



— GET TO KNOW ISLAM

# Hard questions

Some questions about Islam are difficult, and they deserve careful answers. This booklet gathers our answers to the hardest ones, with sources, so you can read them calmly and judge for yourself.

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# Islam and other faiths.

The Qur'an addresses Jews and Christians as People of the Book, recognises their prophets and scriptures as coming from God, and affirms that religion cannot be forced. It also states clear differences: on the nature of Jesus, on the finality of Muhammad's prophethood, and on the Qur'an as the final revelation.

## Shared roots

Islam understands itself as the continuation of the faith of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, not as a new religion. The Qur'an tells Muslims to say that they believe in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Jesus, making no distinction between the prophets, 2:136. Jews and Christians are addressed as People of the Book, ahl al-kitab.

Qur'an 3:64 invites the People of the Book to a common word: to worship God alone. Qur'an 29:46 tells Muslims to argue with them only in the best way and to say that our God and your God is one.

## Real differences

Islam does not accept the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, or the crucifixion as Christianity teaches them; Qur'an 4:157 states that Jesus was not killed or crucified but that it was made to appear so. It holds that earlier scriptures were revealed by God but that the Qur'an is the final, protected revelation, and that Muhammad is the last prophet.

Honest interfaith dialogue names these differences rather than smoothing them over. Muslims, Jews, and Christians can respect each other without pretending to believe the same things.

## Freedom and coexistence

Qur'an 2:256 states that there is no compulsion in religion. Qur'an 109 ends with the words "to you your religion, and to me mine". Qur'an 60:8 says God does not forbid kindness and justice towards those who have not fought Muslims over religion. In Medina the Prophet concluded agreements with Jewish tribes and received Christian delegations in his mosque.

Historically, non-Muslims under Muslim rule were protected communities with their own courts and worship but with a distinct legal status and a special tax. This arrangement was more tolerant than most of its contemporaries and less equal than modern citizenship. Muslim thinkers today debate how the principles behind it apply in states based on equal citizenship.

## Beyond the People of the Book

The Qur'an speaks mostly of Jews, Christians, Sabians, and the pagans of Arabia. Muslim jurists later extended protected status to Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists, and others in practice. Qur'an 5:48 says God could have made all people one community but did not, so that they might compete in good works; the final settling of differences belongs to God.

Many Muslims read this as a basis for pluralism in society while holding firmly to their own faith as true.

## Interfaith life today

Muslims take part in interfaith councils, shared charity, and neighbourhood life across the world. Marriage between a Muslim man and a Christian or Jewish woman is permitted in classical law; Muslims also care for parents, children, and friends of other faiths, as the Qur'an requires.

If you belong to another faith, you can expect a Muslim to disagree with you about some things and to be commanded to treat you with justice and kindness about everything. Both are part of the tradition.

**Sources & further reading:** Qur'an 2:136 · Qur'an 3:64 · Qur'an 29:46 · Qur'an 2:256 · Qur'an 60:8-9 · Qur'an 5:48 · Qur'an 4:157

## What does Islam teach about women?

Qur'an 33:35 addresses believing women and men in parallel as morally responsible people. Qur'an 4:32 recognises a share in what each earns. These are important starting points, but they do not mean that every rule in classical Islamic law is identical for women and men.

Questions about marriage, divorce, inheritance, testimony, education, or public roles should be examined separately. There are differences among legal schools, contemporary interpretations, state laws, and lived experiences. A general claim that everything is either equal or oppressive cannot explain those details.

It is also important to listen to women themselves. Religious ideals should not be used to dismiss discrimination or abuse. When exploring a contested issue, ask which text is cited, how it is interpreted, and how the rule affects people in practice. Our guide is an introduction, not a personal legal ruling.

**Sources & further reading:** Qur'an 33:35 · Qur'an 4:32 · Yaqeen — Islam and women

## Why do some Muslim women wear hijab?

Hijab commonly refers to a head covering and modest dress, although the term has broader uses. Many Muslim women understand covering their hair as a religious obligation, following mainstream traditional interpretations of Qur'an 24:31 and related texts. Details and contemporary interpretations differ.

Modesty is not a teaching directed only at women: the preceding verse addresses men's conduct and gaze. Clothing also carries personal, cultural, and social meanings. Women may describe conviction, identity, privacy, pressure, or a changing relationship with the practice; one explanation should not be imposed on everyone.

A headscarf is not the same as a face veil, and Muslim women do not all dress alike. The most respectful way to learn about someone's choice or experience is to listen without assuming that her clothing tells you how intelligent, free, or devout she is.

