

Unit 2: Religion

Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

Be aware of the following

- Sharia's all-pervasive description of the relationship of a Muslim with God
- Islam means submission; Muslim identifies "one who submits"
- Absolute, non-changing nature of Islamic law
- Major Saudi Arabian holiday periods
 - Nature of the Ramadan fast

Identify

- Mecca, Muhammad, Islam, Muslim
- Sunni, Shiite, Ali, Qur'an
- Zakat, Five Pillars, Hajj, Sawm, Shahadah, Salat
- Sharia, Sunna
- Ijma, Ijtihad
- Inshallah
 - Determinism

Realize

- To live in Islam is to live in Sharia
- Complexity of the Sharia
- Extent of God's presence and providence in the Muslim world
- Benefits of knowing about Islam when in Muslim circles
- Dos and taboos within mosques
 - Family focus of Ramadan observance

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1. History of Islam Islam, from the Arabic word "aslama" (submission), is a way of life for the Arab world. The Islamic religion was founded by Muhammad, the last prophet of the one god, Allah.



Muhammad was born in Mecca in AD 570. At age 40, he had a visitation from the Archangel Gabriel, who revealed to him the contents of the Qur'an, the Muslim holy book, and gave him the task of cleansing Mecca of pagan shrines. Forced to flee Mecca because of his teachings, he returned at the head of an army of followers and made it the main holy city of Islam.

Within a short period, Islamic armies conquered and spread the faith in an area greater than that of the Roman Empire.

With the death of Muhammad, there occurred a religious split which exists to this day. Sunni (SOON-nee), or Orthodox, Muslims believe that the leadership of Islam can pass to any individual according to merit, much as secular leaders emerge. Shiite (SHEE-it) Muslims take their title from Shiat Ali (Partisans of Ali).

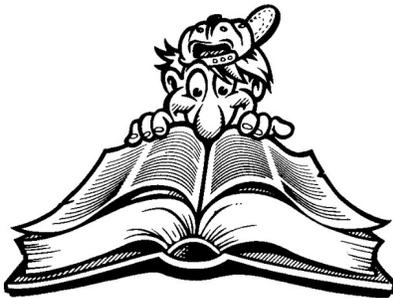
Ali was the son-in-law and cousin of Muhammad. They believe that only direct descendants of Muhammad should be leaders of Islam. Shiite Muslims are a small minority of the total Muslim population of the Arabian Peninsula. Whatever their sect, Muslims practice the five duties required by the Qur'an (the Five Pillars of Islam):

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| SHAHADAH | (sha-HAHD-ah) Profession of the faith—"There is no god but god (Allah), and Mohammed is his prophet." |
| SALAT | (shul-LAHT) The recitation of prayers five times a day, facing toward Mecca (dawn, noon, late afternoon, sunset, evening). |
| ZAKAT | (ZA-kat) The giving of alms to the poor. |

SAWM (SOO-uhm) Fasting between first light and sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.

HAJJ (HAHJ) Completion of a pilgrimage to Mecca.

2. Islamic Law Islamic law, known as the Shari'a (sha-REE-ah) is perhaps the one aspect of the Arab culture which arouses the most prejudices among individuals not of the Islamic faith.



The Shari'a is often thought of by non-Muslims as barbaric, cruel, inhuman, and uncivilized. It is often believed that the cutting off of a thief's hand, the stoning of the adulterer, and the veiling of women comprise the substance of Islamic law. These notions are incorrect.

The Shari'a is not merely a collection of "do's and don'ts," nor just a set of criminal laws prescribing punishments for certain crimes. Because the basic source of the Shari'a is considered the word of God revealed to the prophet Muhammad, the Shari'a encompasses the total relationship between the Muslim man and his God.

This relationship is expressed by the very word "Islam" (submission). The Muslim man submits to Allah by following his will and the guidance brought by the prophets as compiled in the Qur'an.

The Shari'a is therefore considered to be the divinely ordained code of behavior and the prescribed way of life for man. To live in Islam is to live by the Shari'a.

The second source of the Shari'a is the "Sunna" (SOON-nuh, the way or tradition), the life example set by the prophet Muhammad, consisting of what he did, or said, or approved during his prophethood while guiding and directing his followers.

