number of cycles of recitations and movements, starting with raising the hands to the shoulders whilst standing straight and stating *allāhu akbar* “God is greater”. A cycle, known as a *raka‘ah*, consists of periods of standing, bowing and prostrating accompanied by recitations of portions from the Quran, statements in praise of God, supplications and benedictions. In particular, it must contain recitation of the opening chapter of the Quran, the translation of which is: “In the name of God, the all-merciful, the compassionate. Praise be to God, the lord of the worlds; the all-merciful, the compassionate; master of the day of judgement. You alone do we worship, and your help alone do we seek. Guide us to the straight path; the path of those whom you have favoured; not of those who have incurred your wrath, nor of those who are astray.” (Q1:1-7).

Each of the five daily obligatory prayers has a specific number of cycles that need to be performed, although it is encouraged to pray extra cycles as well. As well, there are rules as to which parts of which cycles are said aloud, and which are said quietly. The various schools of interpretation have developed precise instructions for praying that follow the basic pattern, but differ in some minor details, such as where the hands are placed during prayer or the wording of some of the supplications.

Table 2: No. of obligatory cycles for the daily prayers.

Prayer	No. of obligatory cycles
Dawn	2
Noon	4
Afternoon	4
Sunset	3
Night	4

The *ṣalāh* is concluded by pronouncing a statement of peace after which, worshippers may add individual supplications and statements of praise, though the obligatory movements and recitations of the *ṣalāh* are concluded.

Friday prayers

A special congregational prayer service is held at midday on Friday instead of the midday prayer. A short while after the azan is called, the imam will stand facing the sitting congregation and deliver a sermon in two parts with a few moments of silence and reflection in between. Australian imams have tended to offer the sermon in Arabic, the canonical language of Islam, or the languages of migrating groups such as Turkish or Urdu, but more are offering part or all of the sermon in English to cater for growing numbers of Australian-born Muslims for whom English is their first and perhaps only language. The content of the sermon might range from general exhortation to piety and moral living, explanations of teachings of Islam, and even to news and political issues. The imam will offer prayers for the Muslim community, often including Muslims overseas, after which the second quieter call to prayer is made and the congregation stands up to offer two cycles of prayer.

Muslim-majority countries accommodate the service by allotting Friday as a day of rest, even though there is not a religious requirement to cease working outside of the actual midday service, unlike the Jewish sabbath on Saturday. In Australia, those employed Muslims who work close to a mosque and want to attend Friday prayers need to make arrangements with their employers to leave work. Australian mosques try to assist by setting the start of the midday service at a regular specific time (after the noon zenith) and generally imams try to keep from offering lengthy sermons.

Eid prayers

Muslims also hold special services to commemorate two important dates in the Islamic calendar: the Eid festivals. The Festival of Breaking the Fast occurs on the first day after the fasting month of Ramadan, while the Festival of the Sacrifice occurs at the end of the pilgrimage season in the last month of the Islamic calendar, and commemorates the patriarch Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son in obedience to God. Many Australian Muslims, even those who do not attend the mosque regularly, try to arrange at least one day off work to celebrate the Eids with their family and friends and attend the special Eid services. It is highly encouraged to bathe and dress in beautiful clothes, and make statements extolling God's greatness, praising him and remembering the special station of Muhammad and his family and companions, whilst travelling to the mosque and waiting for the Eid service to begin. Unlike other prayers, the azan is not called, and a short two-cycle prayer is offered in congregation that differs slightly from the regular *ṣalāh*. The imam then gives a sermon appropriate to the occasion. After the service, it is traditional to take a different route home than the one taken to the mosque, and this is usually a time when Muslim families visit each other and their friends and give money or gifts especially to the younger generation.

Both the Eids provide opportunities for Muslims to give charity, and before the Festival of Breaking the Fast, the male head of each Muslim family donates the value of one meal for himself and each of his dependents, to the needy. In Australia, this is collected by mosques or Islamic charities and is set at under AU\$10 per person, with the exact amount depending on who is collecting. At the Festival of the Sacrifice, families who can afford it sacrifice a domestic animal such as a sheep or goat, for the purpose of celebrating Eid and distributing the meat to the poor. In Australia, Islamic charities run programs where Muslim families pay around AU\$80 for an animal to be slaughtered with the meat then being canned and shipped to the poor overseas.

Funeral prayers

Another type of *ṣalāh* is the funeral prayer offered in congregation for a Muslim who has passed away. As quickly as possible after death, the body is washed, dried and perfumed by a member of the same sex or the deceased's spouse, then wrapped in clean white cloths covering the whole body.

Muslims believe that the time of death for each person is predestined by God, and believers hope that the last words they utter will be the *shahādah*. It is considered to be obligatory for at least some from the Muslim community to prepare the body for burial and offer funeral prayers. So long as some fulfil this duty, the obligation is lifted on everyone else.

The funeral prayers differ from other ritual *ṣalāh* in that there is no bowing or prostration among other things. The coffin is placed in front of the congregation and the imam stands near the body. The deceased, accompanied by men from the community, is then taken to the cemetery to be buried. The body is removed from the coffin and laid directly in the burial plot on its right side facing Makkah. For many years, Australian laws had required that bodies be encased in coffins for burial, however after much lobbying by Sheikh Fehmi El-Imam, Victoria became the first state—with others following—to give permission for Muslims to bury their dead directly in the earth, without coffins. The need to bury the body directly in earth is due to the Islamic teaching that the soul maintains a connection with the body, and returning the latter to the natural elements as soon as possible is extremely important. For this reason also, cremation and embalming are forbidden, and autopsies are to be avoided as far as legally possible.

