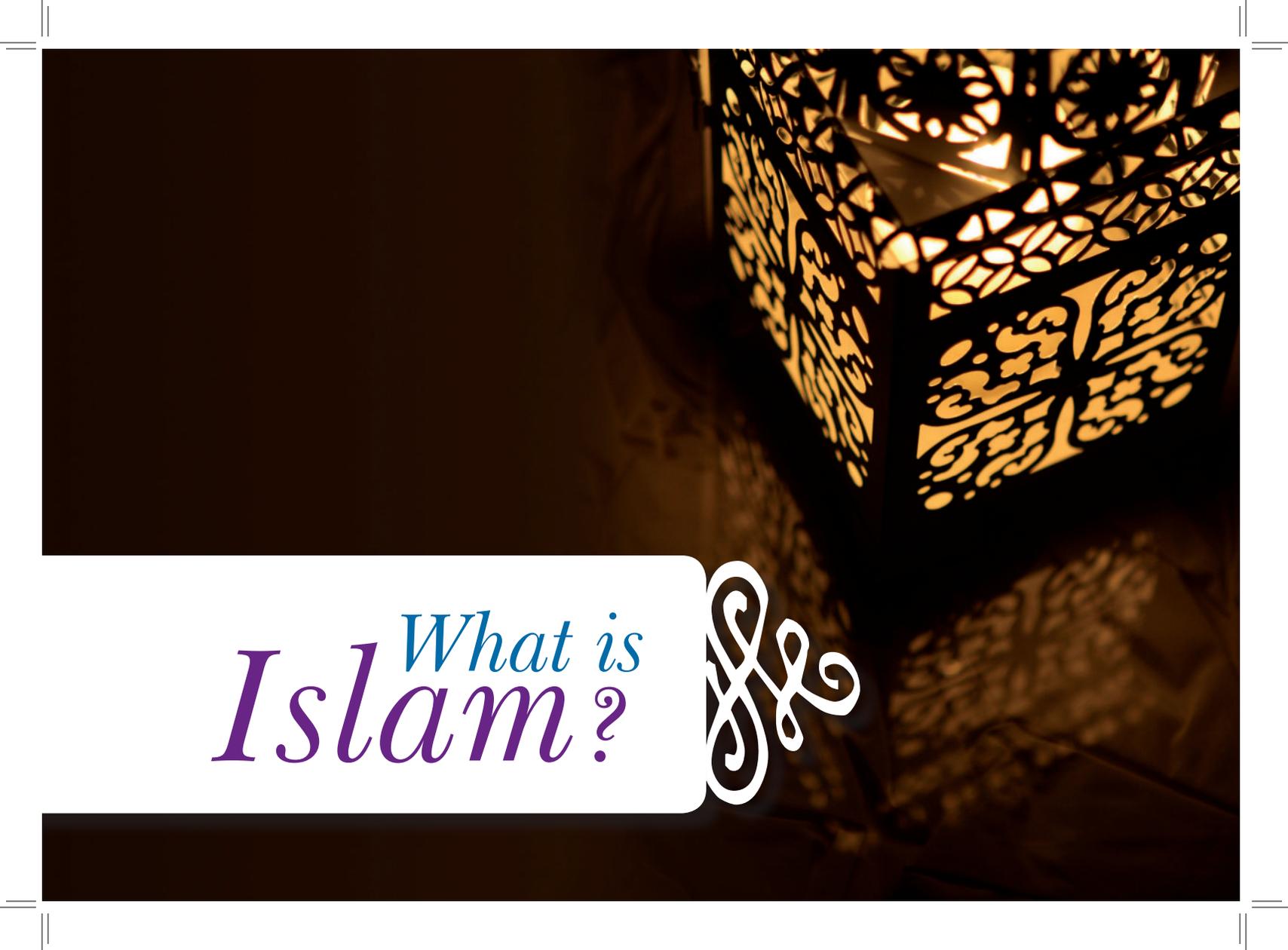


Discover SLAM

A WAMY UK publication

*I*slam has roots in the faith of Abraham, who called people to worship One God, and is often referred to as one of the 'Abrahamic' (monotheistic) faiths, together with Judaism and Christianity. Like the Bible, the Qur'an mentions prophets, angels, miracles, good and bad deeds, reward and punishment, repentance and forgiveness, Heaven and Hell, Adam and Eve, the Torah and the Gospel and many other things that are familiar to Western tradition. The word 'islam' comes from the Arabic word 'aslama', meaning 'peace' and 'submission'. The essence of Islam is that one should acknowledge the Creator and submit to His guidance, which leads to peace and fulfilment in this world and the Next. Muslims believe that Divine guidance has been sent to all peoples on earth at one time or another. God's guidance has been carefully preserved for the benefit of people today in the Qur'an, Islam's holy book, and the Sunnah, or personal example of the final Prophet, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him).





*What is
Islam?*

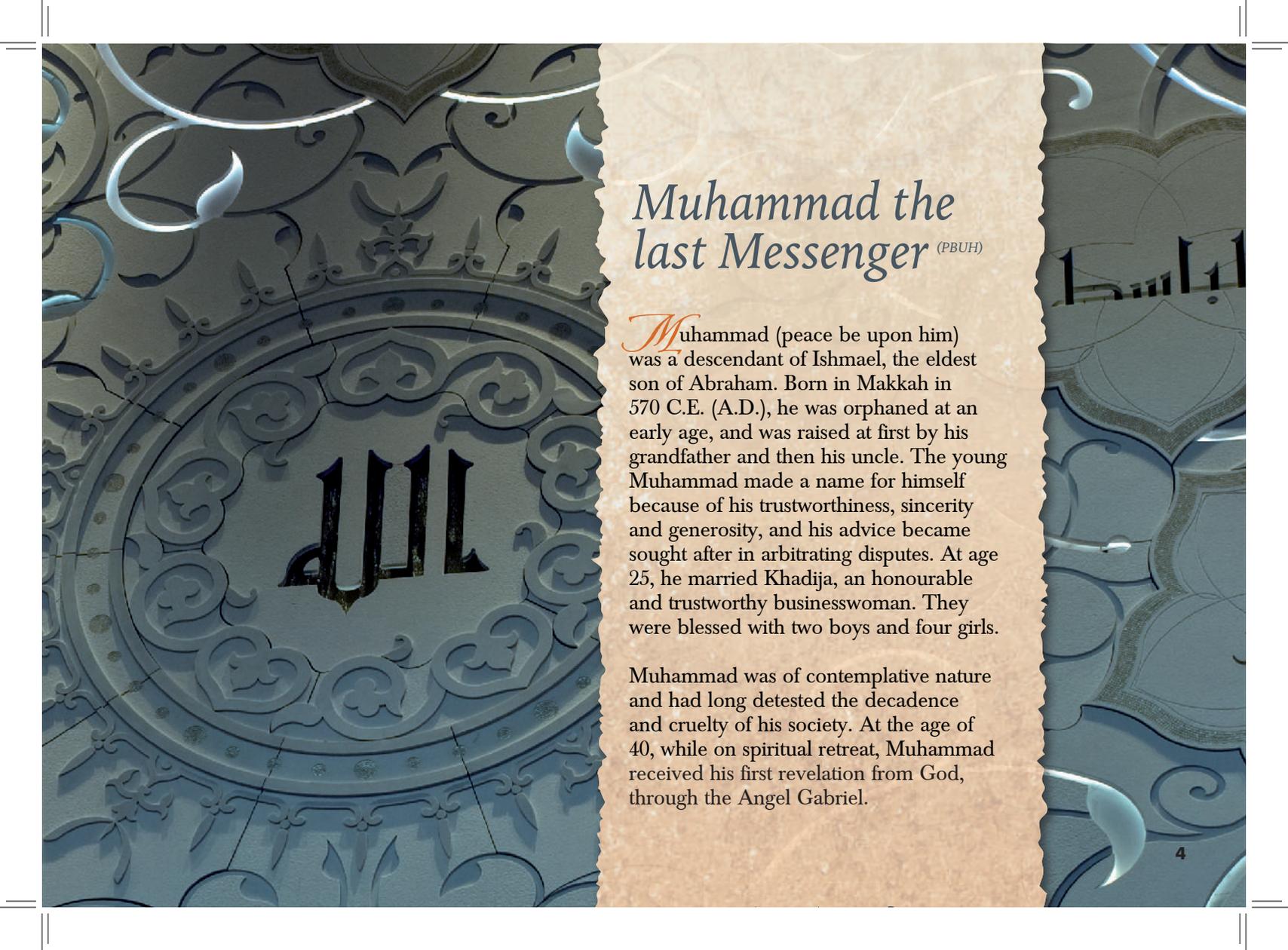


Allah, the Arabic name for God

The only word in Arabic for God, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, is 'Allah', and it is used by Arabic-speaking Christians and Muslims alike; it is not the name of a different god. Ninety-nine additional names of Allah are mentioned in the Qur'an; these refer to Divine attributes such as the Almighty, the Ever-Living, and the All-Knowing, and serve to define the Islamic understanding of God. The most important and frequently mentioned of Allah's names are 'Most Compassionate' and 'Most Merciful'.

