

# Muslim Cultural Awareness Course

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<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>THE BEGINNING OF ISLAM</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>MUSLIM BELIEFS</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>THE DUTIES OF A MUSLIM</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>JIHAD</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>THE HOLY QUR'AN</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>THE MOSQUE &amp; MADRASAH</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>MUSLIM FAMILY LIFE</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>CARE FOR SELF</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>WOMENS HEADSCARF (HIJAB)</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>DIETARY RESTRICTIONS</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>DIVORCE</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>BIRTH, NAMES AND BIRTH CONTROL</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>DEATH AND BURIAL</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>MUSLIM FESTIVALS</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>MUSLIMS AND EDUCATION</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>MUSLIMS AND POLICE</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>MUSLIMS AND SOCIAL SERVICES</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>GLOSSARY TERMS COMMONLY USED BY MUSLIMS</b>	<b>42</b>

# INTRODUCTION

Islam is the religion of about one billion people around the world and represents one fifth of the world's population. There are around three million Muslims in Britain, who originate from various parts of the world, some of them are of European origin. The majority of Muslims are from South Asian countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and India.

Although, the British Muslim community varies from one group to another because of their different nationalities, they share their common beliefs with Muslims from other parts of the world. There may however, be some cultural differences and this is due to the varieties of different cultures in the life of British Muslims.

The main focus of the discussion in this booklet is around the cultural and religious needs of the Muslims. Religiously, there are two main Muslim groups in the world. Sunnis (Ahl-Sunn'ah) and Shie'a (Jafriyah). There are some other sects and groups due to religious or political differences.

Islam literally means submission to the will of Allah (God) and a Muslim is one who submits to Allah's will. In order to become a Muslim, a person must sincerely say and believe in the following testimony of faith; "I bear witness that there is no one worthy of worship but Allah (God) and Mohammad (PBUH) is the messenger and servant of Allah (God)".

When a person or persons become Muslims, they will follow a complete way of life. Islam has clear rules which all Muslims should follow in their daily life, in all aspects of individual, family and community life. Every Muslim regards the holy Prophet PBUH as the last prophet of Allah (God). A Muslim must believe in the articles of faith and fulfil the main duties and accept the

code of behaviour laid down in the holy Qur'an and in the traditions of the holy Prophet PBUH that are known as *Hadith*.

# THE BEGINNING OF ISLAM

According to Muslims' beliefs, Allah is the source of all true guidance for mankind and He has revealed His guidance to human beings chosen by Him for this purpose and they are called the prophets of Allah. These Prophets came to all parts of the world, to all nations, at various times.

Muslims also believe that the holy Qur'an and *Hadith* were revealed and inspired to Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), in the shape of a complete way of life.

The holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was born in Makkah in the year 570 A.D. His father died before his birth and his mother died when he was about six years old. He was looked after by his Grandfather and afterwards by his uncle.

The holy Prophet (PBUH) spent his childhood and youth in Makkah. He was greatly respected among his people. At the age of 25, he married Khadijah. He used to worship in the mount of Al-Noor, in a cave called Hira, in Makkah. At the age of forty, he received his first revelation from (God) Allah, delivered by the Arch Angel Gabriel.

He was asked to call others towards the message of God, and as a result he faced real opposition from the people of Makkah. Despite the difficulties and opposition, some of his friends embraced Islam. The life was not very easy for Muslims and Makkah was no longer a safe place for them. In about 622 A.D. the holy Prophet (PBUH) and some Muslims migrated to Ythrab (later called Al-Madina, the City of the Prophet) and established a system of life where everyone shared everything with one another. After seven years, the holy Prophet (PBUH) returned to Makkah. This was the greatest day for the Muslims. The holy Prophet

(PBUH) forgave the Makkans. In 632 A.D. the holy Prophet (PBUH) passed away. His place of rest is in the holy city of Al Madina in Saudi Arabia.

In the first few hundred years, after the holy Prophet PBUH, the message of Islam spread all over the Middle East region, North Africa, much of Central Asia and even into Spain and as far as the Indian Sub-continent.

# **MUSLIM BELIEFS**

A Muslim must believe in the articles of faith and they are: To believe in One God (Allah), His angels, His Prophets, His Books, The day of Judgement, life after death, and fate that good and bad comes from God (Allah).