Devotional prayers

Whilst the formal recitations of the *ṣalāh* must be said in Arabic, private prayers and supplications to God can be made in any language, using any respectful words the believer wishes to utter, although the prophet left behind many prayers that were memorised and transmitted by his family and companions, and which pious Muslims still use today. Blessings, invocations and supplications are pronounced on a wide variety of occasions, such as before and after eating; entering and exiting the home; whilst travelling; after sneezing; upon hearing good or bad news; after saying the names of prophets and saintly figures; during holy days and celebrations; upon

entering the mosque; putting on and taking off clothes; before and after visiting the toilet; to seek healing from sickness and disease; seeking God's guidance on a particular matter; when eclipses occur; to pray for rain and more.

One of the most important types of voluntary worship is *dhikr* "remembrance of God" based on the Quranic passage "O you who believe! Remember God abundantly!" (Q33:41). Sufi Muslims in particular, have developed specific devotional prayers and recitations designed to facilitate the believer's remembrance of, and communion with, God. A Muslim who joins a Sufi order, learns the various prayers of that particular order that have been transmitted down the centuries, and adds extra devotional practices to their worship. There are a number of Sufi orders with followers in Australia, such as the Shadhili, Mevlevi, Naqshbandi, and Nimatullahi orders.

In common with many other great traditions such as Catholicism and Buddhism, many Muslims use strings of prayer beads--ninety-nine beads divided into three--to help count recitations of God's names and statements praising God.

Alms-giving

Closely connected to prayer, is the third fundamental Islamic practice, the alms-tax called *zakāh*: "Perform your prayers, pay the alms-tax, and give God a generous loan" (Q73:20). The etymology of the word in Arabic carries connotations of purifying and increasing in goodness, hence Islam teaches that once a Muslim has saved wealth (money, crops or livestock) above a minimum threshold for a year, that wealth must be purified by giving a percentage of it in charity. The percentage owed on wealth above the threshold held for a year, ranges from 2.5 percent to 10 percent depending on the nature and acquisition of the wealth. This amount is considered to belong to God and a person who neglects to pay the *zakāh* is considered as possessing stolen property.

Islamic sacred law specifies that *zakāh* can only be paid to specific categories of recipients: the poor who cannot take care of their basic needs and requirements; the needy living on the poverty line; those who perform the service of collecting and distributing the *zakāh*; new Muslims and non-Muslims close to the Muslim community; for the freeing of slaves or prisoners of war; debtors in difficulty; righteous causes "in the path of God"; and travellers.

Shiite Muslims interpret the categories of wealth upon which the *zakāh* is due differently to Sunni Muslims, and more emphasis is given to an alms-tax called *khums* "fifth," based on the Quranic passage: "Know that whatever of a thing you acquire, a fifth of it is for God and for the messenger, for the kinsmen, orphans, the needy and the wayfarer" (Q8:41). Sunni Muslims interpret this to refer to war-booty, whereas Shiite Muslims consider it to apply to all profit. Thus, for Shiite Muslims, *khums* is applicable on the profit or surplus of an individual's income after deducting annual expenditure including expenses incurred by dependents. It is given to needy direct descendants of the prophet, and important Shiite scholars who generally deputise the money to be spent on salaries for religious teachers and

students, and given to the poor, as well as for various good causes.

The Australian state does not collect *zakāh* (or *khums*) so it is up to the individual Muslim to fulfil their obligation. Mosques may collect and distribute the alms-tax, or alternatively there are a number of registered charities that run collection services for Muslims to use.

Fasting

During Ramadan, the ninth—and most holy—month of the Islamic calendar, Muslims refrain each day from eating, drinking, smoking and having sexual intercourse between dawn until just after sunset. The Quran describes the Islamic fast as a continuation of the fasting practices of Jews and Christians: “O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those who came before you; that you will perhaps be God-fearing.” (Q2:183)

Ramadan is a celebratory time for Muslims, with increased acts of worship and charity, visiting of family and friends, and its purpose is to strengthen the spiritual connection of believers with God. Fasting during this month is considered the fourth fundamental religious duty of Islam, and is obligatory upon all religiously mature Muslims unless they are travelling away from home, menstruating, experiencing post-partum bleeding, infirm, mentally incapacitated or physically unable to fast due to a medical condition such as a pregnancy where fasting would put the mother or foetus at risk. Recompense for the suspension of an individual’s fast involves fasting at another time during the year and/or giving the value of a meal in charity for each day of fasting missed. Failing to fast without a valid excuse is considered sinful and in that case the penitent should fast for two months or feed sixty of the poor. Muslim parents may encourage their pre-pubescent children to try fasting for part of a day to graduate them into the experience.

Determining the start and finish of the month is a cause of annual dispute amongst different Muslim communities in Australia. The Islamic calendar is lunar, following the waxing and waning of the moon, making the entire year of twelve month about eleven days shorter than the solar Gregorian calendar. The first year of the Islamic calendar was 622CE, the year that Muhammad and his followers emigrated from Makkah to Yathrib, the city that became known as Medina.

Table 3: Names of the months of the Islamic calendar.

I	Muḥarram	VII	Rajab
II	Şafar	VIII	Sha‘abān
III	Rabī‘ al-awwal	IX	Ramaḍān
IV	Rabī‘ al-thānī (or Rabī‘ al-ākhar)	X	Shawwāl
V	Jumādā al-awwal	XI	Dhū al-qi‘dah

VI	Jumādá al-thānī (or Jumādá al- ākhar)	XII	Dhū al-ḥijjah
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Table 4: Names of the days of the Islamic week and their Gregorian equivalents.

1	Sunday	Yawm al-aḥad
2	Monday	Yawm al-ithnayn
3	Tuesday	Yawm al-thulāthā'
4	Wednesday	Yawm al-arb'ia'
5	Thursday	Yawm al-khamīs
6	Friday	Yawm al-jumu'ah
7	Saturday	Yawm al-sabt

The difference of opinion in Australia, in which the state plays no role in setting an official start or finish to Ramadan, occurs over which method different mosques, organisations and even individuals use to declare the start of the month. Some mosques and organisations, for example the Lebanese Moslem Association based in Lakemba, NSW and the Council of Imams in Victoria, rely on astronomical calculations to determine when a new moon will be born and therefore predict the start of Ramadan. They argue that pre-calculation provides reliability, particularly for Muslims who need to arrange for time off work beforehand.