The other two sources are the Ijma, the historically continuous consensus of the Muslim community, and the Ijtihad, the human endeavor to understand and solve human problems in the light of the Qur'an and the Sunna. The Shari'a consists of things which are

- a. Expressly prohibited (Haram)
- b. Expressly enjoined (Wajib)
- c. Disliked but not prohibited (Mukruh)
- d. Recommended but not enjoined (Mundub)
- e. Simply permitted through silence (Mubah)

Many do not realize that whatever is not prohibited is permitted and a major part of human life lies under the Mubah, as the Shari'a prohibits only a few things and stresses moderation and balance in all activities.

Although Islamic law may sound puzzling, its basic concept of divine manifestation cannot be amended to conform to changing human values or standards. It is an absolute norm to which all Muslim values and conduct must conform. The Shari'a is not equivalent only to laws enforceable through political authority, though they are an important and integral part of it. It overwhelmingly consists of morals, manners, and regulations, from worship to statecraft, which depend for compliance entirely upon a Muslim's conscience.



To condemn Islamic law without understanding its roots and how it encompasses the totality of the Moslem man's life, prejudices oneself against the full spectrum of the Arab culture. The complexity of the Shari'a requires extensive personal study to appreciate fully its precepts.

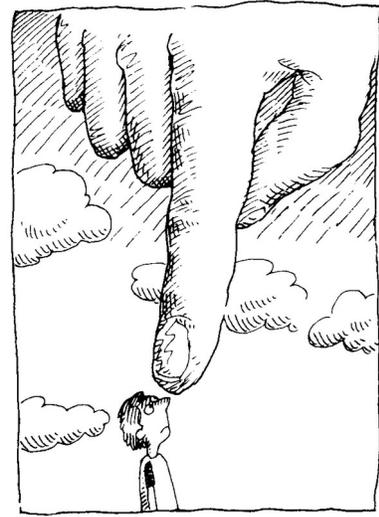
3. Religion in Daily Life In Saudi Arabia, religion is all-important in the daily lives of the people. Perhaps nothing reveals this more than does the Saudis' repeated use, in their conversations, of the phrase *inshallah* (in-SHAH-ahl-lah), which means "God willing" or "if God wills it." Arabs always use this phrase with anything they say concerning things that are to take place in the future.

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They feel that whatever takes place in the future is the result of God's will and that they dare not presume to make a statement

about, or in any sense predict, any future action without adding the phrase *inshallah*.

a. Determinism in Social Thought The Saudi can more easily maintain his dignity in the face of failure because of his belief that God (Allah) determines all things--an individual's life as well as the course of world events.



God's presence and providence is felt much more strongly than in the Western World. Consequently, His name appears on official correspondence, and it is invoked in a wide variety of circumstances, particularly in expressions of hope. For many Saudis, the oil wealth of the kingdom appears to be bounty from God, not the result of a chance discovery and deliberate exploitation of a natural resource. For Muslims in general, history is not the record of human progress; rather, it is the record of God's intervention in human affairs.

Within traditional Arab society, the determinist mind-set engendered the belief that all planning is futile and that man is virtually powerless to change or improve the conditions of life. Such attitudes have recently been challenged as a consequence of the government's ongoing campaign to modernize the armed forces, infrastructure, educational system, and health services of the kingdom. However, the belief in determinism remains as a convenient excuse for those Saudis who are not eager to exert themselves. Even motivated individuals lapse into that mind-set when they confront especially difficult problems.

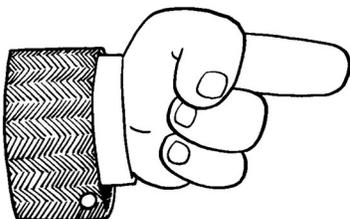
In Arab society, belief in determinism complements passive behavior. It is certainly an interesting question as to which cultural pattern is older. However, both may derive from the same set of conditions--the historic economic dependency of the Arabian peninsula. Except for

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the frankincense and myrrh of antiquity and the oil of
today, the

Arabs had no valuable commodities to export. Without wood to build ships, they were dependent on the seafaring peoples of the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean worlds to generate the commerce which was transported overland by way of camel caravans. Given such conditions, determinism in social thought is understandable.

b. The Visitor and the Muslim



Learn as much as you can about Islam.

Many Saudis enjoy talking about religion with foreigners after they have become friends. Quite often they are interested in comparing Christianity with Islam.

The more you know about Islam, the easier it will be to talk about this subject. (Be sure, though, not to show a negative attitude toward their religion). Also, understanding Islam will make it generally much easier for you to live and function in Saudi Arabia.

Always respect the Saudis' customs and performance of their religious duties. Saudi customs are hallowed by tradition and must be observed by Saudis. For example, Islam expects its followers to pray regularly, wherever they might be, and in Saudi Arabia both the government and society require their people to adhere to this. Therefore you, as an American, must respect a Saudi's need to perform this and any other religious duties.