Who is a Muslim?

Anyone who believes in One God and acknowledges Muhammad to be His last Prophet and Messenger is a Muslim. Although Islam as we know it began in Arabia and most Muslims learn some Arabic, only 18% of Muslims are Arab. Muslims come from all races, nationalities and cultures across the globe. The majority of Muslims live in Asia and Africa, but there are significant minority communities elsewhere, including China, Europe, India, United States, Canada and South America.



Muhammad the last Messenger ^(PBUH)

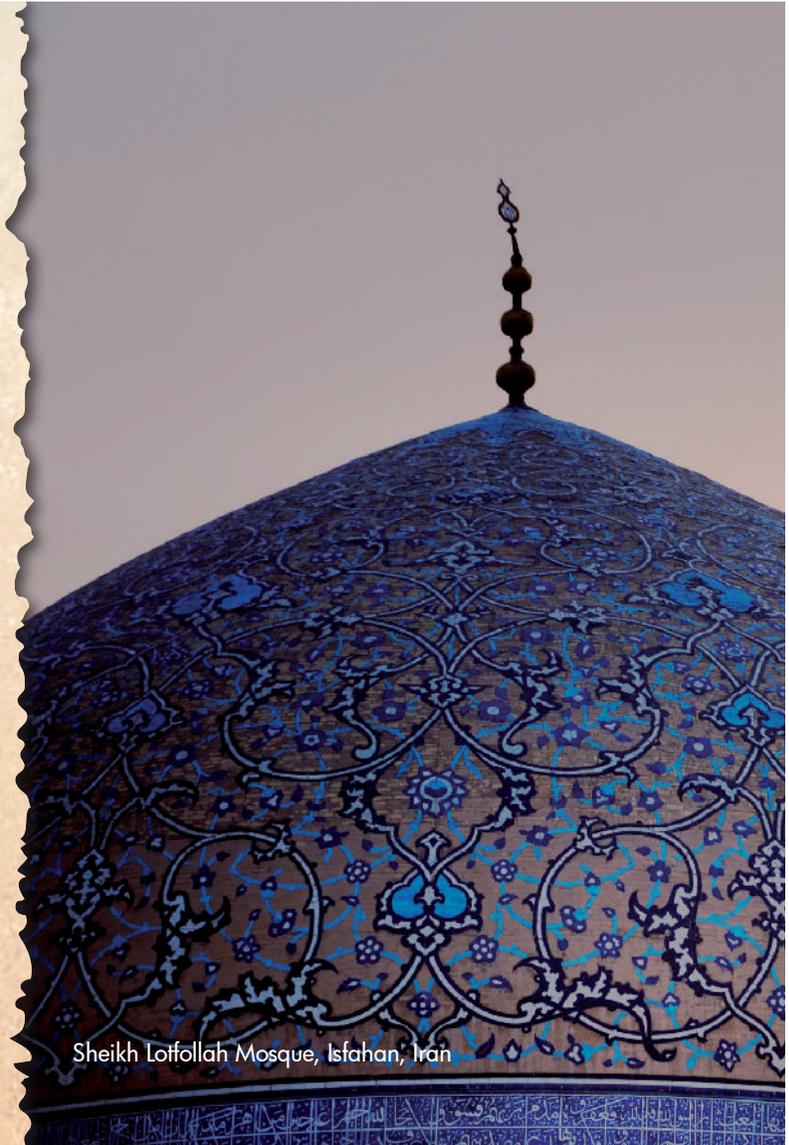
*M*uhammad (peace be upon him) was a descendant of Ishmael, the eldest son of Abraham. Born in Makkah in 570 C.E. (A.D.), he was orphaned at an early age, and was raised at first by his grandfather and then his uncle. The young Muhammad made a name for himself because of his trustworthiness, sincerity and generosity, and his advice became sought after in arbitrating disputes. At age 25, he married Khadija, an honourable and trustworthy businesswoman. They were blessed with two boys and four girls.

Muhammad was of contemplative nature and had long detested the decadence and cruelty of his society. At the age of 40, while on spiritual retreat, Muhammad received his first revelation from God, through the Angel Gabriel.

This was followed by successive revelations over a period of 23 years; together these revelations became known as the Qur'an.

Prophet Muhammad's early followers were mostly young and poor and were bitterly persecuted. They emigrated in search of religious freedom, and were first welcomed in Christian Ethiopia and then, in greater numbers, to the town of Madinah, 260 miles north of Makkah (in Saudi Arabia). This second emigration, in 622, which established Muhammad as the local ruler and enabled the Muslims to settle down, marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

Inspired by the example of a leader who some historians consider the most successful and influential man of all time, Islam spread from Arabia to Spain, Africa, Asia and China within just a century of his death and has touched the hearts and lives of hundreds of millions since.



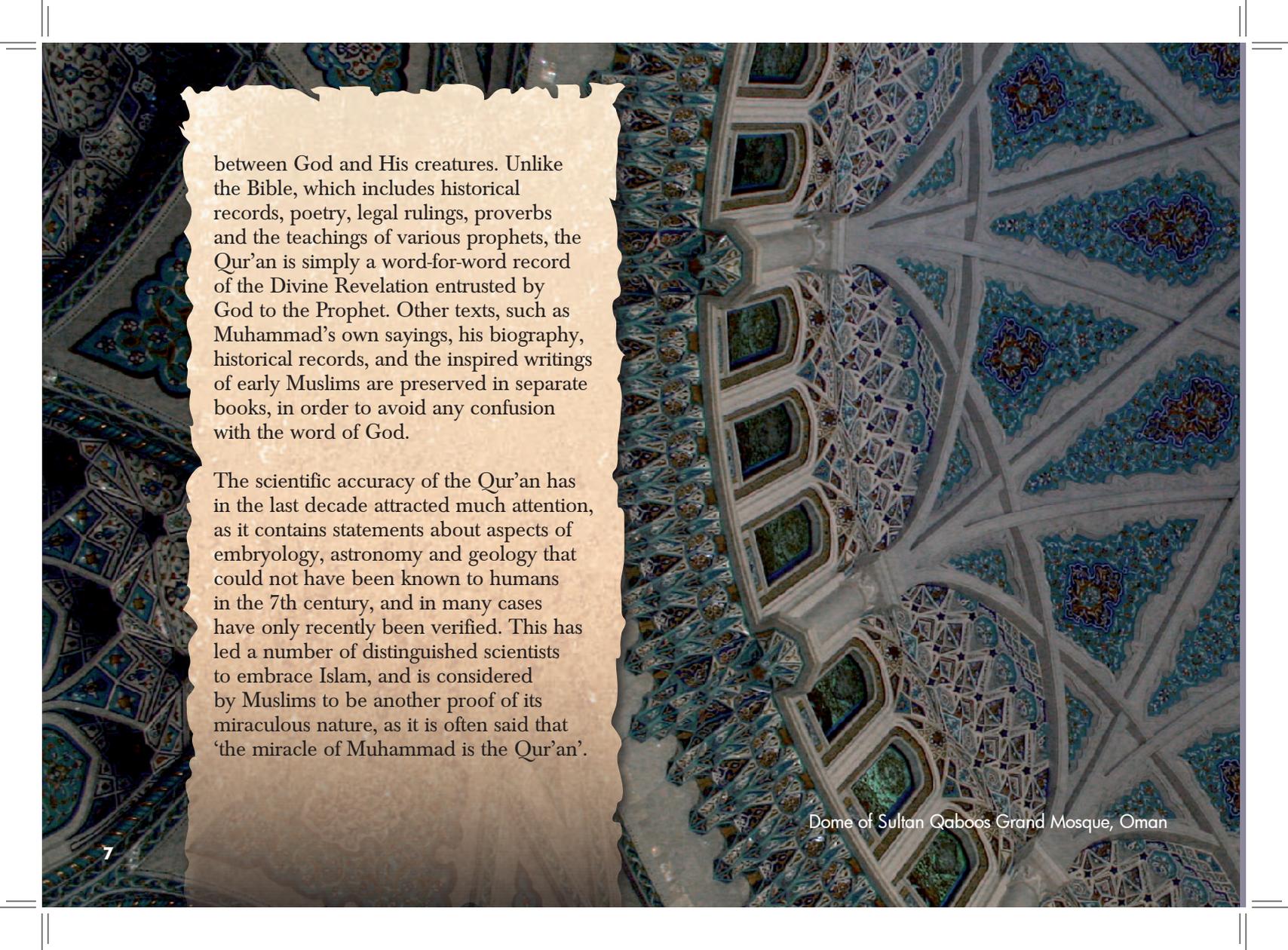
Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Isfahan, Iran