## **ALLAH (GOD)**

To believe in one God (Allah) means that God has no partners or relations. He alone should be worshipped and His messengers are to be followed.

## **THE ANGELS**

To believe in a creation of Allah, they carry the duties assigned to them by almighty Allah. They are many but four of them are well known and they are named as Gabriel, Mikail, Israfeel and I'zraeel.

## **THE BOOKS**

To believe, in whatever was revealed in the past by God (Allah) to the Prophets. It includes The Old Testament, the New Testament and the Last Testament the Holy Qur'an.

## **THE PROPHETS OF ALLAH**

A Muslim must believe in all the Prophets chosen by Allah from Adam to Prophet Muhammad (PBUT). It includes all the Prophets AS: Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Solomon, David and Jesus (PBUT). They were all holy messengers chosen by God (Allah). A Muslim must show and pay respect to all the Prophets AS when mentioning their names by saying the words: `

*Peace and blessing be upon them.'* (PBUT). A Muslim is not regarded as Muslim if he or she does not believe or does not show respect to any one of the Prophets.

## **LIFE AFTER DEATH**

A Muslim must believe in life after death, in the resurrection and in the day of judgement.

## **FATAE (Qadar)**

A Muslim must believe that all good and bad come from God (Allah).

# THE DUTIES OF A MUSLIM

After accepting Islam as a religion, a person should perform some duties. These duties are known as the foundation of Islam.

The Declaration of Faith (Kalimah) this is to say verbally and affirm it by heart that there is no God but Allah and Muhammed (PBUH) is the Prophet of God (Allah).

## PRAYER (SALAT)

A Muslim must perform five times daily Salats (prayers) and there are special times for each prayer as follows:

1. Fajar; Before Sunrise.
2. Zuhur; After Midday.
3. Asar; Late Afternoon.
4. Maghrib; Immediately After Sunset.
5. Isha; At Night.

Each prayer will take about 10 minutes. The prayer is offered by doing certain acts of worship. The performer must stand on a clean mat / place facing in the direction of holy Kabaa in Makkah. Before the prayer, the performer will need to do ablution (Wudoo). Women are exempt from prayer and other religious duties during menstruation and after childbirth for a period of time.

Friday Prayer and other prayers are very important for every Muslim over the age of ten. The time for the Friday prayer starts after midday and goes on till late afternoon and includes a sermon which is called 'Khutba'.

## **FASTING (RAMADAN)**

All healthy Muslims over the age of puberty should fast in the month of Ramadan. It is a great month in Islam.

Fasting starts at dawn and ends at sunset and eating or drinking, intimacy, swearing or fighting are not allowed.

1. The Holy Qur'an is read during the month of Ramadan.
2. In the evening people share food with each other.
3. During the night special congregations are held.

After the end of Ramadan, Muslims celebrate Eid. This Eid is called; Eid-ul-Fitr.

Women who are breast feeding, menstruating, have given birth, weak and ill are exempt from fasting. The month of Ramadan begins with the sighting of a new moon.

There are other optional fasting periods but they are not obligatory.

## **ALMS GIVING (ZAKAT)**

A Muslim who owns a certain amount (equal to 87.48g of gold) of money or other valuables for a whole year should give 2.5 per cent from his or her spare savings every year to the poor and the needy. A Muslim has a duty to feed the hungry and to share with the poor, therefore wasting money on unnecessary things is forbidden. Other than this, a Muslim is required to give charity.

## **PILGRIMAGE (HAJJ)**

If a Muslim has the financial and physical ability, they should go to Makkah once in a lifetime and perform Hajj, which takes place in the last month of the Islamic Calendar.

There are certain activities that are undertaken by Muslims on certain days during their stay in the holy Makkah. These activities are explained in books on `Al-Hajj' which could be easily obtained. Hajj is also broadcast live every year throughout world. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia puts all of its resources into making the event most comfortable for everyone.

## **JIHAD**

This word has been in frequent use in the Western press over the past several years, explained directly or subtly, to mean holy war. As a matter of fact the term "holy war" was coined in Europe during the Crusades, meaning the war against Muslims. It does not have a counterpart in Islamic glossary, and Jihad is certainly not its translation.

The Arabic word "jihad" means struggling or striving and applies to any effort exerted by anyone. In this sense, a student struggles and strives to get an education and pass course work; an employee strives to fulfill his/her job and maintain good relations with his/her employer; a surgeon strives to assist his/her patient as best he/she can and so on.