Other mosques and organisations such as the Al-Ghazzali Centre for Islamic Sciences and Human Development, also based in Lakemba, and the Islamic Association of Western Suburbs Sydney based in Rooty Hill, NSW do not declare the start of Ramadan until the new moon has been physically sighted in the region or the completion of thirty days of the previous month, whichever ever comes first. They place emphasis on following the instruction of the prophet literally: "Whenever you sight the new moon (of the month of Ramadan) observe the fast, and when you sight it (the new moon of Shawwāl) break it, and if the sky is cloudy for you, then observe the fast for thirty days."

Apart from the two positions listed above, some Muslims follow Ramadan timings for their particular country of origin, and others follow dates as decreed by religious authorities in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, different mosques may start fasting the month of Ramadan, and the corresponding Eid celebration on different days.

Whether following pre-determined dates, or the physical sighting of the moon, those intending to fast wake early for a light pre-dawn meal finishing just

before the azan for the dawn prayer is called. As well as abstaining from food, drink, smoking and sexual intercourse, extra effort is made to avoid backbiting, gossip, lying and other sinful behaviours as engaging in these are considered to 'break' the fast as well. Life in Australia still carries on as normal in Ramadan, unlike in many Muslim-majority countries where businesses and shops close for the day and open up at night, so fasting Muslims have learned to balance their religious duties with their regular commitments, although some find it easier than others.

At sunset for Sunni Muslims, and shortly thereafter for Shiite Muslims, the fast is broken, preferably with three dates and a drink of water after having prayed a short grace, as was the practice of the prophet. The sunset prayer is performed and then a larger meal is eaten. This is a festive occasion for Muslims, and many families like to open their homes and provide sumptuous feasts to friends and guests. It is not uncommon for women from traditionally Muslim cultures to have spent long hours preparing the evening meal, serving elaborate favourite dishes.

During Ramadan, extra prayers after the night prayer are offered either individually or preferably at the mosque in congregation by Sunni Muslims—men and women—and only individually at home by Shiite Muslims. It is usual practice for the imam to complete a recitation of the entire text of the Quran over the month during Ramadan prayers.

Islamic teaching holds that the first words of the Quran were revealed to Muhammad during the month of Ramadan, and this is commemorated by observant Muslims 'seeking' a special night called *laylat al-qadr* "the night of destiny." The exact time of *laylat al-qadr* is a mystery, but is traditionally believed to occur on one of the final odd dates of Ramadan, so pious Muslims will spend these nights in prayer and recitation of the Quran. Some retreat to the mosque full-time for the purpose of worship.

Pilgrimage

The fifth essential Islamic obligation is the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca undertaken at least once in every Muslim's life, in so far as they are able: "pilgrimage to the house [at Mecca] is a duty to God from humankind, for all who are able to make the journey" (Q3:97). The annual pilgrimage season occurs in the last month of the Islamic calendar, and every year millions of pilgrims flock to Mecca to perform the hajj rituals and prayers. It is an opportunity for Muslims from every nationality and ethnicity to meet and be astounded at the diversity of the Muslim world, as well as inculcate a sense of connection with an ancient historical tradition.

Arabs performed the pilgrimage before the time of Muhammad, and Muslims believe the practice goes back to the time of Abraham, Hagar and their son Ishmael. Thus, many of the rituals that have their precedent in pre-Islamic practice were Islamicised by the prophet and his followers. During the formative period of Islamic sacred law, scholars went to great lengths to regulate the obligations of the pilgrimage, and as with other areas of religious ritual there are differences of opinion over the precise nature of how the acts are to be carried out. The following,

therefore, is a general description of the pilgrimage.

The pilgrim prepares for the pilgrimage by making an intention and entering a consecrated state. This involves performing a ritual ablution and is the last chance to trim the nails, shave body hair and apply perfume, for a while. Then, male pilgrims wrap two unstitched white cloths around their bodies, whilst women put on clean clothing such as is worn during prayer. After entering this state, the pilgrim may not perform certain acts, such as put on perfume, engage in sexual intercourse, cut their hair, hunt and kill animals, argue, and men may not wear sewn clothing. After entering the consecrated state, the pilgrim prays and begins chanting a declaratory prayer that dedicates their pilgrimage to God.

Over a number of days, the pilgrimage involves camping overnight in a tent-city in the valley of Miná, praying and meditating; travelling to the plain of ‘Arafāt to ask forgiveness for sins—the central ritual of the hajj, considered as a preparation for death and a rehearsal for the day of judgement, in which all will be held accountable to God; collecting small pebbles in the hollow of Muzdalifah where pilgrims stay overnight; throwing some of the pebbles at a construction in Miná symbolising rejection of Satan; and organising for the sacrifice of a domestic animal with most of the meat being given to the poor and some being reserved for the pilgrim (those that cannot afford the cost may fast or give charity). At this point the pilgrim may move partially out of the consecrated state, marking this by putting on ordinary clothes and shaving or trimming the hair.

The next step of the pilgrimage is to visit the house of God, the Ka‘bah. Islamic tradition holds that the Ka‘bah was built by Adam—the progenitor of humankind—as the first house of monotheistic worship. Abraham and Ishmael were commanded to rebuild it, however by the time of the prophet Muhammad, the Ka‘bah was being used inappropriately in pagan worship. Muhammad was thus commissioned to cleanse the Ka‘bah of its idols and re-institute pure monotheistic worship of the one God in its precinct. Pilgrims circumambulate the Ka‘bah counter-clockwise, seven times, and if possible kiss a stone lodged in one corner, after which two cycles of prayer are offered facing a spot known as the station of Abraham. Next, pilgrims make seven brisk walks between the hills of Şafā and Marwah, and drink water from the Zamzam well, to commemorate the search for water undertaken by Hagar after she and her infant son Ishmael were left by Abraham at Mecca in obedience to God’s will.