What is the Qur'an?

The word 'Qur'an' means 'the recitation' or 'the reading', and the first words revealed to the Prophet Muhammad were 'Read (or recite), in the name of your Lord!' Previous Scriptures had mostly been written and passed down by elite circles of scribes and priests, but the early Muslims were encouraged to learn the Qur'an by heart as well as to learn to write it, regardless of gender or status. It is now the most-often read book in the world, and the only Scripture that can be memorised in its entirety by people of all ages and abilities, including non-native speakers.

The Qur'an is the principal source of Muslim faith and practice. It is a guidebook dealing with all subjects that concern human beings, from faith and worship, to community and relationships, to economics and even physical science; but its main theme is the relationship





between God and His creatures. Unlike the Bible, which includes historical records, poetry, legal rulings, proverbs and the teachings of various prophets, the Qur'an is simply a word-for-word record of the Divine Revelation entrusted by God to the Prophet. Other texts, such as Muhammad's own sayings, his biography, historical records, and the inspired writings of early Muslims are preserved in separate books, in order to avoid any confusion with the word of God.

The scientific accuracy of the Qur'an has in the last decade attracted much attention, as it contains statements about aspects of embryology, astronomy and geology that could not have been known to humans in the 7th century, and in many cases have only recently been verified. This has led a number of distinguished scientists to embrace Islam, and is considered by Muslims to be another proof of its miraculous nature, as it is often said that 'the miracle of Muhammad is the Qur'an'.

Dome of Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, Oman

Mosques or 'Masajids', are not only places of worship for Muslims, but also are reflections of their cultural identity and heritage.

1 Abu Mansur Mosque
Samarkand, Uzbekistan



1

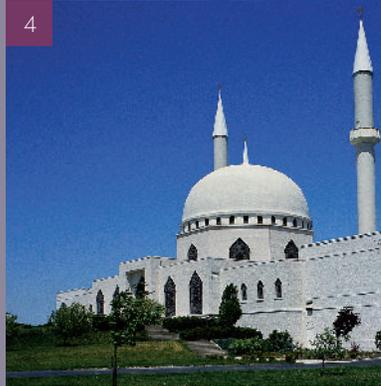


2



3

2 Great Mosque
Xian, China



4



5



6

3 Suleiman Mosque
Istanbul, Turkey

4 Islamic Centre of Toledo
Toledo, USA

5 Jama Mosque
New Delhi, India

6 Sultan Qaboos Mosque
Muscat, Oman



7



8



9

7 Okba bin Nafee Mosque
Kairuan, Tunisia

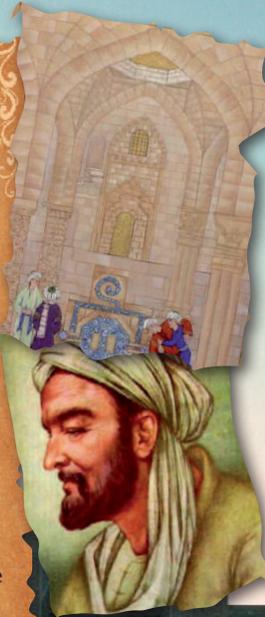
8 Mosque in Bobo
Dioulasso, Burkina Faso

9 London Central Mosque
London, England

8

ISLAM & SCIENCE: MUSLIM SCHOLARS & SCIENTISTS

The Qur'an repeatedly encourages the use of one's reason to reflect on and contemplate the natural world, and wherever its message was accepted, the pursuit of knowledge flourished. The concept of free basic education for all originated in Islam; children learned to read, write, memorise the Qur'an and do basic maths at village mosque schools, while bright students were sent to cities to pursue higher education. The world's first universities, hospitals and public postal services were established by Muslims. Early caliphs set up institutions like Baghdad's 'House of Wisdom', where scholars were paid to translate scientific, literary and religious works from other languages into Arabic. Scholars all over the Muslim world then built on earlier work, conducting their own experiments and making important discoveries

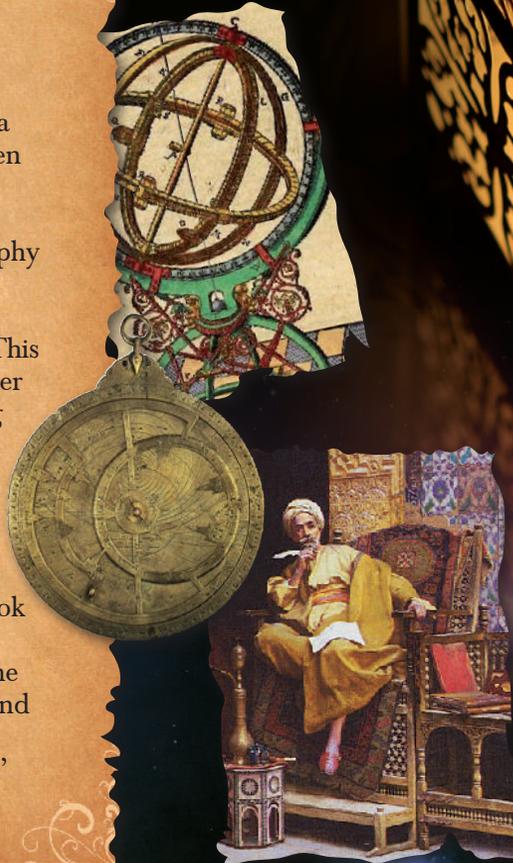


The Registan, Samarkhand, Uzbekistan

and contributions to human culture and civilisation. It was this open-minded pursuit of knowledge that inspired Jewish and Christian scholars in Muslim Spain to translate classical Latin and Greek texts from Arabic into European languages, sparking the European Renaissance. Hence, the conflicts that emerged in Europe during the Middle Ages between religion and science rarely arose in Islam, and most Muslim scientists have also been pious believers.

The Qur'an and science

The Qur'an is free of scientific inaccuracies, while containing many statements about natural phenomena that were only discovered and proven centuries later. Its verses accurately describe aspects of embryology, meteorology, astronomy, oceanography and other sciences; and scientists have found its descriptions to be inexplicable for a 7th century text. This alone has been the cause of a number of distinguished scientists embracing Islam. The Qur'an was never meant to be a 'science textbook'; whether highlighting the wonders of nature or the lessons of history, its verses direct us to reflect on the glory of God. However, no other ancient book or Scripture is accurate in this way. Muslims believe that this is one of the proofs of the Qur'an's authenticity and Divine origin— one of the things that makes it a credible 'living revelation' for a modern age.





*M*uslims believe in the One Unique, Incomparable, Merciful God—the Sole Creator, Master, Sustainer and Cherisher of the Universe; in the Angels created by Him; in the prophets through whom His revelations were brought to humankind; in the Day of Judgment, and in individual accountability for actions; in God’s complete authority over destiny, be it good or bad; and in life after death. Muslims believe that God sent his messengers and prophets to all people. God’s final message to humanity was revealed to the prophet Mohammed, through the Archangel Gabriel.