Jihad can be done when someone making effort to do good to others, with speech, the pen, lobbying or picketing, or the Qur'an by inviting people to the message of Islam.

Since Islam is not confined to the boundaries of the individual but extends to the welfare of society and humanity in general, an individual cannot keep improving himself/herself in isolation from what happens in their community or in the world at large, hence the Qura'nic injunction to the Islamic nation to take as a duty "to enjoin good and forbid evil." (3:104).

Islam does not forbid the use of force as a last resort to bring about the greater good or peace. Every country believes in having an Army to keep the peace and offer protection and security, to its people. The same is true in Islam. There are strict parameters laid down, however, in Divine Law should force be used. In Islam it is the head of state who is responsible for the security for which the head can organise an army or take other steps in this regard. Jihad as a war can only be declared by a head of state, in a situation when a country is in need of defending itself. Its first condition is a united leadership and there are other conditions as well. In Islam no individual or groups can declare jihad as a war against others. Killing innocent people is called terrorism in Islam whoever (Muslims or Non Muslims) commit such actions.

The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) gave various guidelines: Do not dishonour a treaty. Do not mutilate the dead. Do not kill women. Do not kill children. Do not kill the old. Do not kill those without weapons. Do not kill those engaged in worship (priests, rabbis etc.) Do not cut down trees. Do not burn crops. Do not poison wells of your enemies. Kill only those who come at you.

Military action is a subgroup of Jihad and not its totality. That was what Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) emphasized to his companions when returning from a military campaign, he told them: "This day we have returned from the minor jihad (war) to the major jihad (self control and betterment)."

Jihad is not a declaration of war against other religions and certainly not against Christians and Jews as some media and political circles want it to be perceived. Islam does not fight other religions. Christians and Jews are considered as fellow inheritors of the Abrahamic traditions by Muslims, worshipping the same God and following the tradition of Abraham (PBUH).

The Prophet (PBUH) said: "The best Jihad is saying a word of truth in the court of a tyrant ruler". (Abu Dawud)

We have to acknowledge again, for the sake of honesty, that historically all traditions, Muslim, Christian, Jews as well as others, had their lapses in honestly following the valued ideals of their religions or philosophies. We all made mistakes, and we still do. Muslims are no exception, and time and again religion was exploited by ambitious tyrants or violated by ignorant mobs. This is no reflection on religion, but it shows how desperately humanity is in need of better education, more enduring concern for human dignity, rights and freedom, and vigilant pursuit of justice, even at the price of curbing political and economic greed.

# THE HOLY QUR'AN

Muslims believe that the Old Testament and New Testament were originally divine revelations. The Holy Qur'an is the latest and the last source which collectively gathered the earlier revelations.

The holy Qur'an is the final, ultimate and unchangeable Testament. It is found everywhere in the world. Every Muslim family makes the effort to teach their children the holy Qur'an. The person with the degree of specialism in the holy Qur'an is called Qari.

The Qur'an contains 30 parts and 114 chapters. The smallest unit of the holy text is called a Verse and there are 6,236 verses in the holy Qur'an. It was revealed over 22 years and 5 months. It is in Arabic text but it is translated into almost every language spoken and written in the world.

The Holy Qur'an was first translated into Latin by an Englishman in 1143 A.D. The first English Qur'an translation was published in 1669 in London. Mr Pickthall's English translation is regarded as accurate and is widely available. There are other translations as well.

According to the Muslim belief the holy Qur'an must be handled with respect and must be handled with a cover if it is to be handled without purity.

# THE MOSQUE & MADRASAH

The mosque plays an important role in the daily life of Muslims. The mosque is not only a place of worship but it is also a functional place where Muslims gather for various activities. It is regarded as a holy place which should be kept clean all the time. No dirty or smelly things are allowed to be brought into the mosque. Whoever attends the mosque must be clean and washed, fully dressed and use perfume or something which smells pleasant. Shoes are removed before entering the prayer area of the mosque, which is entered with the right foot first. The prayer hall, which is the main part of the mosque, is the most sacred area. Every mosque is furnished with a very nice carpet, especially prepared or made for the mosque. The mosque has two different sections for men and women. No one from the opposite sex is allowed into the other section except in the case of desperate need. There are various other sections in modern British mosques such as places for washing, shoe racks, children's school areas, community hall, counselling rooms and offices.