After having accomplished this, the pilgrim is considered to have fully left the consecrated state, and may re-enter normal life. Then the pilgrims return to Miná for a number of days and recite: *allāhu akbar* “God is greater” whilst throwing remaining pebbles at stone pillars representing Satan; make a final visit to perform circumambulation of the Ka‘bah; and either visit other special places connected with Islamic history, such as the mosque of the prophet in Medina, or return home. The exact order of some of the rituals described may vary depending on the school of interpretation followed by the individual pilgrim. After returning home, the Muslim may now take the title *hajjī* for a male or *hajjah* for a female, traditionally titles of great respect.

Jihad

The Quran prescribes that Muslims should engage in jihad for the sake of God: “O ye who believe! Fear God, and seek the way of approach to him, and strive in his way in order that you may succeed” (Q5:35). The word jihad is derived from a verb meaning “to strive, labour, toil, exert” although it is regularly mistranslated as “holy war”. Islam does not teach that war is holy, but does permit physical fighting as a last resort in the pursuit of justice and to prevent or end oppression. A related word is *ijtihad*, the jurisprudential method where a scholar grapples with interpreting sources to arrive at an independent decision regarding a question of religious law.

Jihad is a controversial concept, not the least because over the centuries, Muslims have taken a number of different—and at times conflicting—approaches to its interpretation. At one end of the spectrum, jihad refers to battles waged against non-Muslim enemies to extend the borders of the caliphal empire and thus open non-Muslim lands to the spread of Islam. At the other end, jihad is an individual’s spiritual struggle against sin and temptation. Nevertheless, the view that jihad is unending holy war between Islam and the West, is not one that has widespread support amongst Australian Muslims, except for perhaps a small few on the extreme fringe.

In particular, classical Sunni scholars developed a concept of jihad as just-war theory, in which it was seen as morally necessary for a Muslim army, under the direction of the caliph, to fight an enemy in the just cause of self-defence or to prevent oppression of the innocent. Some scholars went further and defined oppression to include the deliberate obstruction of Muslim proselytising. However, it was determined that where Muslims engage in military action, they must observe Islamic ethics of warfare that include the sanctity of non-combatant life; preserving the environs of the theatre of war; and accepting peace-treaties as soon as they are offered by the enemy. For most Shiite Muslims, the obligation of engaging in military jihad is considered suspended until the fulfilment of eschatological prophecies.

Sufi Muslims interpret jihad as the human struggle to resist base desires and purify the soul in order to attain reunion with God. They base this on a comment of the prophet: “The fighter is he who makes jihad against himself for the sake of obeying God.” Muhammad was also reported to have said to some of his companions on their return from battle: “You have come from the smaller jihad to the greater jihad.” When queried as to the meaning, he explained that the greater jihad is “the striving of God’s servants against their idle desires.” Sufi Muslims, therefore, developed a complex science of spiritual jihad, involving intense worship and virtuous living for the sake of reunion with God.

One modern reaction to colonisation of parts of the Muslim world has recast jihad as the struggle for independence from colonialist powers. Muslim distress about foreign incursions into Muslim-majority lands has seen religion colouring various politico-national struggles, the most important of which is the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Jerusalem, in particular, is the third most holy site for Muslims after the mosques in Mecca and Medina. Jerusalem was the first focal point

for orientation in Muslim prayer, before revelation was received moving it to Mecca. As well, Muslims believe that the prophet Muhammad was miraculously transported from Mecca to Jerusalem, where he met and prayed with past prophets, and then ascended to the heavens where he had a visitation with God himself, who issued the commandment for Muslims to perform the five daily obligatory prayers. Even those Muslims who interpret the event metaphorically rather than literally, still regard Jerusalem as a holy place. Consequently, Muslims living in Australia--whether Palestinian or belonging to a different ethnicity--express passionate views about the conflict.

Martyrdom

Because Islam teaches that Muslims should actively participate in the struggle for justice in the world, those who are killed in the process are considered martyrs rewarded with Paradise for their sacrifice: "If you should be killed for God's sake or die, forgiveness and mercy from God are better than what they are amass, and if you should die or be killed it is to God that you are gathered... Do not reckon those who are killed for God's sake are dead, but rather [they are] living; they will be provided for by their Lord, so happy will they be with whatever God has given them out of His bounty" (Q3:157-58; 169).

The Arabic word for a martyr is *shahīd* "witness", one who testifies to faith with his or her life, consequently if a person intended their efforts to bring about their own glory, to achieve political power, or for any reason other than the sake of God, they are not martyrs if they are killed. As a tradition narrates, someone came and repeatedly asked Muhammad: "Messenger of God, [what happens when] a man wishes to take part in jihad in God's path desiring some worldly advantage? Each time, the prophet replied: "he will have not reward."

For Shiite Muslims, the archetypal martyr was the grandson of the prophet, Ḥusayn, so much that a doctrine of sacrifice was developed, not entirely dissimilar to the Christian notion of the substitutionary atonement.

Morals and Ethics

Islam teaches that human beings are created with a natural propensity to good, but that it is environment causes that leads people astray. The purpose of this life is to belief in God and live righteously, as the Quran states: "[God is] the one who created death and life, so that he may test which of you is finest in action" (Q67:2). As such, Islamic scriptural sources, as well as many works written by interpreters and scholars emphasise the necessity of living ethically.

Theologians divided sins into major and minor categories, although there is difference of agreement over some details of the particular lists. Among other commandments, the Biblical decalogue can be derived from various passages of the Quran, with the exception of the commandment to keep the sabbath. Instead, Muslims are obliged to gather at noon on Friday for congregational prayers.

Table 5: Islamic equivalent of the Biblical decalogue.

