

Islam FOR DUMMIES



Islam: in a nutshell

"Islam" is the Arabic word meaning 'submission'. It started with the prophet Mohammed from Mecca and follows the Quran (Koran) holy book. Committed Muslims fit into two main categories:

Classical Islamists – follow the exact example of Mohammed; beyond the Quran they follow a system of laws and rules called "sharia" law

Moderate Muslims – seek to discover principles applicable to modern life

Life of Prophet Mohammed (AD570 – 632)

Mohammed was born in Mecca (Arabia), and at a young age became an orphan. He worked as a businessman for a widow, whom he later married. Every month, he would go into the wilderness to pray and fast and in 612 he was called by an angel to be a 'Prophet'. Mohammed's message was simple: there is only one God who demands worship to Him alone and expects justice and honesty in life, because a judgment day awaits. Mohammed fled to Medina to escape persecution, where he managed to unite conflicting tribes. After eight years of fighting, his followers conquered Mecca and by the time of his death, most of Arabia had converted to Islam.

Practice, Practice, Practice: "Five Pillars"

1. **Declaration of faith:** there's one God and Mohammed is His Messenger
2. **Daily prayer:** five times a day; together at the mosque on Fridays
3. **Tax for the poor:** 2.5% for the underprivileged and the spread of Islam
4. **The fast of Ramadan** during daylight hours: month-long commemoration of the Quran
5. **Pilgrimage to Mecca:** journey to the birthplace of the Prophet; believed to wash away past sins

Some say 'jihad' is the sixth pillar because it is the duty of all Muslims to seek to spread Islam and the rule of Islam. Today, almost all Muslims believe violence is not permissible to spread Islam.

Types – or "denominations" of Islam

While there are differences in teaching and minor differences in practice, the division is basically political:

1. **Sunni** – majority of 'traditional' Islam (85% of the world's Muslims)
2. **Shi'ite** – dedicated to Mohammed's family
3. **Sufi** – mystical branch of Islam

Connection and Distinction with Christianity

- ✓ Muslims and Christians both believe in one God, however Muslims believe Jesus was a prophet like Mohammed, not the Son of God
- ✓ Muslims believe in the prophets, including Moses, Abraham and Jesus, but they believe these prophets preached Islam
- ✓ Muslims give respect to some Christian holy books: the Torah (first five books of the Bible) the Jabbour (Psalms) and the Injil (the Gospels). Most believe the books have been changed from an original Islam focus and are therefore untrustworthy and not worth reading
- ✓ Historically, the Islamic perspective on Christians is that they:
 - lead 'unclean' lives in terms of diet and personal hygiene, because Christianity gives principles for behaviour rather than laws, leaving too much room for error
 - are sexually immoral, primarily because of how life in 'Christian' countries is portrayed by the media
 - worship three Gods: Father, Son, and Mother Mary

Snappy Stats

Second largest religion in the world with 1.3 billion believers, making up 22% of the world's population.

...

Australia's Muslim population is over 300,000, having more than doubled in the past twenty years.

...

Islam is growing faster than Christianity by biological growth and slower by conversion, but overall exceeds the growth of Christianity. There's dramatic growth of Islam in Europe and Australia, where Christian numbers are shrinking and Muslim immigration and evangelism are very active.

THE MUSLIM WORLD

Around A.D.610, one man's mystical experience in the Arabian Desert forever changed the world. In a cave outside Mecca, in what is now Saudi Arabia, a trader named Muhammad — a man known for his honesty and integrity — is said to have had a visit from the angel Gabriel. The angel told him he was to become a prophet and revealed the first few words of what would become the holy book of Islam, the Quran.

Muslims believe Muhammad was a descendant of Ishmael — Abraham's first son by his wife's maid, Hagar — forever linking Islam with Judaism and Christianity as one of the three great monotheistic faiths.

Muhammad's historical impact has been immense. His teachings, and the Islamic faith, have directly influenced social, political and religious institutions for 14 centuries.

Over these centuries, Islam spread out of Arabia, sweeping in three great arcs — one across North Africa and eventually into Spain, another north through the Middle East across Europe to the gates of Vienna, and the third east across Asia to the Pacific.