Almost every child in the Muslim community usually attends mosque every day until the age of about 15-16 years. This is for Qura'nic studies, language studies, other religious and cultural studies.

The mosque is a much organised place; therefore every mosque has an elected or selected committee with members, including a secretary and a chair. This body is responsible for the day to day administration of the mosque.

The Imam is responsible for organising religious activities, such as classes for children, conducting marriages and funeral services etc.

Although, Islam does not allow priesthood, any Muslim with the ability can serve the religious need but it is essential for each mosque to have a qualified Imam. The Imam must be specialised in Qura'nic Studies, have a deep knowledge of the Arabic language, Islamic Laws and the local community. In Britain it is vital that the Imam speaks English and is well aware of British ways of life, British values and Muslim cultures.

Titles given to the Imam are Qari, (degree of speciality in Qura'nic Studies) Molana and Sheikh a theologian. The media has used the word 'Mulla' to refer to Imams, and this is regarded as offensive.

## **Madrassah Supplementary School**

In a madrasah children learn how to read Qur'an, the basic beliefs, the practical aspects of Islam and community languages. Some mosques offer extra help (homework clubs) sports activities.

## **Safeguarding**

Local Safeguarding Children Boards are working with mosques and madrasahs to offer them training in child protection. Some mosques do DBS checks on their teachers and imams. In some areas, mosques are appointing their designated child protection officers as CPO (Child Protection Officers) for each mosque and such people who work with children are going to go through Vetting and Barring in the future.

Professional Development needs are taken into consideration such as;

Initial teachers' training  
Raising cultural awareness

Interaction with local school

SEN training

Communication with local SEN coordinators

Links with others faiths and cultures are also in process, which could be described as;

- more cooperation between mosques
- between mosques and churches
- between mosques and community organisations.

### **Seminary (Daru-Uloom)**

The seminaries are full time schools, which extend into Higher Education in Islamic theology to prepare imams for mosques and teachers for madrahs. The seminaries are registered with DEF and subjected to regular inspections by Ofsted. The reports from such inspections can be accessed on the net.

The seminaries offer most subjects from the National Curriculum, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and The Islamic studies traditional curriculum (Ders-e-Nezami), during which students undertake a six years programme of Islamic theology to achieve the status of Alim (scholar). Islamic theology programme includes Tajweed (Qura'nic recitation), Tahfeez (memorisation). Qura'nic studies also consist of Tafseer (Qur'anic translation and interpretation).

It also offers provision for studying Hadith (accounts of what the Prophet did, said, or approved) and Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence developed by one of the four main schools of jurisprudence).

The Association of Muslim Schools (AMSUK) represents a large number of full time Muslim schools.

# MUSLIM FAMILY LIFE

The family is very important in the Muslim society. In the holy Qur'an Allah (God) gives guidance on the rights, responsibilities and obligations of every Muslim within their family and stresses the social values as a source of support, love and security. In Islamic culture the family is regarded as a wider unit than conventional definitions of an extended family. It includes all those regarded as blood relatives. Islam strongly advises the entire Muslim community to be one family without difference in colour or cast. All Muslims are regarded as brothers and sisters. Marriage and raising children; supporting and serving parents; giving protection to orphans; feeding and supporting the weak and poor are all regarded as a religious duty of every Muslim in the society.

Islam regards sex as a very important part of human life, but Islam advises a healthy, clean and pure sexual life, after taking a faithful partner as a husband or wife. Sex is allowed after marriage. Islam is strictly against any sexual contact before or outside of marriage. Islam considers responsible and proper segregation of both sexes, before reaching the age of puberty, to prevent any encouragement of pre-marital sexual involvement.

Men and women are treated equally in Islam. They have to perform the same duties. According to Islamic teaching, men and women have their own special roles to play in the society. Men and women are responsible for all matters outside and inside their home and for supporting their families. Islam drew a striking contrast between the position of women before Islam and their position after Islam. Before Islam women had no rights in their society, no obligations, no protection from the family unit, and no legal status as independent human beings. Sometimes women were treated worse than animals and were regarded as a burden

on the family. After Islam, the holy Qur'an declared that women should have justice; this created a revolution in Arabia. Women were given equal rights and status to men. The Prophet (PBUH) gave a speech about women's rights and warned those who abused women. The rights given to women were:-

1. Inheritance - women will have the right to inherit after the death of a relative.
2. The right to own something after marriage without consulting her husband.
3. The right to have her own business without consulting or sharing with her husband.
4. The right to have her own property without consulting her husband.
5. The right to educate herself.