What Muslims do Believe?



The meaning and purpose of life

*T*he purpose of life from an Islamic perspective is to devote one's life to God's service and to cultivate an awareness and remembrance of Him throughout all one's activities, both spiritual and mundane. Devotion should arise spontaneously out of love for God, awe of His majesty and gratitude for His many blessings. Service assumes many forms – from formal acts of worship such as prayer; to being charitable to one's fellow-human beings; to studying and advancing human knowledge; to raising children and working to earn an honest living. Every good act that a believer does with the intention of pleasing God is considered an act of worship, worthy of reward in the Next Life.

The Oneness of God

A core concept in Islam is that of tawhid, or unity: the belief in One God, Unique and Incomparable, accessible to all, who has a plan for all people in every age. Islam's understanding of God's Unity differs from that of mainstream Christianity: the concept of trinity or 'three-in-one' is not considered compatible with true monotheism, and Muslims consider it impossible that the Creator of the universe could dwell in a human being, or that a man could in any way be God. Similarly, although Allah is referred to as 'He', it is understood that God is Self-Sufficient and transcends physicality, duality and gender; God is neither 'father' nor 'earth goddess'. Allah is described in the Qur'an as being One without partners; eternally Living, needing neither sleep nor rest; All-Hearing, All-Seeing and All-Knowing; Most Merciful, Just and Loving; beyond human comprehension; Ever-Present and closer to ourselves than our jugular vein; who does whatever He wills.

Prophets and Messengers

A prophet, is a man chosen by God to be the spiritual leader of his community, and protected by God from committing major sins in order to serve as a role model. Prophets were granted Divine revelations by God through angels; some of these were recorded in books of Scripture. The Qur'an mentions 25 prophets by name, most of whom are also mentioned in the Bible; of these, five are considered great Messengers: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, the last and final prophet. Muslims revere all true prophets (peace be upon them) but do not worship or pray to them, since in Islam devotion is reserved for God alone.

*Prophets in
the Bible*

Adam

Enoch

Noah

Lot

Abraham

Ishmael

Isaac

Jacob

Joseph

Job

Moses

Aaron

David

Soloman

Jonah

Zachariah

John

Jesus

Muhammad

Adam

Idris

Nooh

Lut

Ibrahim

Isma'il

Ishaq

Ya'qoub

Yusuf

Ayyub

Musa

Haroon

Darwood

Sulaiman

Yunus

Zakariyya

Yahya

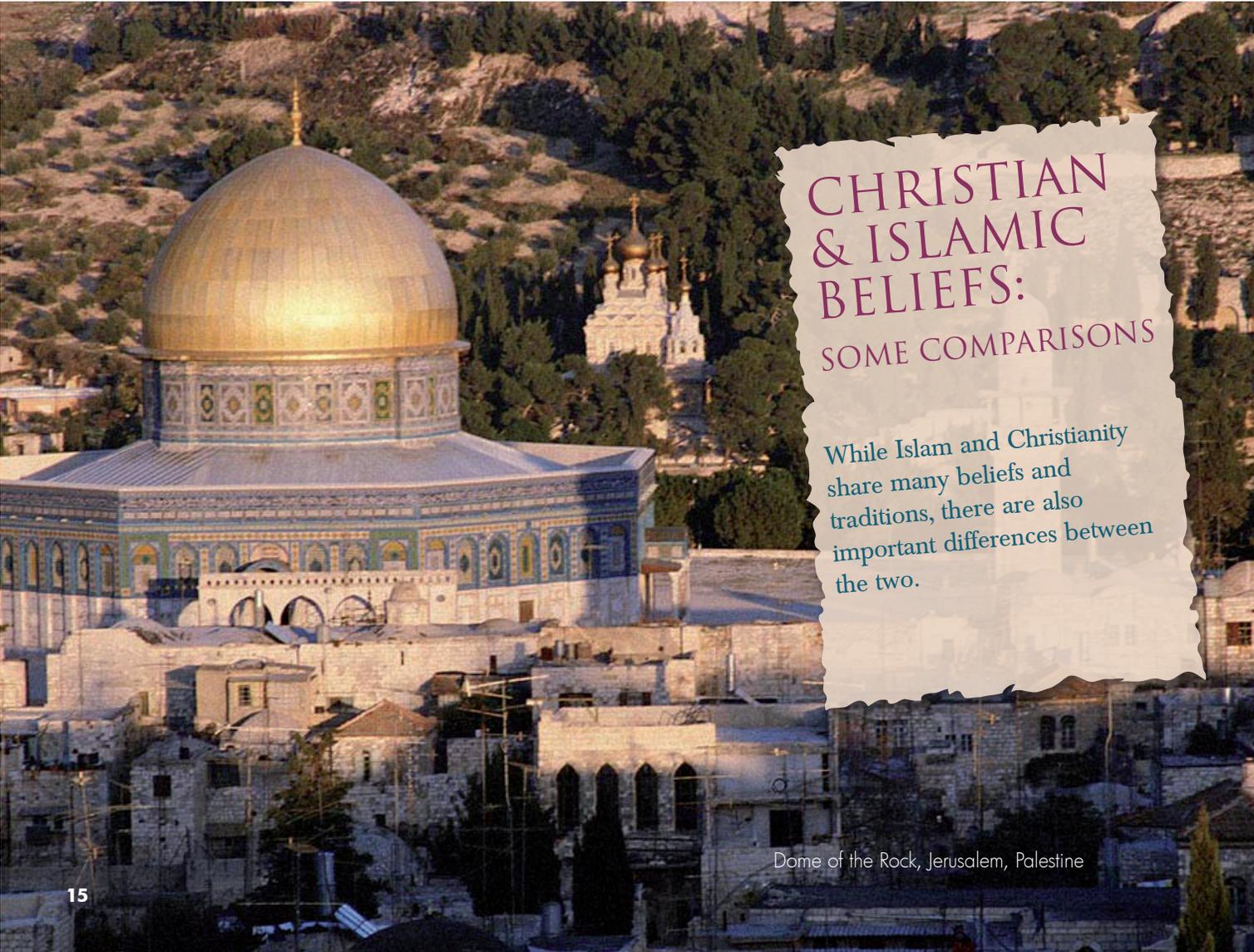
Esa

Muhammad

*Prophets in
the Qur'an*

Scriptures

Scriptures over the ages have provided people with a 'long-term perspective'; they are a rich store of parables and wisdom, and lay out ethical codes of conduct and belief. Injunctions such as 'do not lie, steal or commit adultery; do not take an innocent life; treat others as you would like to be treated' are common to all Scriptures, just as injunctions to pray, be charitable and fast are found in all major religions; they form a solid foundation for an education in virtue. Several earlier Scriptures are mentioned in the Qur'an, including the scrolls of Abraham, the Torah, the Psalms of David and the Gospel. However, the Qur'an states that the texts of earlier Scriptures were lost, changed or corrupted over time so that they no longer can be relied on (a historically verifiable claim). Muslims believe in all true Scriptures as originally revealed by God, but rely only on the Qur'an, which has been preserved exactly in one authorised version in its original Arabic.



