

## ASIAN FACTS

## Islam

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

In an effort to provide readers who are unfamiliar with Islam with basic information about the religion, we devoted this issue's "Asian Facts" page to Islam. All information is excerpted from *World Religions Today* by John L. Esposito, Darrell J. Fasching, and Todd Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press), 2002.

- Islam means submission or surrender to God.
- Christians and Jews trace their genealogy to Abraham through Sara and her son Isaac. Muslims represent the other branch of the family, who descended from Abraham's son Ismail and his mother Hagar.

Islam is one of the world's fastest growing religions, with 1.2 billion followers in some 56 countries. Islam is the second largest religion in the world, second to Christianity, which has 1.9 billion followers.

- Arabs constitute only 20 percent of Muslims. The vast majority live in non-Arab societies: Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, and Nigeria.
- Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, is monotheistic.
- Muhammad (570CE–632CE) was born in the Arabian city of Mecca to the ruling tribe, but of a family of modest means. He was an orphan by six and was raised by his uncle.

Employed in the caravan business. Met and married Khadijah, a wealthy widow, and became a prominent member of Meccan Society.

In 610 he was, according to tradition, revisited by the angel Gabriel, received revelations, and became the messenger of God. For more than two decades (610–632) Muhammad received further revelations that became the text of the *Qur'an* or "the recitation or discourse."

After ten years of rejection and persecution in Mecca, in 622 Muhammad and his followers migrated to Yathrib, later renamed Medina. Muhammad became the religious and political leader of Medina. This emigration, or *hijra*, marked a revitalization and expansion of Islam.

Muhammad did not create a new religion, but was a prophet and reformer of an existing one.

Muhammad used force and diplomacy to unite the tribes of Arabia under the banner of Islam.

- Islamic law consists of two main divisions. *Ibadat* concerns a Muslim's duties to God, and *muamalat* concerns one's duties to others or social obligations. In particular, the Five Pillars of Islam inform Muslims of their duties to God. They are:

1. The Profession of Faith, or *shahadah*, is repeated at least five times a day, "There is no God but the God and Muhammad is the messenger of God."
2. Five times a day, Muslims are called upon to proclaim *shahadah* during worship, or *salat*, consisting of prayer preceded by a series of ablutions.
3. The third pillar of Islam is the *zakat*, a religious tithe or almsgiving.
4. The Fast of Ramadan—healthy Muslims are required once annually to fast from dawn until dusk during the month of Ramadan, or the ninth month of Islam's lunar calendar.
5. Pilgrimage to Mecca or *hajj*—every physically or financially able adult Muslim is expected to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his or her life.

- The two great branches of Islam are the Sunni and Shiah. Sunnis constitute 85 percent, and Shiahs constitute approximately 15 percent of the global Islamic community.
- Sufis, practitioners of Islamic mysticism, are represented in both of the above branches.