Most Mosques are closed to all non-Moslems unless special permission is obtained. If you obtain permission to visit a mosque, remove your shoes prior to entering, speak only in whispers, and do not attempt to take photographs.



You will see Moslems at prayer wherever they happen to be when the call for prayer is heard. Do not stare or take photographs while they are praying. Respect the requirement

for Moslems to fast during the holy month of Ramadan. Do not offer food, beverages, or tobacco products to Moslems during the hours of fasting (dawn to sunset) and attempt to avoid eating or smoking in their presence. In some Arab countries, soldiers on duty are exempt from the fasting requirement.

4. Holidays In Saudi Arabia, there are two main holiday periods—the feast which follows the Ramadan fast (Arabic, 'Id al-Fitr, i-EED-ahl-FAHT-ehr) and the feast which follows the Annual Pilgrimage (Arabic, 'Id al-Adha, i-EED-ahl-OOHD-hah).



These conform with the Islamic calendar, which, being based on lunar months, is 10 or 11 days shorter than the Western year. Otherwise, Saudi National Day falls on 23 September of the Western calendar, but the date is normally not observed by the natives. For the two feasts, the government announces official holidays of three or four days. However, it is often the case that Saudis employed in government and military service take about two weeks off from work. Celebration of the feast following Ramadhan has a family focus, while the other feast involves more visiting and entertaining.

Regarding Ramadan itself, the fast is prescribed for the time between dawn and dusk. During the night hours, Muslims take a special nutritional meal and otherwise engage in shopping and visiting. Nonetheless, the requirements of the fast can be harsh, especially abstention from drinking water when Ramadan falls during the hot months of the year. Westerners must be careful not to eat, drink, or smoke in the presence of Muslims during the prescribed hours of fasting. The law requires adherence to the fast in public.



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Saudi holidays are not occasions for military ceremonies. These do occur, but they are mostly confined to bases and training areas and usually involve a pass in review. Appropriate occasions include high level change of command, graduation from formal courses, completion of modernization training or related reorganization. The armed forces provide honor guard details at airports for the reception of visiting dignitaries. Occasionally, troops will line the streets along the route of a motorcade; however, they do not parade through them. During holiday times, officers and men of the National Guard may assemble in some public place to perform the traditional sword dance, which derives from the tribal ritual of old Arabia.



"I truly believe that the ultimate determinant in the struggles that we will face will not be tanks and airplanes, but a test of wills and national character...a trial of spiritual resolve...the values we hold...the beliefs we cherish...the ideals to which we are dedicated."

General Charles C. Krulak

Review Quiz: Religion

Multiple Choice Place the letter of the most correct answer in the blank provided.

1. _____ The Sharia is
 - a. a list of Muslim "dos" and "don'ts."
 - b. Muslim guidance stressing moderation and balance in all activities.
 - c. a simple, easy to understand outline of Muslim behavior.

2. _____ What branch of Islam believes that leadership must pass directly from the blood descendants of Muhammad?
 - a. Sunni
 - b. Shia
 - c. Sufi

3. _____ The five duties prescribed by the Qur'an are also known as the five
 - a. life principles.
 - b. pillars.
 - c. foundation stones.

4. _____ Islam comes from the Arabic word meaning
 - a. one God.
 - b. submission.
 - c. loved one.

5. _____ During the Ramadan fast, participants
 - a. can drink fluids in moderation during the day.
 - b. must not eat or drink from sunup to sundown.
 - c. invite relatives and friends over for a mid-afternoon feast.

6. _____ For Muslims, history is a record of
 - a. human progress.
 - b. God's intervention in human affairs.
 - c. human foibles and inconsistencies.

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7. _____ Another term for Islamic law is the
- a. Hajj.
 - b. Shahadah.
 - c. Sharia.
8. _____ What branch of Islam believes that any individual--based on personal merit--can accept the leadership of Islam?
- a. Sunni
 - b. Shia
 - c. Sufi
9. _____ The two main Saudi Arabian holidays are feasts held following Ramadan and
- a. on Muhammad's birthday.
 - b. after the Annual Pilgrimage.
 - c. on National Day.
10. _____ According to Muslim thought, the Archangel Gabriel gave Muhammad the task of
- a. cleansing Mecca of pagan shrines.
 - b. making Meccan citizens Muslim converts.
 - c. building the Kaabah in Mecca.