CHRISTIAN & ISLAMIC BELIEFS: SOME COMPARISONS

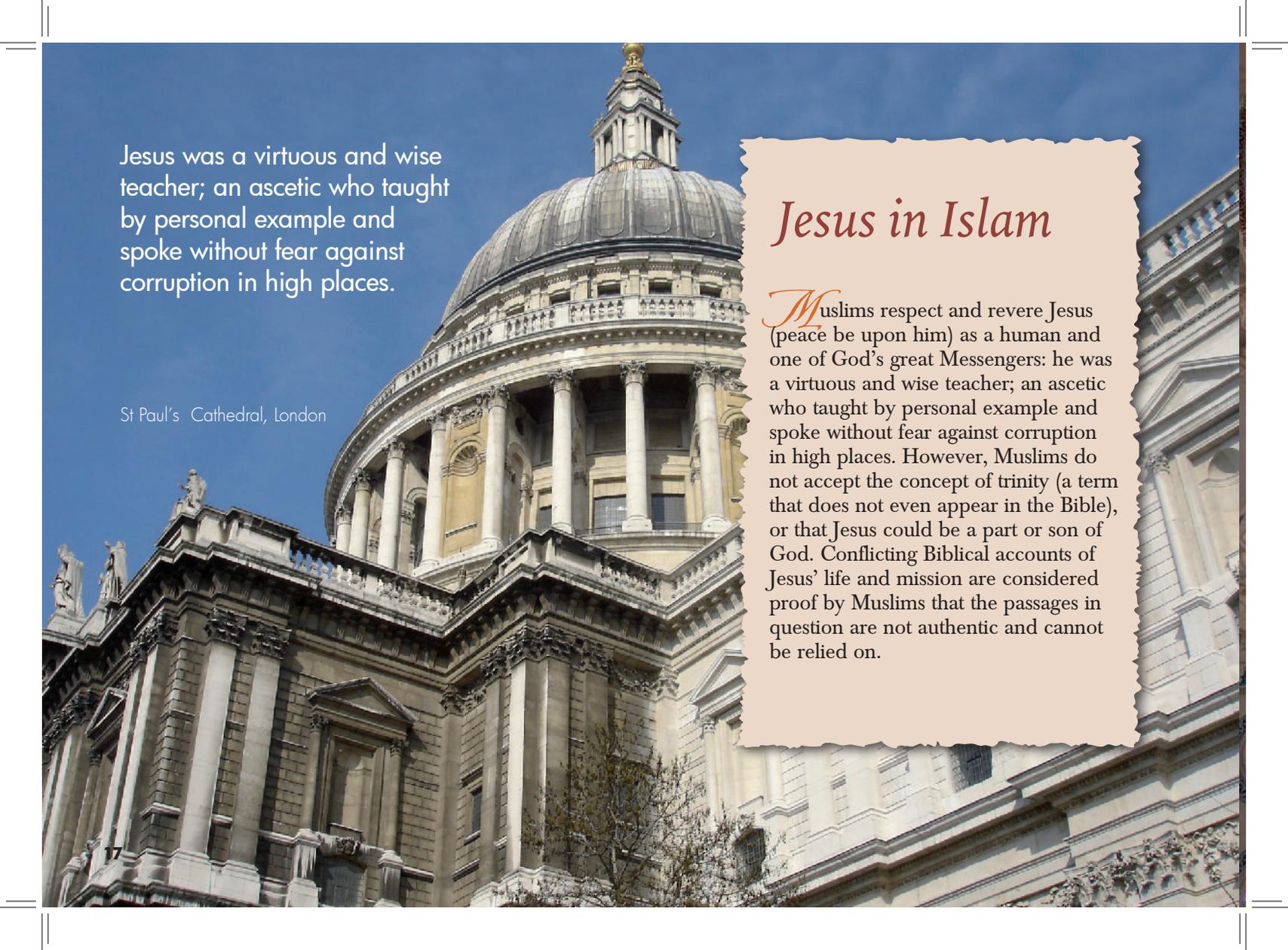
While Islam and Christianity share many beliefs and traditions, there are also important differences between the two.

Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, Palestine



Children: born innocent or sinful?

One key tenet of mainstream Christianity is that of 'Original Sin': the doctrine that all people 'inherit' the first sin of Adam and Eve and are inherently sinful from birth, so that even newborn babies must be baptised in order to be safe from God's punishment. Islam has a more positive view: although people are inclined to be forgetful and to lapse into sinful or bad habits, humans have been created as God's representatives on earth, and are born in a state of *fitra*— a natural inclination to seek goodness, knowledge and beauty. Sin is not inherited; each soul will be held accountable for its own deeds. Children who die before puberty will be admitted to Paradise; they are not considered fully responsible for their actions until they reach young adulthood and are able to reason.

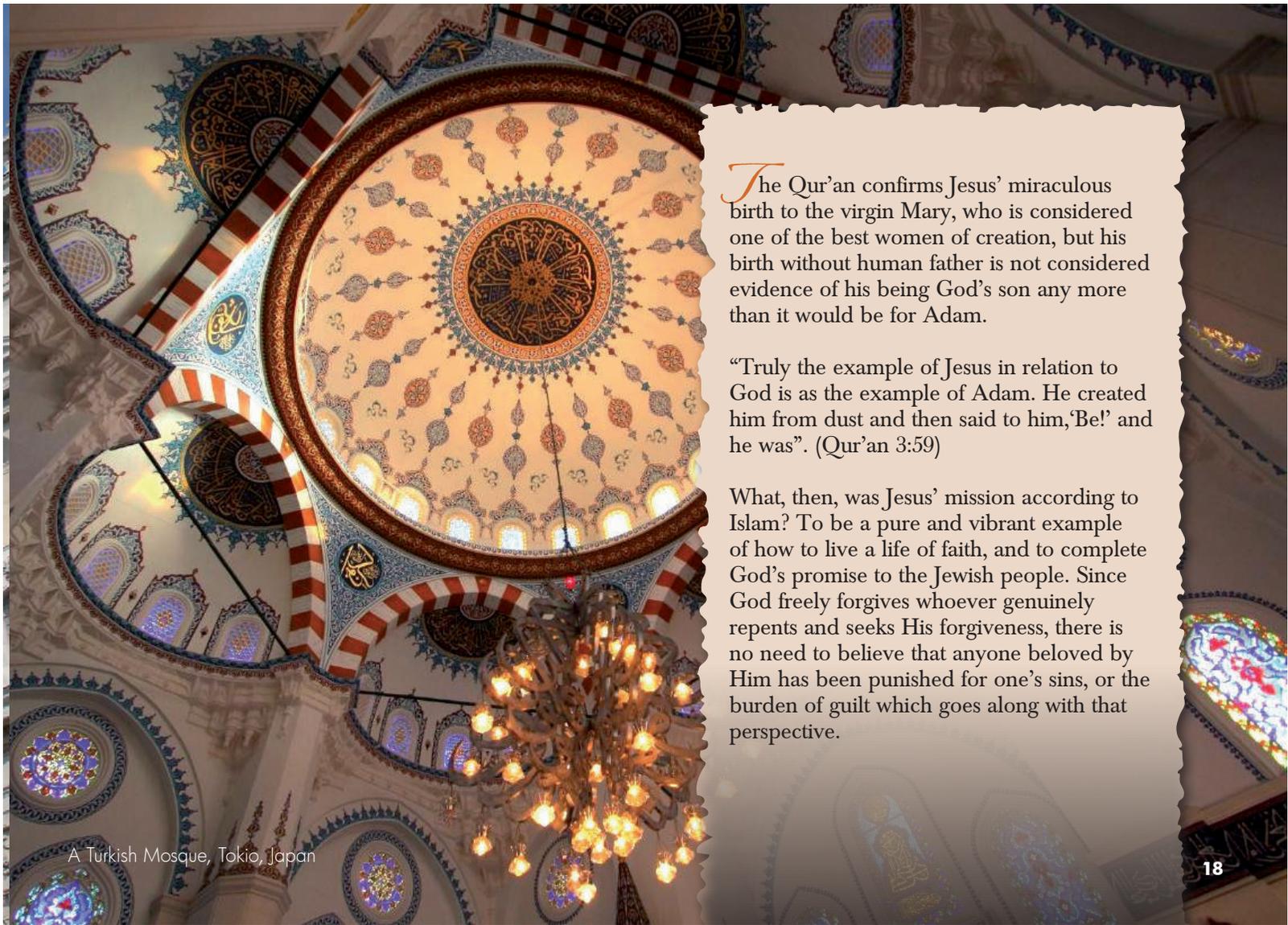
A photograph of St Paul's Cathedral in London, showing its large dome and classical architecture under a clear blue sky. The building is made of light-colored stone with many columns and arches.

Jesus was a virtuous and wise teacher; an ascetic who taught by personal example and spoke without fear against corruption in high places.

St Paul's Cathedral, London

Jesus in Islam

*M*uslims respect and revere Jesus (peace be upon him) as a human and one of God's great Messengers: he was a virtuous and wise teacher; an ascetic who taught by personal example and spoke without fear against corruption in high places. However, Muslims do not accept the concept of trinity (a term that does not even appear in the Bible), or that Jesus could be a part or son of God. Conflicting Biblical accounts of Jesus' life and mission are considered proof by Muslims that the passages in question are not authentic and cannot be relied on.