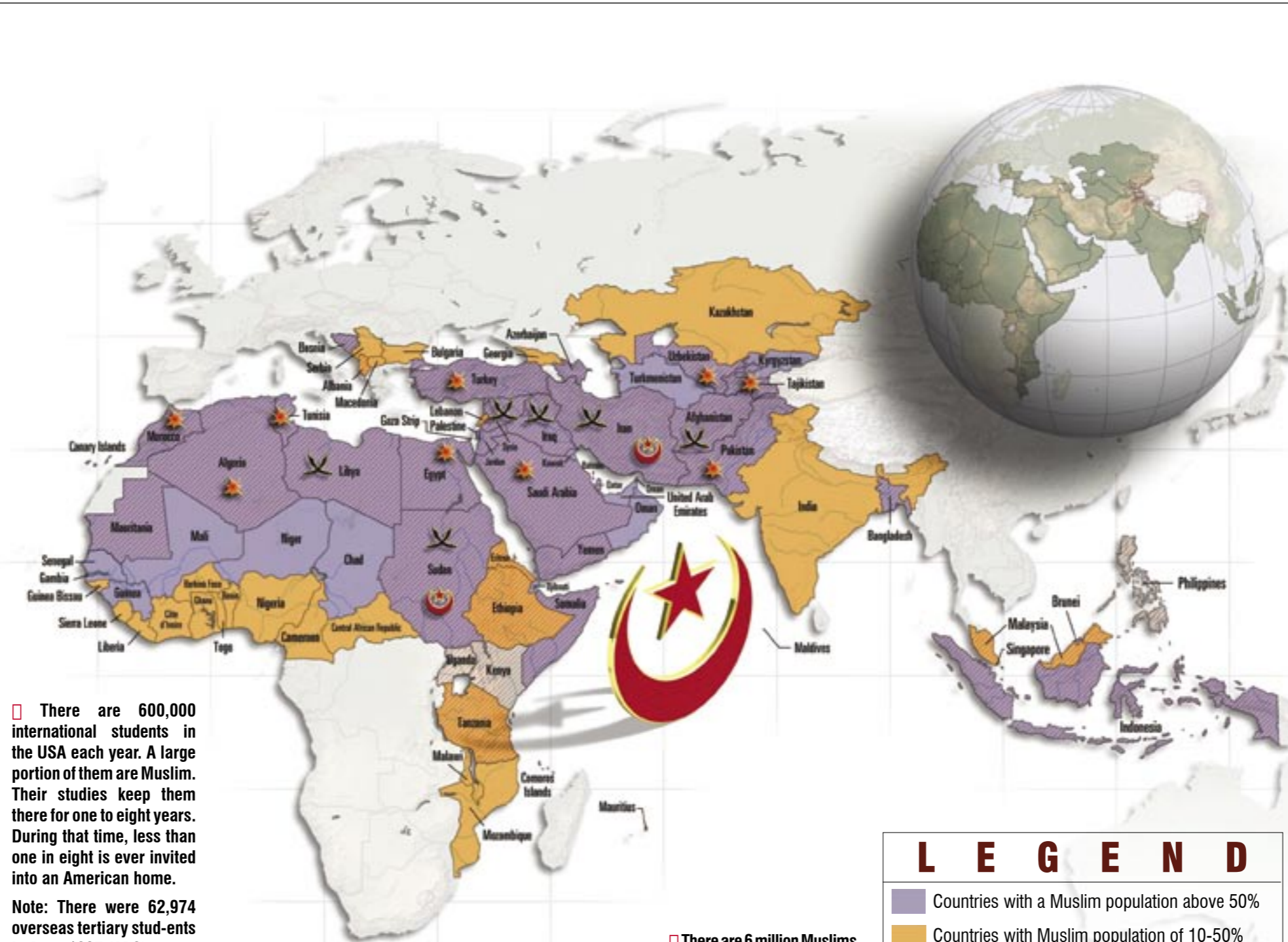
Islam's theology of peace and submission to Allah produced civilizations of stunning beauty. But much of this expansion was the result of conquest, carried on swift horses by fierce warriors with the edge of the sword.

Islamic religious texts contain verses that supported this conquest and have a militancy that to this day extremists use to justify conquest, violence and acts of unspeakable terror — all in the name of Allah.

Today, Islam, little understood by most non-Muslims, is the faith of 1 billion people across the globe and the fastest growing religion in the world.

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□ There are 600,000 international students in the USA each year. A large portion of them are Muslim. Their studies keep them there for one to eight years. During that time, less than one in eight is ever invited into an American home.