**Sources & further reading:** Qur'an 24:30-31 · Qur'an 33:59

## What does jihad mean? Does Islam permit terrorism?

Jihad means striving or exertion. Muslim sources and scholarship use it in different contexts, including moral and spiritual effort and, in legal discussions, armed struggle. Reducing it either to "holy war" or only to an inward struggle leaves out part of that history.

The existence of rules about warfare does not make violence unrestricted. Qur'an 2:190 connects fighting with limits against transgression; Sahih al-Bukhari 3015 reports a prohibition on killing women and children in warfare. These sources are relevant to rejecting the deliberate targeting of civilians.

Historical wars, extremist claims, and modern state actions still require specific examination. A group's use of religious language does not establish that its actions are justified. Equally, a responsible answer should not pretend that the history of Islamic law contains no discussion of armed conflict.

**Sources & further reading:** Qur'an 2:190 · Sahih al-Bukhari 3015 · Qur'an 5:8

## **What is Sharia, and is it the same as a country's law?**

Sharia is commonly used for the divinely guided path of life in Islam, encompassing worship, ethics, and conduct. Fiqh is the human scholarly effort to understand practical rulings from religious sources. The distinction matters because interpretations can differ and develop.

A modern government's laws are not simply a transparent copy of a single, uncontested code called "Sharia." States select, interpret, codify, and enforce rules within particular political and legal systems. Muslim scholars and communities may disagree about those choices.

Ask about a specific issue: Which source, which school, which interpretation, and which jurisdiction? This is much more useful than treating the word as meaning only criminal punishments, or claiming that every policy adopted in its name represents all Muslims. This answer provides concepts, not legal advice.

**Sources & further reading:** Qur'an 45:18 · Yaqeen — Shariah

## **What does Islam say about other religions?**

Islam holds that God sent prophets to every people, that Jews and Christians received genuine revelation, and that the Qur'an is the final message confirming and correcting what came before. It therefore sees itself as true and others as, at best, partial. At the same time, the Qur'an says there is no compulsion in religion, commands justice and kindness towards those who do not fight Muslims over faith, and says God will judge between communities on the Day of Resurrection.

Historically Muslim states gave Jews, Christians, and others protected status with their own worship and courts, an arrangement more tolerant than most of its time and less equal than modern citizenship. Today Muslims take part in interfaith work across the world. Our guide to Islam and other faiths sets out the shared ground and the differences in more depth.

## **Can someone leave Islam?**

People leave Islam, as they leave every religion, and the Qur'an addresses the possibility in several places, speaking of those who turn back after believing. In each case it describes loss and judgement in the life to come; it prescribes no earthly punishment and states that there is no compulsion in religion. On the evidence of the Qur'an, leaving Islam is a matter between a person and God.

Classical Islamic law, drawing on certain hadith and on the context of early wars in which apostasy meant joining the enemy, prescribed the death penalty for public apostasy by men, and this remains the law in a small number of countries. Many contemporary scholars argue that those rulings concerned treason rather than belief, and that freedom of religion is the Qur'anic position. This is a live debate within Islam and a source of real suffering for some who leave, which an honest introduction should acknowledge rather than hide.

**Sources & further reading:** Qur'an 2:256 · Qur'an 4:137 · Qur'an 3:86-90 · Qur'an 18:29

## **If God is merciful, why is there suffering?**

Muslim discussions of suffering often consider human wrongdoing, the trials of earthly life, the limits of human knowledge, and accountability beyond death. Qur'an 2:155–157 acknowledges fear and loss; it does not present suffering as something believers never experience.

Human freedom can help explain some harm people cause, but it does not by itself explain every illness or natural disaster. The wider theological question has a long history, and different explanations should be weighed carefully rather than offered as a slogan.

We should not claim to know why a particular person suffered, blame someone for their pain, or treat compassion as unnecessary because life is a test. Whatever one's philosophical answer, relieving suffering and standing against injustice remain practical responsibilities.

**Sources & further reading:** Qur'an 2:155-157 · Qur'an 4:135

## **If God knows everything, do people have free will?**

Divine knowledge and human choice are not treated as a simple either-or in Islamic belief. Muslims affirm that God knows creation, while human beings are addressed as responsible for what they choose and do. Knowing a choice is not the same concept as forcing it.

How divine decree and human agency fit together has been explained in different ways by theological schools. A brief analogy cannot resolve every philosophical difficulty. The practical emphasis is that belief in decree is not an excuse to avoid responsibility, learning, or efforts to improve a situation.