A Turkish Mosque, Tokio, Japan

The Qur'an confirms Jesus' miraculous birth to the virgin Mary, who is considered one of the best women of creation, but his birth without human father is not considered evidence of his being God's son any more than it would be for Adam.

“Truly the example of Jesus in relation to God is as the example of Adam. He created him from dust and then said to him, ‘Be!’ and he was”. (Qur'an 3:59)

What, then, was Jesus' mission according to Islam? To be a pure and vibrant example of how to live a life of faith, and to complete God's promise to the Jewish people. Since God freely forgives whoever genuinely repents and seeks His forgiveness, there is no need to believe that anyone beloved by Him has been punished for one's sins, or the burden of guilt which goes along with that perspective.

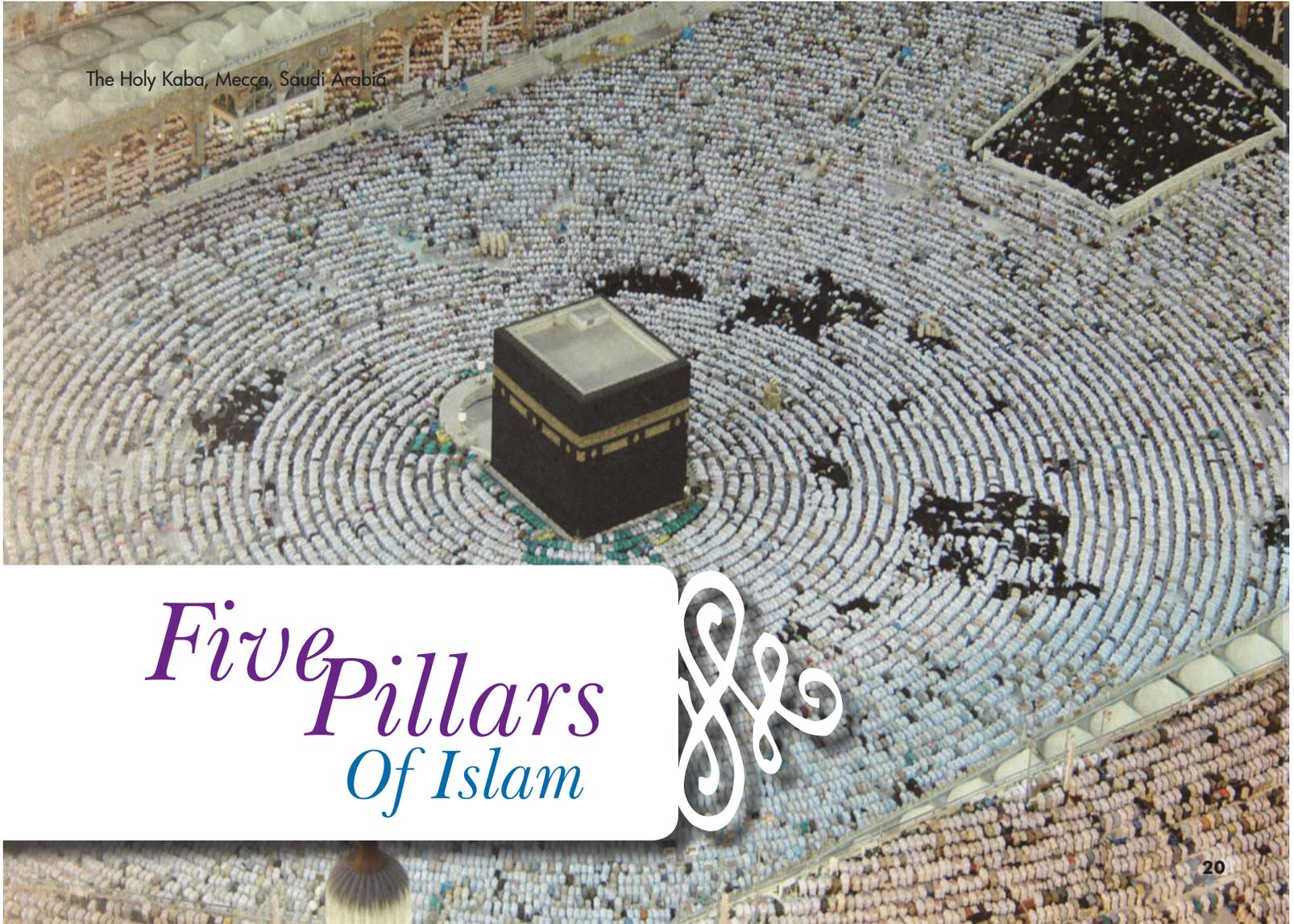
The practical foundations of Islam, which a Muslim must put into practice in order to make his faith complete, are known as the 'Five Pillars'. These are the shahada, or declaration of faith; the salat, or daily prayers; the zakat, or giving in charity to the needy; sawm, or the fast of Ramadan; and Hajj, or the Pilgrimage to Makkah for those who are able.

Shahada (Declaration of Faith)

'There is none worth of worship except God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.' This simple statement marks a person's entry into Islam; it is also repeated during the daily prayers and on other occasions. More than just a formula, it is the foundation of Islam and signifies a belief that the purpose of life is to serve God, by following the teachings of the last Prophet, Muhammad (peace be upon him).



The Holy Kaba, Mecca, Saudi Arabia



Five Pillars Of Islam





Salat (Prayer) and other devotions

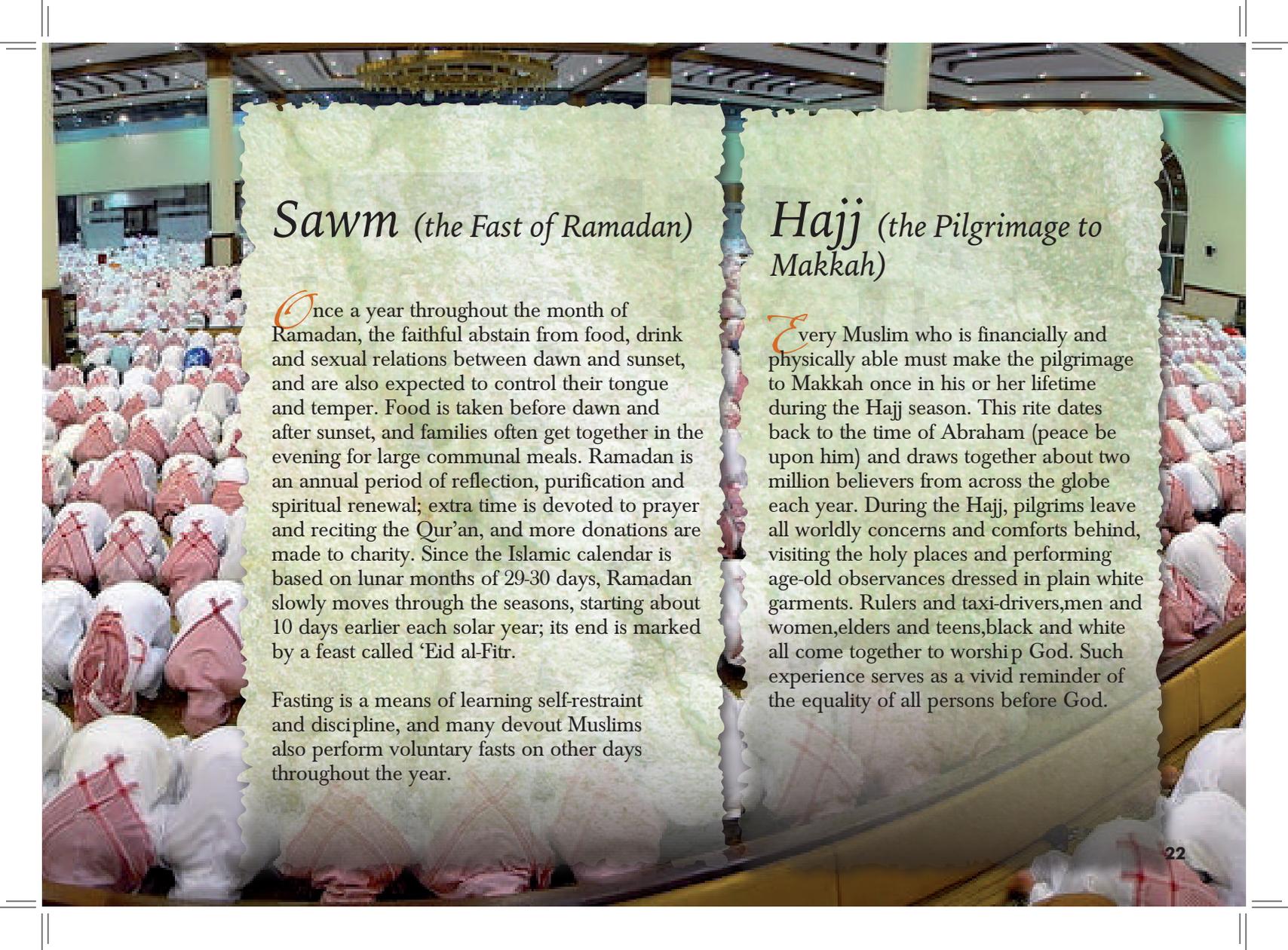
Unlike followers of other religions in which prayer is prescribed less frequently or is left up to their personal inclination, a Muslim is obliged to pray five times a day: at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset and in the evening. People are often surprised at this; but for a believer the prayers are a natural way to establish the rhythm of the day, and provide much-needed peaceful breaks from the demands of daily life. Lasting about ten minutes, the ritual prayers engage body, mind and soul in a unified expression of praise, awe, gratitude and love for the Creator, and serve to increase God-consciousness. Offered together with others whenever possible, the salat also increases solidarity and community spirit.