Note: There were 62,974 overseas tertiary students in Aust, 1997 (ABS)

□ Muslims, like Christians and Jews, consider themselves children of Abraham. They trace their lineage through Ishmael, who is said to have settled into Mecca after he and his mother were ordered out of the tribe after the birth of Isaac.

□ Muslim-on-Muslim terrorism is a persistent reality as Islamic fundamentalists attempt to wrest control from secular governments. In Algeria alone, 100,000 have died over the past 10 years.

□ Contrary to what many Westerners believe, Muhammad is not considered the originator of Islam by Muslims. He is considered God's final prophet - part of a long line of prophets that includes Abraham, Moses, Ishmael and Jesus.

□ There are 6 million Muslims in the USA, and growing.

Note: 200,885 in Australia (1996 ABS figure)

□ Muslim prayers are memorised recitations. When reciting them, they always face the holy city of Mecca. However, their prayers are not directed to the city itself, but to Allah.

LEGEND

- Countries with a Muslim population above 50%
- Countries with Muslim population of 10-50%
- Countries and regions in which Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda organisation is a presence
- Countries with an Islamic Fundamentalist government
- Countries with state-sponsored terrorism within the Islamic world
- Countries experiencing terrorist attacks due to Islamic Fundamentalist challenge

Major Muslim groups

Sunni Muslims:

Considered to be the "orthodox" of Islam; emphasize the individual's direct relationship with Allah without any human mediation; are culturally and religiously diverse and do not insist on uniformity in every question of faith or religious practice; found from Africa to Indonesia, the Middle East to Asia; nearly 90 percent of the world's Muslims are Sunni.

Shiite Muslims:

Place a heavy emphasis on leaders called imams, regarded as successors of Muhammad, who possess complete knowledge of the Quran; the last imam is unseen, having disappeared from human view in A.D. 878; all current Shiite clerics derive their authority as deputies of this unseen imam; official religion of Iran; communities of believers in India, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and other areas; 10 percent of the world's Muslims are Shiite.

Sufi Muslims:

The mystics of Islam; often the prophetic voice of the faith and highly influential throughout the centuries; conservative Muslims view the movement with scepticism, at times see it as heretical; seek direct union with Allah through asceticism, contemplation and prayer; small in number, Sufis flourish in communities in various parts of the world by virtue of their sensitivity to and flexibility among local traditions and cultures.

Five pillars of Islam

Confession of faith: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet."

Ritual prayer: Observed five times a day; directed toward Mecca.

Almsgiving: The *Zakat* or purification tax (approx. 2.5 percent of one's wealth) for the poor.

Fasting: Observed during the holy month of Ramadan.

Pilgrimage: Every Muslim, if able, is expected to make at least one pilgrimage, or *hajj*, to Mecca during his or her lifetime.



ISLAM



Elements of faith

Key figure in history

Teachings of Christ

Holy Spirit

Holy writings

Doctrine of humanity

Doctrine of sin

Doctrine of salvation

Meeting site

Life after death

Evangelical Christians

Muslims

How to pray

Terms for understanding Islam

One God, revealed and experienced as the Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit

Only one God, called Allah

• Pray that Muslims will come to believe in the one true God, who revealed himself on earth through Jesus Christ, his Son.

Jesus Christ

Muhammad (or Mohammed) – A.D. 570 – 632
 The last in the line of prophets (which includes Jesus) and the final authority
 Like the other prophets, he was infallible and sinless

• Ask the Holy Spirit to convince Muslims of Jesus' divinity, crucifixion, death and resurrection.

The Person:

One divine, eternal person
 Two natures: divine and human

His work:

Supreme example of God's love for humans and his intended pattern of living. Jesus is God, reconciling the world to himself.

The person:

A major prophet but not the Son of God

His work:

Lived a sinless life
 Taught people the Golden Rule
 Didn't die on cross but was taken into heaven by Allah

• Pray that Muslims will feel a need for and find a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Eternal member of Trinity
 Guide for churches, Christians

Angels are divine messengers. Many Muslims call the angel Gabriel the Holy Spirit because he brought the text of the Quran

• Pray for a strong movement of the Holy Spirit among Muslims, showing them the true path to salvation.