Belief in the one God	“Know that there is no deity except God” (Q47:19).
Prohibition of improper worship	“Shun the abomination of idols” (Q22:30).
Prohibition of vain oaths	“Do not use God as an excuse in your oaths, to keep yourselves from being virtuous” (Q2:224).
Keep the sabbath	“You who believe, when the call is made for prayer on the day of congregation, hasten to remember God and leave off business” (Q62:9).
Honouring parents	“Your Lord has decreed that you should worship nothing except him, and kindness to your parents” (Q17:23).
Prohibition of murder	“Do not kill your children in dread of poverty... Do not take life--which God has made sacred--except for just cause” (Q17:31-3).
Prohibition of adultery	“Do not commit adultery. It is an indecency, and evil as a way” (Q17:32).
Prohibition of theft	“A thief, whether a man or a woman, shall have his or her hands cut off as a penalty for whatever he or she has earned” (Q5:38).
Prohibition of bearing false witness	“Shun lying speech” (Q22:30)
Prohibition of coveting	“Do not covet that whereby God in bounty has preferred one of you above another ” (Q4:31).

Social Practices

In Islamic sacred law, any aspect of living that is not an act of ritual worship (prayer, fasting, pilgrimage etc.) is considered to fall under the category of societal law, where the default position is one of permissibility, unless there is an explicit prohibition contained in the sources of Islamic law. Consequently, Muslims have developed distinct and unique cultures spanning the globe, and the life of a Muslim living in, for example, the patriarchal monarchy that is Saudi Arabia is very different to that of a Muslim living in the matriarchal, consensual society of the Minangkabau

people in Indonesia.

Because there is no single Australian Muslim cultural pattern, as Muslims living in Australia come from a wide variety of different ethnic backgrounds--the following section merely attempts to point to some broad trends found among Australian Muslims.

Family life

The family is considered the fundamental building block and moral backbone of society, although cultural variation affects the composition and nature of Muslim families across the globe. In the prophet's time, the structure of the family was tribal in scope and patriarchal by nature and many of the Quranic passages and traditions addressed issues raised within that specific familial context. As Islam spread across the globe and people from different cultural backgrounds embraced the new religion, there emerged various interpretations of Islamic teachings regarding the role of the family and the rights and duties of its constituent members. In twenty-first century Australia, Muslim families are expected to negotiate what at times can appear to be conflicting needs and expectations, and tension can sometimes arise between cultural expectations, religious teachings, and the legal and social reality of living in a non-Muslim country.

Marriage

Marriage legitimises sexual relations between a man and a woman, and provides a safe and stable environment for the next generation of believers to be raised. Indeed, celibacy and monasticism are stigmatised and the prophet was reported to have said: "When a person marries, he has fulfilled half of his religion, so let him fear God regarding the remaining half." Dating, pre-marital sex and cohabitation without marriage are all considered impermissible in Islam, and thus are less commonly reported within the Muslim community than in the broader Australia society.

Marriage ceremonies can be simple or elaborate, depending on the cultural backgrounds of the marrying couple. Most are officiated by an imam, however strictly speaking his involvement is not obligatory under Islamic sacred law, although an authorised celebrant (usually the imam who is registered with the state) is required to fulfil Australian legal regulations.

There are two parts, the first is the contracting of an Islamic marriage, and the second is the wedding feast where the marriage is publicly celebrated. As in other cultures and faith traditions, weddings are joyfully celebrated with neighbours, family and friends and it is considered sinful to refuse to attend a wedding feast to which one has been invited. Although the finer details differ depending on the particular school of sacred law, for a marriage to be Islamic, it requires the offer of marriage and acceptance of that offer, usually by the woman's guardian with her consent, in front of two witnesses. The contract of marriage requires payment by the husband of a negotiated dowry to the woman, either paid in full, or more commonly half before consummation of the marriage and the other

half due if the marriage ends. The dowry can be money or a gift of value. Women may stipulate conditions in their marriage contracts, such as the right to divorce or monogamy. Shiite law allows temporary marriage, where a marriage is contracted between a man and a woman for a specified amount of time, at which point the marriage naturally expires if it is not renewed. This type of marriage was practiced during the time of the prophet, but Sunni Muslims consider it now prohibited.

An issue that has arisen for Muslims living in Australia is in trying to negotiate two legal codes: the Islamic regulations surrounding marriage, and Australian legal requirements. This can have awkward ramifications such as where a woman who does not possess the contracted right to divorce her husband, seeking to dissolve the marriage through the civil courts only. Although she may be legally divorced in the eyes of Australian law, she cannot remarry Islamically unless she also obtains an Islamic divorce from her husband or she appeals to an Islamic authority. Another situation that sometimes arises is in the case of polygyny. Islam allows a man to be married to a maximum of four women at the same time, but places certain strictures on him, such as financial and temporal equity for each wife. The lack of official recognition that polygyny exists and is practiced by some Australian Muslims (even if they do not break the law in attempting to register those marriages with the state) leaves some families in legally vulnerable positions. Furthermore, the absence of a recognised Islamic legal system in Australia means there is no duly authorised body to protect the rights of the various marriage partners and children in polygynous families.

Islamic sacred law prohibits marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims. An exception to this rule is given in the Quran, which allows Muslim men to marry righteous Jewish or Christian women, although even this form of interfaith marriage is disliked among some Muslim scholars if there is a risk the children will not be brought up Islamically. Consequently, interfaith marriage rates among Muslim Australians are not high. One issue that has arisen in recent years is that of Australian women who convert to Islam but who are married to non-Muslims. A strict interpretation of sacred law requires their husbands also to convert, with the marriages suspended for a period, and then dissolved if they refuse. However, because there is no legal censure under Australian law for violating Islamic sacred law, it is more an issue of community peer pressure than anything else.