Besides the obligatory prayers, devout Muslims may offer additional prayers and engage in other forms of worship, including personal supplications (du'a), daily recitation of a portion of the Qur'an (hizb), night vigils (tahajjud), reflections on the Qur'an and the Prophets tradition.



Zakat (the Charity Tax)

Islam teaches that one's material possessions are a blessing from God and a trust, rather than purely 'personal property', and Muslims are expected to give a minimum of 2.5% (one-fortieth) of their net yearly savings to charity. The word zakat means purification and growth, indicating that one's property is not pure for one's own use until it has been shared with those who are less fortunate. Besides the obligatory minimum, Muslims are encouraged to donate or invest their surplus wealth in worthy charitable causes, as well as to be helpful and generous with their time.



Sawm (the Fast of Ramadan)

Once a year throughout the month of Ramadan, the faithful abstain from food, drink and sexual relations between dawn and sunset, and are also expected to control their tongue and temper. Food is taken before dawn and after sunset, and families often get together in the evening for large communal meals. Ramadan is an annual period of reflection, purification and spiritual renewal; extra time is devoted to prayer and reciting the Qur'an, and more donations are made to charity. Since the Islamic calendar is based on lunar months of 29-30 days, Ramadan slowly moves through the seasons, starting about 10 days earlier each solar year; its end is marked by a feast called 'Eid al-Fitr.

Fasting is a means of learning self-restraint and discipline, and many devout Muslims also perform voluntary fasts on other days throughout the year.

Hajj (the Pilgrimage to Makkah)

Every Muslim who is financially and physically able must make the pilgrimage to Makkah once in his or her lifetime during the Hajj season. This rite dates back to the time of Abraham (peace be upon him) and draws together about two million believers from across the globe each year. During the Hajj, pilgrims leave all worldly concerns and comforts behind, visiting the holy places and performing age-old observances dressed in plain white garments. Rulers and taxi-drivers, men and women, elders and teens, black and white all come together to worship God. Such experience serves as a vivid reminder of the equality of all persons before God.

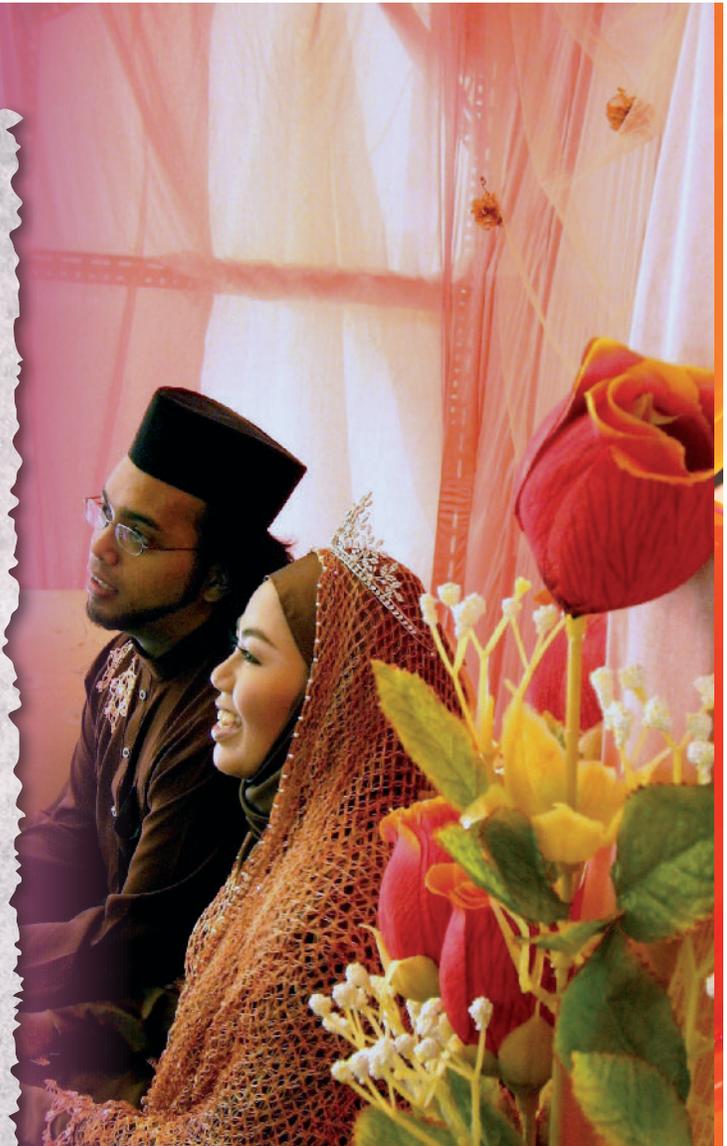
ISLAMIC MARRIAGE & FAMILY LIFE

Islam promotes the family as the foundation of a stable and prosperous society. The ideal relationship between husband and wife in Islam is one of interdependence, based on God-consciousness, love, comfort and companionship. The Qur'an says,

“And among His signs is this: He created spouses for you from among yourselves that you might settle with them in comfort, and He put between you love and mercy. Surely there are signs in this for people who reflect.” (Qur'an 30:21).

The mutually supportive relationship between husband and wife is also described metaphorically in the following verse:

“...They are (like) garments for you, and you are garments for them.” (Qur'an 2:187).





A Muslim marriage is both a sacred act and a legal agreement, in which either the groom or bride is free to include legitimate conditions. Rights and responsibilities of both wife and husband are equitable and balanced.

Parents are greatly respected in the Islamic tradition. Mothers, in particular, are greatly honoured. God says in the Qur'an:

“And we have enjoined upon man to be good to his parents. With difficulty upon difficulty did his mother bear him, and wean him for two years. Show gratitude to Me and to your parents; to Me is your final goal”
(Qur'an 31:14).



The Qur'an, more than any other religious scripture, portrays women in a positive light. **'The believers, men and women, are protecting friends of one another'** (Qur'an 9: 71-72). Furthermore, all of its rulings were originally intended to improve the position of women in society and secure their rights, which in the pre-Islamic world were almost non-existent.

Muslim women have been granted rights as individuals in the Sacred Law; they may not be married off against their will, may keep their maiden names after marriage, and have the right to divorce. They may also own, inherit and invest property; this was not achieved by European women until the 19th century. Muslim women may work outside the home as long as their other duties are taken care of, and are encouraged to enter teaching, medicine and other respectable careers and professions. The Prophet's first wife, Khadijah, was a wealthy businesswoman who first employed him to manage her trade caravan before proposing to marry him, being impressed by his good character.





