

## Common misconceptions about Islam

### Common misconceptions about Islam answered

#### Misconceptions # 1: Islam is a religion only for Arabs

Of the two billion Muslims worldwide, only 15% to 20% are Arabs. There are more Indian Muslims than Arab Muslims and more Indonesian Muslims than Indian Muslims! Belief that Islam is only a religion for Arabs is a myth that was spread by the enemies of Islam early in its history. This mistaken assumption is possibly based on the fact that most of the first generation of Muslims were Arabs, the Quran is in Arabic and the Prophet Muhammad was an Arab. However, both the teachings of Islam and the history of its spread show that the early Muslims made every effort to spread their message to all nations, races and peoples. Furthermore, it should be clarified that not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs. An Arab can be a Muslim, Christian, Jew, atheist - or of any other religion or ideology. Also, many countries that some people consider to be Arab are not Arab at all - such as Turkey and Iran (Persia). The people who live in these countries speak languages other than Arabic as their native tongues and are of different ethnic heritage. It is important to realize that from the very beginning of the mission of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), his followers came from a wide spectrum of geographic and religious origins -- there was Bilaal, the Abyssinian slave; Suhaib, the Byzantine Roman; Ibn Salaam, the Jewish Rabbi; and Salmaan, the Persian. Islam teaches that God's revelations to mankind have always been consistent, clear and universal. Islam is meant for all people regardless of race, nationality or linguistic background. Taking a look at the Muslim World, from Nigeria to Bosnia and from Malaysia to Afghanistan is enough to prove that Islam is a universal message for all of mankind -- not to mention the fact that significant numbers of Europeans and Americans of all races and ethnic backgrounds are accepting Islam as their way of life.

#### Misconception # 2: Muslims worship Muhammad

According to Islamic belief, the Prophet Muhammad was the last Messenger of God. He, like all of God's prophets and messengers such as Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus - was only a human being. Some people have the mistaken assumption that Muslims worship Muhammad because Christians worship Christ. This is one of the reasons that they called Muslims by the incorrect name "Muhammadans" for so many years! Muhammad, like Jesus, never claimed divine status. He called people to worship only Almighty God and he continually emphasized his humanity so that people would not fall into the same errors as others did with regard to Jesus. In order to prevent his deification, the Prophet Muhammad always said to refer to him as the Messenger of God and His slave. "Muhammad was God's final messenger - entrusted to communicate the message not only in words but also to be a living example of the message. Muslims love and respect him because he was of the highest moral character and he brought a religion of pure monotheism, or Islam. Even when Islam was in its very early stages, God revealed that Muhammad "was sent as a mercy to all of mankind" - thus informing

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us that the message of Islam would become very widespread. Muslims strive to follow the great example of Muhammad (peace be upon him), but they do not worship him in any way. Additionally, Islam teaches Muslims to respect all of God's prophets and messengers - but respecting and loving them does not entail worshipping them. All true Muslims realize that all worship and prayer must be directed to Almighty God alone. Suffice it to say that worshipping Muhammad --- or anyone else --- along with Almighty God is considered to be the worst sin in Islam. Even if a person claims to be Muslim, but he worships and prays to other than Almighty God, this cancels and nullifies his Islam. The Declaration of Faith of Islam makes it clear that Muslims are taught to worship God only.

This declaration is as follows: "There is nothing worthy of being worshipped except God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God".

### Misconception # 3: Muhammad wrote the Quran

In addressing this misconception, it is interesting to note that no other religious scripture claims to be the direct word of God Almighty in total as clear and as often as the Holy Quran. As God clearly says in the Quran: "if it had been written by man, you would have found many discrepancies therein". [An-Nisaa' 4:82]

{...وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا} النساء: 82

Transliteration: walaw kana min AAindi ghayri Allahi lawajadoo feehi ikhtilafan katheeran

At the time the Quran was revealed, the Arabs recognized that the language of the Quran was unique and that it was distinctly different from the language normally used by the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. It is important to note that the Arabs of that time were known for their beautiful poetry and Muhammad was known to be an illiterate man! The Quran clearly says that Muhammad was unable to read and write, so if this wasn't true, certainly his contemporaries would have protested and rejected him, refuting him in this regard. However, there are no reports of this. Of course there were people who rejected Muhammad's message, just like other prophets were rejected, but none for this reason. On the contrary, Muhammad, peace be upon him, had thousands of loyal followers and the results of their efforts spread Islam from Spain to China in just over a century! It is also interesting to point out that even though the Quran is not poetry, the Arabs essentially quit writing poetry after it was revealed. It could be said that the Quran is a piece of Arabic literature par excellence -and Muhammad's contemporaries realized that they couldn't outdo it. Additionally, it is easy to prove that Muhammad did not possess a great deal of the knowledge that is expounded in the Quran, such as knowledge of historical events, previous prophets and natural scientific phenomenon, subjects about which Muhammad could not have known about. So, again, if this wasn't true, certainly his contemporaries would have rejected his claims.

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Suffice it to say that not only is the Quran the most memorized and well preserved scripture on earth, it is also unequalled in eloquence, spiritual impact and clarity of message.

### Misconception #4: Women in Islam

Even though many aspects of Islam are misunderstood by non-Muslims, the ignorance, misinformation and incorrect assumptions that are made with regard to Islam's treatment of women are probably the most severe. Numerous verses of the Quran make it clear that men and women are equal in the sight of God. According to the teachings of Islam, the only thing that distinguishes people in the sight of God is their level of God-consciousness. Due to this, many people are surprised to learn that Islamic Law guaranteed rights to women over 1400 years ago which women in Europe and America only obtained recently. For example, Islam clearly teaches that a woman is a full- person under the law and is the spiritual equal of a male. Also, according to Islamic Law, women have the right to own property, operate a business and receive equal pay for equal work. Women are allowed total control of their wealth, they cannot be married against their will and they are allowed to keep their own name when married. Additionally, they have the right to inherit property and to have their marriage dissolved in the case of neglect or mistreatment. Also, Islam does not consider woman an "evil temptress", and thus does not blame woman for the "original sin".

Women in Islam participate in all forms of worship that men participate in. Actually, the rights that Islam gave to women over 1400 years ago were almost unheard of in the West until the 1900s. For example, less than fifty years ago in Britain and North America, a woman could not buy a house or car without the co-signature of her father or husband.

Islam gives great respect to women and their role in society by preserving their dignity and integrity as members of the community. It should be mentioned that the Prophet Muhammad's mission stopped many of the horrible practices that women were subject to in the society of his time. For example, the Quran put an end to the pagan Arab practice of killing unwanted daughters when they were born. Additionally, Islam put restrictions on the unrestricted polygamy of the Arabs of the time, and put many laws in place to protect the well-being of women.

Many of the misconceptions regarding the treatment of women in Islam are falsely attributed to the religion. In actuality, the real problem is that in many places, cultural traditions alien to Islam have come to overshadow its teachings either through ignorance or the impact of colonialization. Islam has clearly given women their rights. It is just that people unrightfully withhold them due to their culture.