Divorce

Islam permits divorce as a last resort when a marriage has irretrievably broken down. There are different types of divorces and marriage dissolutions in Islamic sacred law. The Quran grants men an unrestricted right to divorce called *ṭalāq* “repudiation, divorce”, that takes two forms: revocable and irrevocable. The different schools of sacred law take different positions on the requisite conditions to effect revocable and irrevocable divorces--including the times when they are prohibited, such as when the wife is menstruating--but essentially it involves the man intending and pronouncing a divorce upon which the marriage is suspended and the woman enters a waiting period of three menstrual cycles. If the couples

reconcile, then the marriage resumes, however the man may only initiate this procedure twice more. If the waiting period completes and the marriage is not resumed, it is considered irrevocable and the couple are divorced. At this point, if the couple wish to remarry, they must negotiate a new marriage contract. If the marriage is resumed during the waiting period, and the husband initiates divorce twice more, on the third time, the marriage is dissolved such that they are not permitted to remarry each other, without the woman having married and divorced another husband. In the opinion of some scholars, it is possible for a man to pronounce the divorce formula three times in one sitting, and the marriage is legally dissolved, however this is a controversial practice and again, the partners may not remarry each other without the woman having married and divorced another husband.

During the waiting period the husband is still responsible for her maintenance, and upon dissolution of the marriage, she keeps the full dowry (unless they have not consummated the marriage, in which case she keeps half the dowry). Islamic custody laws differ depending on the school of interpretation, and are overridden by Australian laws, but generally speaking Islam encourages that younger children should stay with the mother, unless she is unfit to parent.

Other types of divorce include

- mutual agreement between a husband and wife to dissolve the marriage
- where the wife obtains a release from the marriage by paying for her freedom or returning the dowry to the husband, who irrevocably divorces her
- where the husband accuses his wife of adultery, or repudiates her through a derogatory phrase
- if a woman has contracted the right to initiate divorce, particularly if the husband has failed to fulfil some negotiated stipulation such as monogamy
- where the woman seeks dissolution of the marriage through an Islamic authority based on any one of a number of grounds, including if the husband has neglected to support his wife and family; if he suffers some incurable and repulsive disease; if he is impotent or unable to fulfil her sexual needs; the husband has a mental illness; she suffers from domestic violence; the extended, unexplained absence of the husband or his desertion; if she discovers he has lied or misrepresented himself to contract the marriage; or the marriage has utterly broken down and reconciliation is impossible.

Family structure

The vast majority of Muslims living in Australia have come from patriarchal cultural backgrounds where the father is considered the head of the family, and many men take this responsibility seriously. A father is expected to provide for his family--in many cases extending beyond the nuclear core, including relatives living overseas. Mothers are valued as the first carers and educators of the next generation and the

prophet was reported to have said: "Paradise is at the feet of the mother." Consequently, obedience to one's parents is considered extremely important even beyond childhood, and the practice of putting parents in nursing homes is generally viewed with aversion unless there is genuine need or no other alternative. "We have recommended to man his parents; his mother bore him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning was in two years. Thank me and your two parents. To me is the return" (Q31:14).

Children have the right to inherit their patrilineal name, and whilst fostering and adopting orphans and vulnerable children is seen as virtuous, it is prohibited to hide or mask their birth parents' identities. This stress on preserving ancestral lineage has implications for the use of assisted reproductive technology, and the use of donor eggs and sperm by infertile couples is considered prohibited for Muslims, according to Islamic sacred law.

Muslims have different opinions about the use of contraception and family planning methods. Whilst methods such as surgery that end the procreative ability are considered forbidden, generally the use of temporary forms of contraception is permitted so long as both spouses agree. This is because the right to sexual enjoyment and procreation is considered to belong to both the husband and the wife equally. Abortion is a controversial topic, and classical scholars discussed it in the context of compensation and expiation owed by those who cause an abortion to occur in a pregnant woman. The debate centres around the notion of ensoulment. Based on the Quran and traditions of the prophet, the soul is believed by most scholars to enter the foetus at 120 days after conception, although some hold earlier. Abortion after ensoulment is prohibited except to save the mother's life. Before ensoulment, abortion is still considered sinful without reason by most, nevertheless some scholars allow the procedure if continuing the pregnancy would be harmful to the mother's mental or physical health, or if there are extenuating circumstances such as the pregnancy being the result of rape.

Education and the acquisition of knowledge, particularly religious knowledge, are considered extremely important, and parents are answerable to God for the education of their children. Establishing weekend schools to teach the basic tenets and practices of Islam was among the very first concerns of the establishing Muslim community in Australia. Mosques generally offer a variety classes. Since then, a variety of private Islamic schools have been set up around the country that offer both the relevant state curriculum and instruction in Arabic and Islamic studies.

Life cycle events

Many of the life cycle events are celebrated in a variety of different ways depending on the culture of the family, with some Arabic traditions dating back to the pre-Islamic era. These were transformed by the prophet, then taken across the globe. Consequently, some or all of the following rituals are practiced at varying dates after the birth of a child, ranging from three, seven or forty days after the birth all the way up to before puberty.

When a Muslim family welcomes a new life into the world, the father will softly chant the words of the call to prayer into the baby's ears. Then, it is traditional to rub a small piece of chewed date in the mouth of the baby to give him or her a taste of sweetness. The placenta is buried and on the seventh day (or possibly later) it is recommended to give the child an honourable name, shave his or her head and give the equivalent weight of the hair in gold or silver as charity to the poor, and host a celebratory feast for family and friends. A domestic grazing animal (such as a sheep or a goat) is sacrificed and the meat distributed with a portion given to the needy, and the rest given or served to family and friends. A number of Australian charities and butchers offer a service where the animal is pre-ordered and butchered for the family. Some cultures anoint the baby's shaven head with saffron or oil, a reflection of the pre-Islamic Arabic tradition of rubbing the head with the blood of the sacrificed animal.