Bible (Old and New Testaments)
 Authoritative, unique, inspired Word of God
 Norm of faith and practice

Quran (Koran)
 A later revelation, superseding and correcting errors in the Bible
 The source of all certainty

• Pray for Scripture translation projects in languages of unreached people groups in Muslim regions
• Pray Muslims will be convinced the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

Created in God's image
 Since Adam's fall, sin is inherent
 All relationships damaged beyond human ability to repair

Created by God with ability to follow will of Allah

• Pray that Muslims will come to believe that human beings are created in God's image.

Sin is wilful rebellion against God

Sin caused by forgetfulness, human weakness and a spirit of rebellion [Editor's note: primarily non-observance of religious duties, as in Old Testament]

• Pray that Muslims will recognize sin as rebellion against God and see a need for salvation through Jesus.

God's gift through Jesus Christ's atonement
 Received by grace through personal faith in Christ

Achieved by submitting to the will of Allah and living a good life
 Works oriented

• Pray that Muslims will come to believe that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23, NIV).

Church

Mosque (*masjid* in Arabic)

• Ask God to call out workers from evangelical congregations to spread the good news of Jesus to Muslims worldwide.

Eternal communion with God (heaven)
 Eternal separation from God (hell)

Final judgement with destination of paradise or hell

• Ask the Holy Spirit to convince Muslims that their future is secure only through Jesus Christ.

Dar al-Harb: The House of War, those who do not live under Islam.

Dar al-Islam: - The House of Peace, those who live under Islam. Outsiders are brought in by submission. Some Muslims consider Christians and Jesus "people of the book" and part of Dar al-Islam, but most consider them outsiders.

Fatwa: A legal ruling by a man of high standing in Islam that someone is in violation of Islamic principles and should be punished by faithful Muslims. Muslims debate who has authority to issue a fatwa. Some, for instance, vest that power only in muftis and feel Osama bin Laden has no such power.

Hadith: The sayings and life of Muhammad as recorded by trusted companions; second to the Quran in authority for Muslims.

Islam: Literally "surrender" or "submission".

Jihad: Exertion of effort to advance Islam. Often equated with holy war, a national struggle, but also refers to a personal struggle to advance Islam within one's own soul. The Quran says a warrior who dies in jihad goes straight to paradise.

Mullah: Person, primarily in the Shia sect, who specialises in understanding the science of religious regulation. He interprets the laws and doctrines of Islam as they affect all of life. Not professional clergy, but holds great influence.

Muslim: A follower of Islam. Literal meaning: "Submitted one."

Muslim Brotherhood: The grandfather of all Islamic fundamentalist organisations. Seeks to establish Islamic republics. The current version emerged in the 1930s in Egypt in response to Western colonial powers and their puppet leaders. Sayyid Qutb, an influential leader in the 1950s,

espoused the idea that Muslims may make war against a Muslim state that had compromised. Bin Laden's top ideologist has a background with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Quran (Koran): The holy book of Islam, considered the word of God existing from eternity to eternity.

Sharia: Rule of the Quran and Hadith. Laws and religious regulations of Islam that govern all of daily life.

Shiite: One who believes that leadership of Islam should come from descendants of Fatima, Muhammad's only living offspring, and her husband. Places a heavy emphasis on leaders called imams, inspired purveyors of truth. Allows a charismatic leader power to reinterpret Islam. Official religion of Iran. Communities of believers in India, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other areas. About 10 percent of the world's Muslims.

Sufi: A Muslim mystic found across all types of Islam. They seek the deeper meaning of Islam through practices such as asceticism, contemplation, prayer and ecstatic dancing (the whirling dervishes). Few in number but very influential.

Sunni: One who believes leadership of Islam should come from among Muhammad's tribe. Nearly 90 percent of the world's Muslims, Sunnis follow the traditions of Islam, rather than a charismatic leader, and are considered the "orthodox" of Islam. They emphasise the individual's direct relationship with Allah without any human mediation, are culturally and religiously diverse and do not insist on uniformity in every question of faith or practice. Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Egypt and Indonesia are among countries where Sunni Islam is dominant. Both Sunnis and Shiites believe Islam is destined for world domination. Osama bin Laden is Sunni. □

Understanding Islam

Bibliography

Braswell, George W., Jr. *Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996.

A reasonably comprehensive overview of the history and global spread of Islam, focussing on statistics and trends. A large section is devoted to Islam in America.

Chandler, Paul-Gordon. *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path between Two Faiths*, Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2007.

Building on the common Middle Eastern heritage the Christian faith shares with Islam, this book looks at the life of a "Muslim follower of Christ" to demonstrate the importance of removing Western cultural and religious trappings associated with Christ in the minds of Muslims, and following a Christ who first walked the Middle Eastern road.

