

## Does Islam tolerate other beliefs?

The Quran says: "The Almighty does not forbid you from (honourable relationships with) those who have not fought you over religion, nor expelled you from your dwellings- that you relate kindly and equitably with them. Indeed the Almighty loves those who are just." (Quran, 60-8)

It is one function of Islamic law to protect the privileged status of minorities, and this is why non-Muslim places of worship have flourished all over the Islamic world. History provides many examples of Muslim tol-



## THE QURAN

The Noble Quran is the holy book for Muslims and even today has been memorized in its entirety by many believing Muslims.

erance towards other faiths: when the Caliph Omar entered Jerusalem in the year 634 C.E., Islam granted freedom of worship to all religious communities in the city.

## What about Muslim women?

Islam sees a woman, whether single or married, as an individual in her own right, with the right to own and dispose of her property and earnings. A marriage dowry is given by the groom to the bride for her own personal use, and she keeps her own family name rather than taking her husband's.

Both men and women are expected to dress in a way which is modest and dignified; the traditions of female dress found in some Muslim countries are often the expression of local customs.

The Messenger of the Almighty (peace be upon him) said: "The most perfect in faith amongst believers is he who is best in manner and kindest to his wife."

## How does Islam guarantee human rights?

Freedom of conscience is laid down by the Quran itself: "There shall be no compulsion in religion." (2:256)

The life and property of all citizens in an Islamic state are considered sacred whether a person is Muslim or not.

Racism is incomprehensible to Muslims, for the Quran speaks of human equality in the following terms:

"O humankind! Indeed We have created (all of) you from a (single) male and female. Moreover We have made you peoples and tribes, so that you may (come to) know one another. And, indeed, the noblest of you, in sight of the Almighty, is the most God-fearing of you. Indeed the Almighty is all-knowing, all-aware." (49-13)

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# MUHAMMAD

(PEACE BE UPON HIM)

Who is Muhammad (peace be upon him)?

What do Muslims believe about him?

Why is he relevant today?



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### Who is Muhammad (peace be upon him)?

Muhammad (peace be upon him), was born in Mecca in Arabia in the year 570 C.E., at a time when the world was steeped in the darkness of idol-worship. Since his father died before his birth, and his mother shortly afterwards, he was raised as an orphan by his uncle from the respected Arabian tribe of Quraysh. As he grew up, he became known for his truthfulness, generosity and sincerity, so that he was sought after for his ability to arbitrate in disputes.

Muhammad (peace be upon him) was of a deeply religious nature, and had long detested the decadence of his society. It became his habit to meditate from time to time in the Cave of Hira near the summit of the Mountain of Light near Makkah.

### How did Muhammad Become a Messenger of the Almighty?

At the age of 40, while engaged in a meditative retreat, Muhammad (peace be upon him) received his first revelation from the Almighty through the Angel Gabriel. This revelation, which continued for twenty-three years, is known as the Quran, the sacred book of the Muslims.

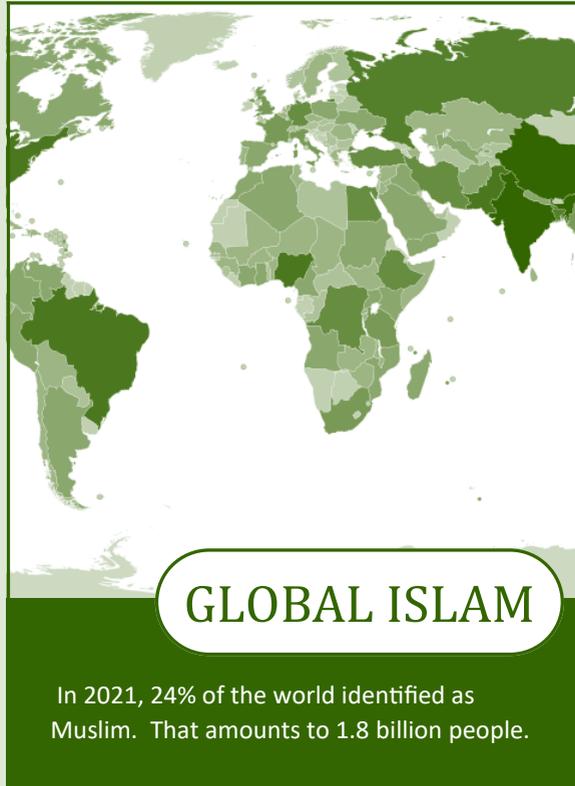
As soon as he began to recite the words he heard from Gabriel, and to preach the truth which the Almighty had revealed to him, he and his small group of followers suffered bitter persecution, which grew so fierce that in the year 622 C.E. the Almighty gave them the command to emigrate. This event, the Hijrah, 'emigration', in which they left Mecca for the city of Medina some 434 kilometres to the north, marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

After several years, the Messenger and his followers were able to return to Mecca, where they forgave their enemies and established Islam definitively. Be-

fore the Messenger (peace be upon him) passed away at the age of 63, the greater part of Arabia was Muslim, and within a century of his death, Islam had spread to Spain in the West and as far East as China.

### How did the spread of Islam affect the world?

Among the reasons for the rapid and peaceful spread of Islam was the simplicity of its doctrine - Islam calls for faith in only One Almighty, worthy of worship. It also repeatedly instructs man to use his powers of intelligence and observation.



Within a few years, great civilizations and universities were flourishing, for according to the Messenger (peace be upon him), "Seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim man and woman." The synthesis of Eastern and Western ideas, brought about great

advances in medicine, mathematics, physics, astronomy, geography, architecture, art, literature, and history. Many crucial systems such as algebra, the Arabic numerals, and also the concept of the zero (vital to the advancement of mathematics), were transmitted to medieval Europe from Islam. Sophisticated instruments which were to make possible the European voyages of discovery were developed, including the astrolabe, the quadrant and good navigational maps.

### What is the Qur'an?

The Quran is a record of the exact words revealed by the Almighty through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It was memorized by Muhammad (peace be upon him) and then dictated to his Companions, and written down by scribes, who cross-checked it during his lifetime. Not one word of its 114 chapters, has been changed over the centuries, so that the Quran is in every detail, the unique and miraculous text which was revealed to Muhammad (peace be upon him) fourteen centuries ago.

The Quran, the last revealed Word of the Almighty, is the prime source of every Muslim's faith and practice. It deals with all the subjects which concern us as human beings: wisdom, doctrine, worship, and law, but its basic theme is the relationship between the Almighty and His creatures. At the same time, it provides guidelines for a just society, proper human conduct and an equitable economic system.

### Are there any other sacred sources?

Yes, the sunnah, the practice and example of the Messenger (peace be upon him), is the second authority for Muslims. A hadith is a reliably transmitted report of what the Messenger said, did, or approved. Belief in the sunnah is part of the Islamic faith.