It is strongly recommended that males be circumcised, a procedure that involves removing the foreskin of the penis, usually by elective surgery in Australia. Cultures vary as to whether this occurs in the week, weeks or months after the birth, or even as late as just before puberty. Some Muslim cultures also practice a form of female circumcision where the clitoral hood is pricked or cut as a rite of passage, however more severe forms of female genital cutting such as clitoridectomy and infibulation are generally regarded as un-Islamic by the vast majority of Muslims, and in any case are prohibited under various Australian laws. In both male and female circumcision, the practice is often connected with ancient tribal rites of initiation and passage into gendered identity, purity and as preparation for marriage.

In the pre-modern period, Muslim cultures did not mark out a separate period of adolescence between childhood and adulthood. Consequently, religious duties such as praying and fasting are considered obligatory at adulthood marked as the onset of puberty. This is defined as the appearance of one or more of the following signs: the start of menstruation; the appearance of pubic hair on the body; ejaculation or having reached the age of fifteen if no other signs are present. At the other end of the life-cycle, menopause also marks a relaxation of the stricter forms of gender segregation and during Ramadan, the elderly may donate to charity if they are too weak to withstand the rigours of fasting.

Illness is viewed as a test from God that purifies sin, and it is considered highly meritorious to visit with, and take care of the sick. For those near to death, it is the practice of Muslims to sit with them and to recite Quran, pray for them, and encourage them to say the *shahādah* as their final words. The prophet was reported as saying: "If you are in the presence of a sick or dying person, you should say good things, for verily the angels say 'amen' to whatever you say." Once the soul has departed, the eyes are closed and the body covered, awaiting burial preparations and the funeral prayers.

Muslims living in Australia are strongly encouraged to write wills, as those who die intestate are subject to Australian wills and probate laws, which differ from Islamic inheritance laws. The latter are a complex field of Islamic jurisprudence,

with various categories of Muslim relatives receiving predetermined shares of the estate after debts have been settled.

Upon the death of a loved one, family members mourn for three days, with the wife alone mourning longer. Her mourning period is four months and ten days during which she does not dress up or wear makeup, nor can she receive new marriage proposals. It is forbidden for anyone to excessively wail or show extreme outpourings of grief, as it is believed this would distress the soul of the departed. On hearing of the death of a fellow Muslim, the pious utter the phrase: *innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rājiʿūn* “verily, we belong to God, and unto him do we return.” It is highly commendable to pray for the departed, to give charity on their behalf, even to perform the pilgrimage as a proxy if the deceased was unable to go during life. Likewise, it is recommended for the living to visit and pray at the graves of Muslims who have passed away, as a reminder that they too will one day die and stand before God.

Shiite Muslims in particular, mourn the martyrdom of the grandson of the prophet, Ḥusayn, on ‘Āshūrā the tenth day after the Islamic new year. The pious will wear black, avoid listening to music, cry and occasionally thump the chest and self-flagellate, when listening to or watching commemoration dramas surrounding the events of the Battle of Karbala. Sunni Muslims do not commemorate the martyrdom, instead observing a fast on that day and the one preceding or following it as per the prophet’s honouring of Moses’ victory over Pharaoh and his army.

Etiquette in the home

As cleanliness is considered important, particularly the need to observe ritual purity when worshipping God, many Muslims have developed cultural etiquettes designed to protect cleanliness on the body and in the home. These include removing the shoes before entering the home; using perfumes; washing the genitals with water after urination and defecation, using the left hand; using the right hand for eating; and avoiding keeping dogs as pets.

Many religious Muslims avoid keeping statues--three dimensional figures--in their homes, and some even avoid hanging pictures or watching television, based on an interpretation of sacred law in which it is considered prohibited to make pictures that imitate the likeness of creatures that have souls (animate beings). Other Muslims believe the prohibition does not cover photography and moving images.

Music is another contentious issue for those Muslims who believe that listening to the use of musical instruments, especially when played in immoral contexts such as where alcohol is being consumed, leads to sin. Exceptions are made for *a capella* singing that is in keeping with Islamic morality, and the use of a tamborine-like drum. On the other hand, other scholars assert there is no general prohibition on music and musical instruments, only that which glorifies un-Islamic sentiments such as polytheism or adultery, and music has long been used in many Sufi orders in devotional practices. In Australia, a great many Muslims listen to secular as well as religious music, and popular Muslim singers and hip-hop artists

include Yusuf Islam (formerly known as Cat Stevens), Dawud Wharansby Ali, Sami Yusuf, Zain Bhikha and the groups Native Deen, Outlandish and Raihan.

Dress

The Quran encourages men and women to dress in beautiful clothes, particularly for prayer and when visiting the mosque. "Children of Adam, wear your best clothes to every place of worship! Eat and drink, yet do not overdo things; he does not love the extravagant" (Q7:31). This encouragement, however, must be understood in the context of the Islamic virtue of modesty. The prophet noted: "Every religion has its characteristic, and the characteristic of Islam is modesty." Islam prescribes principles of a dress code and manners of interaction between men and women from puberty onwards, in which sexuality is de-emphasised in the public sphere. The Quran says: Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their modesty: that will be purer for them. God is aware of what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their modesty, and that they display not their ornaments except what appears of them. And that they draw their head covers over their bosoms" (Q24:30-31). Islam distinguishes between close relatives with whom one may relax one's guard, such as parents, grandparents, children, house servants etc. and the wider public in front of whom modesty laws must be observed. These have generally been interpreted to mean that unrelated men and women should maintain a social distance in their interactions, avoid touching except in emergencies (such as when a doctor is called to examine a patient of the opposite sex) and that men and women should wear modest dress in public.

In Islamic sacred law, dress for men and women was mostly discussed in the context of what a Muslim should wear whilst praying, although this was naturally extended to mean appropriate public dress. The minimum standard for men is that they wear loose, opaque clothing that covers at least from the navel to the knees. It is recommended that they cover more, preferably following the example of the prophet whose dress included a cloak and head cover. Men are forbidden from wearing gold, silk, and clothes that mark them as belonging to a religion other than Islam. They are encouraged to keep a beard in the manner of the prophet, and to avoid lengthening their trousers past their ankles if it is a sign of pride.