This book addresses how a Muslim may follow Christ's teachings and remain an insider in his or her Islamic community.

Chapman, Colin. *Cross and Crescent*. Leicester: IVP, 2003.

One of the best books on approaching Muslims personally. Written from a British perspective, it is an aid to understanding and relating to Muslim neighbours.

Cragg, Kenneth. *The Call of the Minaret*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.

A classic work on Islam by one of the 20th Centuries most respected Western writers on Islam. A little dated now, but still gives very valuable insights.

Esposito, John L. *Islam: The Straight Path*. Third ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Esposito, John L. *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

John Esposito is sometimes called a 'Muslim apologist'. He is one of the most articulate Muslim writers for a Western audience today and seeks both to explain and help Westerners understand an Islamic world view. What Everyone needs to Know is written in a simpler, question and answer, style.

Farah, Caesar E. *Islam, Beliefs and Observances*. Hauppauge, NY: Barrons, 7th Edition, 2003

Farah's book is a study, not only of the basics, such as what Muslims believe, who Muhammad was, etc., but also of why there are different sects in Islam, how those sects came about, their leaders, what they believe and why they strive against one another.

Mallouhi, Christine A. *Waging Peace on Islam*. London: Monarch Books, 2000.

A very personal account of Melbourne's Christine Mullaouhi's life in Muslim communities. She writes with compassion and understanding, exposing some of the West's double standards. This book helps us see what is normal, human, inspiring and commendable about Muslim cultures and many of her Muslim friends. Highly recommended – especially to counter stereotypes.

Martinson, Paul Varo, ed. *Islam: An Introduction for Christians*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1994.

A good, broad brush Introduction to Islam. Accessible for non-theologians.

Mernissi, Fatima. *Women and Islam*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

This historical and theological enquiry is by a Muslim Woman who struggles with attitudes to women held by Muslims both in the past and today. The book's jacket states: "The author, who is both a feminist and a Muslim [sociologist], aims to shed light on current attitudes by examining and reassessing the literary sources as far back as seventh century Islam.

Musk, Bill A. *Touching the Soul of Islam*. Crowborough, U.K.: MARC, 1995.

Focusses more on the worldview of Islamic communities, some of the values and attitudes that appear to be reasonably common across the Muslim world. Issues examined include attitudes towards male and female; family and individual; honour and shame; hospitality and violence; and brotherhood and rivalry. Very helpful for a deeper understanding of what often lies beneath the surface.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Ideals and Realities of Islam*. London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1975.

Derived from lectures delivered at the American University in Beirut back in the 1960s this book does a good job at introducing Islam from an Islamic perspective and so aids in understanding. Six major sections address Islam in general; the Quran; Muhammad's life and legacy; Shariah law; the mystical side of Islam and the Sunni and Shiite division.

Netton, Ian Richard. *A Popular Dictionary of Islam*. London: Curson Press, 1992.

A good basic and comprehensive dictionary of Islamic terms and concepts.

Parshall, Phil. *Inside the Community: Understanding Muslims through Their Traditions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994.

The Sunna or Hadith (Traditions) are the second source of Islamic rulings after the Quran. They consist of a number of collections of thousands of reminiscences of events in Muhammad's life. Phil Parshall has compiled this fascinating selection of quotations from the Hadith on a number of key areas. A real eye-opener that helps understand many worldview assumptions.

Riddell, P. & Cotterell, P. *Islam in Context*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.

Riddell and Cotterell emphasise the importance of considering the context of the events of the history of Islam. Topics include the life and accomplishments of Muhammad; the caliphate; the ebb and flow of Empire; The Muslim Masses and Westophobia; The Radical Islamist Worldview; The Moderate Worldview and Responses to Terrorism.

Saeed, A. *Islam in Australia*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003.

A general overview and introduction to Muslim beliefs and practices with special attention to the history of Muslims in Australia.

Waines, D. *An Introduction to Islam*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

This book is scholarly introduction to Muslim beliefs and practices as they developed during the formative period. Separate chapters are devoted to a description of the sacred law (the Shar'iah), theology, and mysticism. Attention is given also to the beliefs and practices of the important Shi'ah minority of Muslims. It also covers the last two centuries during which Muslims have been challenged by Western dominance and are seeking to establish a modern sense of identity.