The Prophet's wife Aisha was the first woman who taught the followers of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). She was the first woman teacher in the history of Islam. The holy Qur'an is the first book which has a chapter named 'The Women'. In public behaviour there is a code, particularly during visits and other engagements, for example, men and women do not shake hands with each other, they usually sit in different rooms and lower their gaze when talking. It is preferable to remain silent when adults or elders are speaking. These codes are applied when receiving visitors from another family, but there are no restrictions when the visitors are from the same family. Relationships within the privacy of the immediate family are the same as western families.

## CARE FOR SELF

Muslim men and women are required to wear good clothes to cover their bodies and at the same time fulfil the needs of the weather. The dress is to be modest, to show respect and dignity in the society. Women are required to be covered from head to foot. Therefore Muslim women sometimes face difficulties in hospitals. Muslim girls in schools face similar difficulties during their P.E. lessons. Muslim women do not expect to be undressed other than when they are alone. Therefore, in any clinical examination they must not be fully exposed. Muslim men are required to keep themselves covered from their waist to their knees, even in the presence of other men.

Physical contact between men and women, other than close relatives, is regarded as embarrassing. Even putting an arm around the opposite sex could be offensive. On the other hand, physical contact between the same sexes is natural and acceptable for example shaking hands, hugging, kissing and putting arms around each other.

During menstruation and after birth, sexual intercourse is forbidden. During these days, women are exempted from all kinds of religious duties. Before Islam, people used to regard women, during these days, as unclean. They were not allowed to enjoy normal life, such as cooking, sharing, touching each other or kissing loved ones. After Islam, the holy Qur'an strictly abandoned all these practices, and regarded them as ignorant and inhumane.

# WOMENS' HEADSCARF (HIJAB)

**This article is written by Mary Ali, The Institute of Islamic Information and Education, North America. ([www.iiie.net](http://www.iiie.net))**

"Why do Muslim women have to cover their heads?" This question is one that is asked by Muslim and non-Muslim alike. For many women it is the truest test of being a Muslim.

The answer to the question is very simple - Muslim women observe HIJAB (covering the head and the body) because Allah has told them to do so.

"O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women to draw their outer garments around them (when they go out or are among men). That is better in order that they may be known (to be Muslims) and not annoyed..." (Our/an 33:59)

Other secondary reasons include the requirement for modesty in both men and women. Both will then be evaluated for intelligence and skills instead of looks and sexuality. An Iranian school girl is quoted as saying, "We want to stop men from treating us like sex objects, as they have always done. We want them to ignore our appearance and to be attentive to our personalities and mind. We want them to take us seriously and treat us as equals and not just chase us around for our bodies and physical looks."

A Muslim woman who covers her head is making a statement about her identity. Anyone who sees her will know that she is a Muslim and has a good moral character. Many Muslim women who cover are filled with dignity and self esteem; they are pleased to be identified as a Muslim woman. As a chaste, modest, pure woman, she does not want her sexuality to enter into interactions with men in the smallest degree. A woman who covers herself is

concealing her sexuality but allowing her femininity to be brought out.

The question of hijab for Muslim women has been a controversy for centuries and will probably continue for many more. Some learned people do not consider the subject open to discussion and consider that covering the face is required, while a majority are of the opinion that it is not required. A middle line position is taken by some who claim that the instructions are vague and open to individual discretion depending on the situation. The wives of the Prophet (PBUH) were required to cover their faces so that men would not think of them in sexual terms since they were the "Mothers of the Believers," but this requirement was not extended to other women.

The word "hijab" comes from the Arabic word "hajaba" meaning to hide from view or conceal. In the present time, the context of hijab is the modest covering of a Muslim woman. The question now is what is the extent of the covering?

The Qur'an says: "Say to the believing man that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them; and Allah is well acquainted with all that they do.

"And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; and that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands..." (Qur'an 24:30-31)

These verses from the Qur'an contain two main injunctions: (1) A woman should not show her beauty or adornments except what appears by uncontrolled factors such as the wind blowing her

clothes, and (2) the head covers should be drawn so as to cover the hair, the neck and the bosom.