The minimum standard for women is to cover their whole bodies with loose, opaque clothing, except for the face, hands and feet, although some schools of interpretation state the feet should be covered, and others the face as well. In Australia, Muslim women's attire, particularly the headscarf, is colloquially referred to as the hijab, the meaning of which is a curtain or veiling barrier. The Quran, however, uses more specific vocabulary when discussing female dress. Women may wear gold and silk, but not clothes that mark them as belonging to a religion other than Islam. It is also discouraged for women to wear heavy perfume and make-up in public, other than kohl (used as an eyeliner).

A great many Muslim men and women living in Australia do not observe traditional rules about dress for a variety of reasons. In the post-World War II

period, assimilation and integration was strongly stressed in Australian society. Consequently, many migrants of that generation adopted Western dress and in some cases even changed their names to Anglicised variants, or adopted new names altogether. Other Muslims stress that the point of the Islamic dress code is modesty, and believe that cultures can determine standards of modesty differently. Still others express fears of discrimination if they were to outwardly signal their Muslim beliefs to the wider public, particularly women who feel conspicuous wearing head covers.

Food and drink

Islam contains rules regarding what is halal to eat and drink: “O humankind! Eat of that which is lawful and good in the earth, and follow not the footsteps of the Devil, for he is indeed a declared enemy to you.... But he who is driven by necessity, neither craving nor transgressing, it is no sin for him. For God is forgiving, compassionate” (Q2:168; 173).

As well as meeting the needs of Muslims living in Australia, the sensitive nature of Australia’s valuable export market to Muslim countries relies on the assurance of the halal status of exported meat and foodstuffs, thus various Australian Muslim organisations have developed halal certification codes. Except in cases of dire necessity (when food prohibitions may be temporarily lifted to save life) the Quran prohibits:

- Animals that die by themselves, whether naturally such as through illness, or falling or being gored by another animal
- Blood and blood by-products
- Alcohol
- Pork including derivatives such as some types of gelatine
- Animals that are improperly slaughtered such as that offered to idols.

There are also a number of traditions and legal rulings that prohibit the consumption of:

- Narcotics, i.e. marijuana, cocaine, opium etc.
- Land-based predatory animals
- Donkeys and horses (although there are differences of opinion)
- Rodents, reptiles, worms, insects (except for locusts), pests and amphibians
- Poisonous animals and plants
- Bodily secretions considered unclean
- Normally permissible animals whose diet has contained mostly unclean products, giving the flesh a bad odour.
- Any normally permissible food that has come into contact with something impermissible

In regard to seafood, Shiite Muslims only eat prawns and fish with scales, with

everything else considered prohibited. Most Sunni Muslims eat all types of creatures that live in water including all types of fish, crustaceans and molluscs, although some Sunni Muslims do not eat prawns and crustaceans and others do not eat eel.

Those land-based animals considered permissible to eat must be skillfully slaughtered by a Muslim, as the prophet was recorded as saying: "...If you slaughter, slaughter well. Let each one of you sharpen his blade and let him spare suffering to the animal he slaughters." Meat slaughtered by non-Muslims is considered haram, with the exception of that slaughtered by Jews and Christians as long as the obligatory requirements for Islamic slaughtering are observed. With some differentiation depending on the school of sacred law, these generally include: pronouncing the name of God and extolling his greatness, and using a sharp cutting implement to slit the throat, causing the blood to flow out of the body. The slaughterer must slit the throat in one movement, making sure to cut the windpipe and gullet (and according to some, the jugular vein) but without severing the spinal cord. Other stipulations are given for the slaughter of camels and animals that are killed by hunting.

It is considered preferable to offer the animal water before slaughtering it; to make sure it is calm and unaware of other animals being slaughtered; to make sure the animal does not see the cutting implement; to lie the animal down on its left side with its body facing the direction of prayer; and to hold the animal securely until it is completely dead, only after which it may be skinned and butchered. Australian laws require the stunning of animals before slaughter, although a small number of abattoirs have gained permission to slaughter without stunning.

The ethical treatment of animals according to traditional Islamic sacred law would seem to conflict with the exigencies of large-scale mass slaughtering in commercial abattoirs, and there are a number of Muslims who emphasise the Quranic notion that food should be *tayyib* "good, wholesome" as well as halal. These Muslims are concerned not only with the correct method of ritual slaughter, but also about genetically modified food, the ethical treatment of animals before slaughtering and have environmental concerns about the use of pesticides and toxic chemicals from industry entering the food-chain.

Banking and Finance

Classical Islamic scholars working in the field of jurisprudence were very much interested in economics and finance and developed sophisticated legal interpretations on the rules of borrowing and lending; contracts; currencies; trusts; business partnerships and so on. Perhaps the most important issue, with which Muslim scholars were concerned, was the avoidance of usury as the Quran warns: "O you who believe, fear God and write off anything that remains outstanding from lending with usury if you are believers. If you do not do so, then be prepared to face war declared by God and his messenger! If you repent, you may retain your principal. Do not wrong others and you will not be wronged" (Q2:278-9). Most Muslims interpret interest as included in the definition of usury and so the twentieth century saw the development of innovative banking and finance products

to allow the faithful to avoid the appearance of paying or receiving interest. Muslim-owned businesses and organisations have been joined by major banking institutions, in Australia and overseas, offering what are described as shariah-compliant products. These include mortgages where the lending institution buys a property on behalf of the borrower. The borrower then buys the property for a higher price over a specified period of time, and lives in it while paying rent in proportion to the percentage still owned by the institution.

Notes

The system of transliteration used in this article for Arabic words is based on the ALA-LC Romanization Tables. Where an Arabic word appears in the Oxford English dictionary, the dictionary spelling is used without italicisation, eg. Quran. If the Arabic word is not found, it is transliterated and italicised.

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