*Muslim
Beyond Women
Stereotypes*



Muslim women's dress

About half of all Muslim women and girls observe the Qur'anic ruling of covering their head and hair when in public, while the others do not. The issue of 'the veil' has often been misunderstood by politicians, feminists and the media. It is not a symbol of 'political Islam' or male authority, does not impede learning or achievement, and is not a health hazard; rather, it is a way for women to function in society in the company of men while preserving their dignity. The women who happily cover their heads often do so despite being subjected to discrimination at school and work, as well as verbal and sometimes physical abuse. For such women and girls, it is an expression of their identity and obedience to God, and a matter of personal choice and human rights. Some Muslim women also veil their faces when out and about. Scholars disagree on whether this is necessary or desirable, but the women who do so are following a valid school of Islamic thought and are entitled to their convictions.



The issue of 'the veil' has often been misunderstood by politicians, feminists and the media.

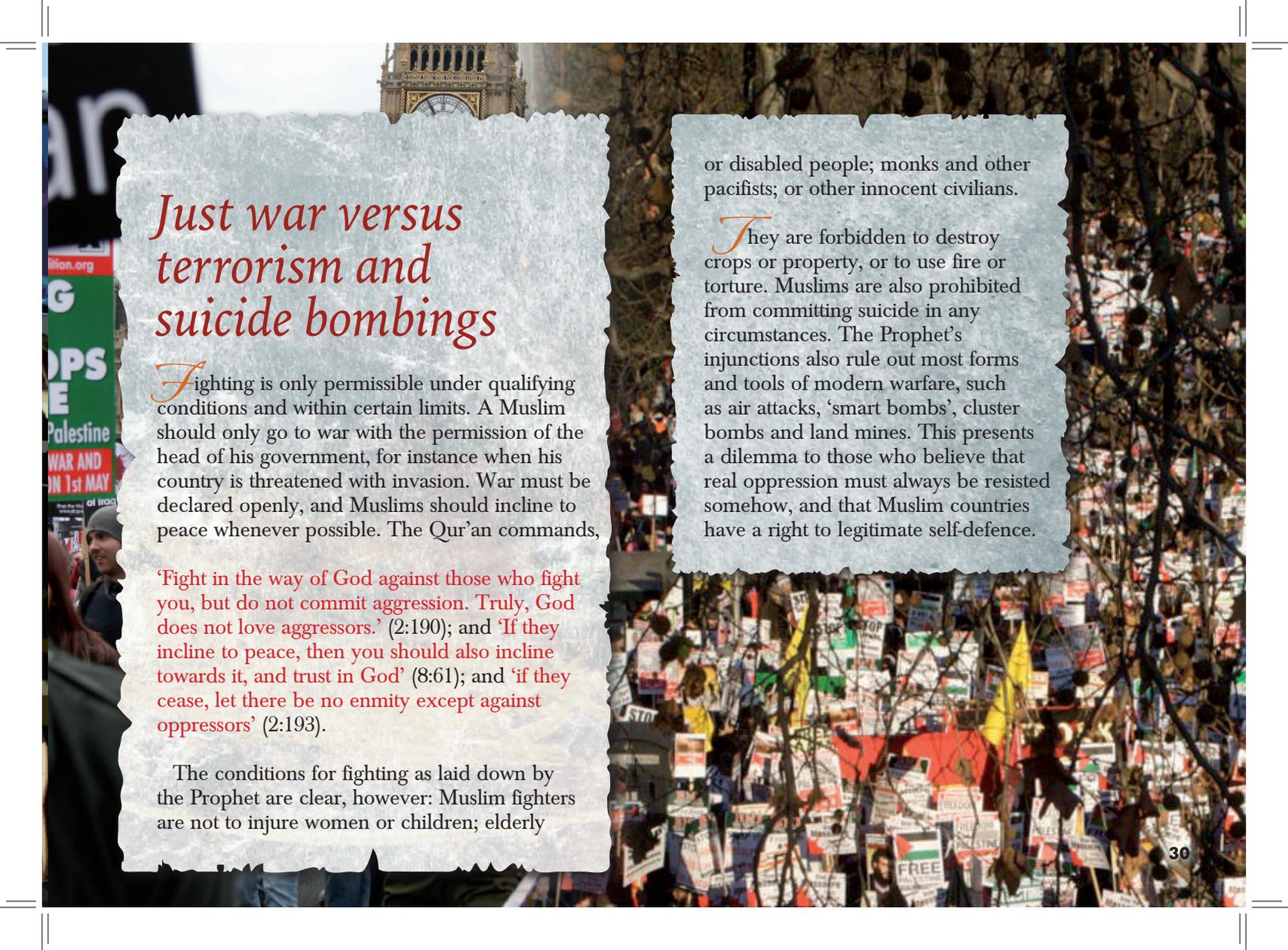


PEACE & JUSTICE

Islam is a religion of peace and mercy; its very name means “peace through submission to God’s will”, and Muslims greet each other by saying “Assalam Alaikum” (peace be with you). One of Allah’s names is ‘As-Salam’, or ‘Peace’, and 113 of the 114 chapters of the Qur’an begin ‘In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful’. Inner peace is achieved through acts of devotion such as prayer, reciting the Qur’an, and dealing justly and compassionately with others. But it is acknowledged by Muslims that peace in the world can only come from God and is seldom achieved because of the nature of this world. Sometimes peace has to be fought for, as was needed in the struggle against Nazism in World War II. According to Islamic teachings, in the time before the Day of Judgement the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary will return to earth to usher in a brief age of peace and harmony. The believers who are alive at that time will experience a foretaste of Paradise, ‘the abode of lasting peace.’

Jihad: the inner & outer struggle for justice

Peace in this world, when it does occur, is an outcome of justice and understanding; not subservience or oppression. Like most other religions, Islam permits self-defence and recognises that it is sometimes necessary to fight in order to resist evil and tyranny. The word ‘jihad’, commonly used to refer to warfare and sometimes incorrectly translated as ‘holy war’, literally means ‘struggle’. This struggle against evil and oppression takes many forms, the most difficult of which is the daily struggle against one’s own ego, bad habits and negative qualities. This is known as the ‘greater jihad’, whereas fighting in warfare is known as the ‘lesser jihad’. The Qur’an says, ‘**Strive for God with a worthy effort (jihad)**’ (22:78).



Just war versus terrorism and suicide bombings

*F*ighting is only permissible under qualifying conditions and within certain limits. A Muslim should only go to war with the permission of the head of his government, for instance when his country is threatened with invasion. War must be declared openly, and Muslims should incline to peace whenever possible. The Qur'an commands,

'Fight in the way of God against those who fight you, but do not commit aggression. Truly, God does not love aggressors.' (2:190); and *'If they incline to peace, then you should also incline towards it, and trust in God'* (8:61); and *'if they cease, let there be no enmity except against oppressors'* (2:193).

The conditions for fighting as laid down by the Prophet are clear, however: Muslim fighters are not to injure women or children; elderly

or disabled people; monks and other pacifists; or other innocent civilians.

*T*hey are forbidden to destroy crops or property, or to use fire or torture. Muslims are also prohibited from committing suicide in any circumstances. The Prophet's injunctions also rule out most forms and tools of modern warfare, such as air attacks, 'smart bombs', cluster bombs and land mines. This presents a dilemma to those who believe that real oppression must always be resisted somehow, and that Muslim countries have a right to legitimate self-defence.

This booklet is sponsored by the Muslim World League London Office Trust

The MWLLOT is a registered charity in the UK under the auspices of its parent organisation the Muslim World League, a worldwide Muslim NGO based in Makkah (Saudi Arabia) with affiliation to the ECOSOC, UNESCO and UNICEF.

Vision

Integrating efforts in education and introducing Islam

Mission Statement

With a teamwork spirit, the MWL works towards initiating a constructive dialogue among various faith communities in the UK focusing on points of agreement. MWL is also engaged in forging unity among Muslims while respecting other faith and social groups by building bridges of understanding. The youth are focal point of MWL's activities. It endeavours to enable them positively contribute to the welfare of their societies. To achieve its objectives, MWL organises conferences, symposia and various cultural events open to faith and non-faith groups and to the British society at large.

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