**Sources & further reading:** Qur'an 76:3 · Qur'an 81:28-29 · Forty Hadith of al-Nawawi 2

## **Can someone value science and believe in Islam?**

Science investigates the natural world through evidence, testable explanations, and revision. Religious belief also addresses questions of meaning, worship, and moral responsibility. Many Muslims see these as compatible activities, while recognising that particular claims can raise difficult questions.

Topics such as human origins are interpreted differently among Muslims. It is more useful to examine a specific scientific claim and a specific religious interpretation than to insist that there can never be tension—or that all religious belief must reject science.

The Qur'an encourages reflection on creation, but it should not be treated as a modern laboratory manual. Claims that a verse predicts a scientific discovery need careful attention to language, context, and the strength of the evidence. Faith should not depend on a sensational claim that has not been checked.

**Sources & further reading:** Qur'an 3:190-191 · Yaqeen — FAQs with Islamic Apologetics

## **What do Muslims believe about the crucifixion of Jesus?**

Qur'an 4:157–158 says that those who claimed to have killed Jesus did not kill or crucify him, but that it was made to appear so to them, and that God raised him to Himself. Most Muslim interpreters have understood this to mean that Jesus was not crucified and that someone else was made to resemble him, though interpretations of the details vary.

Muslims also believe that Jesus will return before the end of time. This is one of the clearest differences between Islam and Christianity, and it is best acknowledged plainly in any conversation between the two faiths. The two agree on Jesus' virgin birth, his miracles, and his status as the Messiah sent to Israel.

**Sources & further reading:** Qur'an 4:157-158 · Qur'an 3:55 · Qur'an 19:16-36

## What does Islam say about racism?

Qur'an 49:13 says that God made people into nations and tribes so that they might know one another, and that the noblest in His sight is the most God-conscious. In his farewell sermon the Prophet is reported to have declared that no Arab is superior to a non-Arab, nor a white person to a black person, except by piety. Bilal, an Ethiopian former slave, was chosen by the Prophet to give the first call to prayer.

Pilgrims on Hajj, dressed identically regardless of origin, experience this equality in practice; Malcolm X's account of it is well known. Muslim societies have nonetheless practised slavery, tribal prejudice, and colour-based discrimination, and some still do. The teaching is a standard against which Muslims, like everyone else, fall short, not a claim that they never have.

**Sources & further reading:** Qur'an 49:13 · Qur'an 30:22 · Musnad Ahmad 23489

## How do Muslims approach marriage and dating?

Islam strongly encourages marriage and describes it as a source of tranquillity, love, and mercy. A marriage requires the free consent of both parties, witnesses, and a gift from the groom to the bride that remains her own property. Forced marriage is invalid in Islamic law. Sexual relationships outside marriage are not permitted, which is why dating in the sense of casual or sexual relationships before commitment is generally avoided.

How Muslims find a spouse varies greatly: through family introductions, friends, community events, and matchmaking apps. Many couples meet, talk, and decide for themselves with family aware and involved. Men may marry Jewish or Christian women in classical law; Muslim women are expected to marry Muslims, a rule some contemporary scholars have questioned. Practice differs by family and culture more than by doctrine.

**Sources & further reading:** Qur'an 30:21 · Qur'an 4:19 · Qur'an 24:32 · Sahih al-Bukhari 5138

## Can Muslims care for family and friends of other faiths?

Qur'an 60:8 permits kindness and justice towards people who are not fighting or expelling believers because of religion. Qur'an 31:15 describes courteous companionship with parents even where there is a serious disagreement about worship. These are important foundations for relationships across religious difference.

Specific questions about religious ceremonies, marriage, or shared practices have their own scholarly discussions. They should not be collapsed into a demand to abandon every person you already care about. Explain your needs respectfully and make room for others' questions.

If a change of belief could bring threats or loss of essential support, careful planning and trusted help matter. You are not required by this website to disclose anything or make a public decision.

**Sources & further reading:** Qur'an 60:8 · Qur'an 31:15

## **Why do Muslims avoid interest?**

The Qur'an forbids *riba*, usually translated as interest or usury, in strong terms, contrasting it with trade, which is permitted, and with charity, which is praised. The underlying concern is that money should not earn money by itself, at the expense of someone in need, without sharing in real risk. Debt relief for those in difficulty is commanded in the same passage.

Observant Muslims therefore avoid interest-bearing savings and loans where they can, and a global industry of Islamic finance structures mortgages, investments, and banking around partnership, leasing, and sale rather than lending at interest. Where no alternative exists, scholars differ on what is permitted out of necessity, and individual Muslims make different choices.

**Sources & further reading:** Qur'an 2:275-280 · Qur'an 3:130 · Qur'an 30:39



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