Islam has no fixed standard as to the style of dress or type of clothing that Muslims must wear. However, some requirements must be met. The first of these requirements is the parts of the body which must be covered.

Islam has two sources for guidance and rulings: first, the Qur'an, the revealed word of Allah and secondly, the Hadith or the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who was chosen by Allah to be the role model for mankind. The following is a Tradition of the Prophet:

"Ayesha (R) reported that Asmaa the daughter of Abu Bakr (R) came to the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) while wearing thin clothing. He approached her and said: 'O Asmaa! When a girl reaches the menstrual age, it is not proper that anything should remain exposed except this and this. He pointed to the face and hands.'" (Abu Dawood)

The second requirement is looseness. The clothing must be loose enough so as not to describe the shape of the woman's body. One desirable way to hide the shape of the body is to wear a cloak over other clothes. However, if the clothing is loose enough, an outer garment is not necessary.

Thickness is the third requirement. The clothing must be thick enough so as not to show the colour of the skin it covers or the shape of the body.

Another requirement is an overall dignified appearance. The clothing should not attract men's attention to the woman. It should

not be shiny and flashy so that everyone notices the dress and the woman.

In addition there are other requirements:

- Women must not dress so as to appear as men.
- Women should not dress in a way similar to the unbelievers.
- The clothing should be modest, not excessively fancy and also not excessively ragged to gain others' admiration or sympathy.

Often forgotten is the fact that modern Western dress is a new invention. Looking at the clothing of women as recently as seventy years ago, we see clothing similar to hijab. These active and hard-working women of the West were not inhibited by their clothing that consisted of long, full dresses and various types of head covering. Muslim women who wear hijab do not find it impractical or interfering with their activities in all levels and walks of life.

Hijab is not merely a covering dress but more importantly, it is behaviour, manners, speech and appearance in public. Dress is only one facet of the total being.

The basic requirements of the Muslim woman's dress apply to the Muslim man's clothing with the difference being mainly in degree. Modesty requires that the area between the navel and the knee be covered in front of all people except the wife. The clothing of men should not be like the dress of women, nor should it be tight or provocative. A Muslim should dress to show his identity as a Muslim. Men are not allowed to wear gold or silk. However, both are allowed for women.

For both men and women, clothing requirements are not meant to be a restriction but rather a way in which society will function in a proper, Islamic manner.

**This article is written by Mary Ali, The Institute of Islamic Information and Education, North America. ([www.iiie.net](http://www.iiie.net))**

# DIETARY RESTRICTIONS

According to Islam all good things are allowed to be used as food. As a general rule every food is lawful unless declared otherwise. Islam provides guidance as to what food is unlawful which is called Haram. Pork in all forms is unlawful (Haram).

All varieties of fish and all kinds of vegetables are acceptable (Halal) in Islam. It is only in the variety of meat that Islam discriminates between certain animals. Pig in all forms and other carnivorous animals are specifically forbidden (whether they are slaughtered ritually or not). It is likewise unlawful to use even the fat or bones of the pig and all the carnivorous animals. Any food which contains lard will be unlawful, whether it is ice-cream or bread. Moreover, an animal which is lawful becomes unlawful, if it is not ritually slaughtered. Therefore, all animals which have died naturally or have been killed contrary to Islamic law, for example, have died from electric shock, or sacrificed in any rituals, or been slaughtered without taking the name of Allah (God), are unlawful.

Within the Islamic law, animals are slaughtered so that the blood flows out by penetrating the neck (with a very sharp knife). The name of God (Allah) should be recited upon slaughtering. Such meat is called Halal. The Muslim community has established its own system of distributing Halal meat throughout Britain through shops run by Muslims. All other foods containing meat that is not properly slaughtered are forbidden. A Muslim has to read the contents of foods before buying them.

With regards to drinks, all alcohol is forbidden. All soft drinks are permitted. Water is usually drunk with meals. The law relating to alcohol is very strict, there are no exemptions. Muslims are allowed to eat dairy products such as cheese if it's made with

rennet other than pig. Islam is very strict in the cooking of food, which should be cooked thoroughly.

Any drugs to distort the mind or make someone unconscious are unlawful and are not allowed to be sold or taken. Cigarettes are also not good for health and a smoker can become addicted. Islam does not advise the use of such things.

# MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Marriage in Islam is an agreement between a man and a woman. Marriage in Islam is regarded as a practical social need and a positive change in an individual's life. It enables people to lead a responsible life, to their full potential. Every Muslim should marry if they have the financial and physical abilities to do so.

The traditional time is after the age of puberty, but most countries have legislation on minimal ages for marriages. A Muslim man can marry a Jewish or Christian woman, but a Muslim woman must only marry a Muslim man.

Asian Muslim weddings are traditionally arranged by the families concerned. Pre-marriage consultations of the man and woman in question are important and essential. Consultation with parents is also important. The marriage is seen as a union of two families.

First cousin marriages are acceptable in Islam and occur frequently. Many Asian Muslims consider that these marriages within the family are more likely to be successful. The man and the woman are both well known to each other and come from the same cultural background.

Wedding ceremonies are culturally important social gatherings in the Muslim community. As part of the wedding, before commencing their life as husband and wife, the couple must be declared as husband and wife in a ceremony. During the wedding an acceptance is taken from the male partner and acceptance from the female partner to take each other as husband and wife. The marriage ceremony is simple and can be performed by the Imam and at least two male witnesses and a guardian representing the woman. This process is called Nikah. After the

ceremony, the couple can get together and they are allowed to have sexual contact. In Britain to validate the marriage, Muslim couples must register their marriage in the registry office before or after the religious ceremony. Some mosques provide both the Nikah and civil registration at same time. In some Muslim communities the civil ceremony at the registry office is often regarded as an engagement ceremony which is followed by the wedding. The wedding is regarded as a large celebration for relatives, friends and neighbours. Sometimes it may go on for one, two, three, four or five days which is part of tradition. Religiously, weddings should be kept very simple and affordable rather than a means of competition in lavishness as it is happening within the Asian community.

Any sexual relationship without a valid marriage, in which a man may take no responsibility for the woman and any of his children, is strictly forbidden in Islam. Islam forces men and women to be strictly responsible for any sexual relationship.

Polygamy is illegal in the UK and in most countries of the world. However, in some very special circumstances and after fulfilling some conditions, Muslim men are allowed to marry up to four wives. However, a husband must fulfil the required rights of all the wives and at the same time must have adequate means and abilities to support them equally in accordance with their status. Traditionally and due to economic realities most men will marry only one wife. In most Muslim countries, particularly in Asian countries, legislation forbids more than one wife without a prior permission from a family court. Permission is only given in some cases such as, infertility, physical or mental illness of the first wife. The husband is also required by Law in some Muslim countries to get permission of the existing wife or wives before he may marry again. Polygamous marriages are still a tradition in some part of

the world. However, it is not legal to marry polygamously in the United Kingdom.

# DIVORCE

Islam recognises that sometimes after marriage, a couple for various reasons, may find it difficult to live with one another. Therefore, Islam permits divorce. However, before choosing divorce, there are clear guidelines which should be followed to resolve differences. The Muslim community leaders and Imams are well prepared to help the community in solving marital issues. Most mosques are also prepared for this. Islam also condemns the divorce and discourages couples to take such action, for the reason that it will have bad effects on their families.

In most cases, the divorce is initiated by the husband and he is not required to justify the divorce but he must say the words, "I divorce you," preferably in front of witnesses once each time, at monthly intervals but in the situation when his wife's period cycle is ended. This procedure gives him time to rectify his decision if he was wrong, after each month. The man must also pay his wife the sum promised as a dowry and all other expenses. However, if a man in any situation divorces his wife three times in one go then the majority opinion is that the divorce is a complete full divorce. This is regarded as a punishment for the man for humiliating his wife.

In case of a wife initiates a divorce, she must also follow a process but must justify and approve it in a court or Sharia committee and apply for dissolution. If both parties are U.K residents, they have to follow the U.K Laws in a British family court.

In Islam, the children of divorced couples will be raised by the mother throughout infancy unless she wants to give the responsibility to her husband but he will have equal guardianship. It is the mother's right to keep her children. However, courts in the

U.K make their own custody orders according to the best interests of the affected children.

Islam encourages the divorced and widowed, to continue their social life by re-marrying. It is very virtuous of a man to become supportive by marrying a widow. A divorced pregnant woman should not marry until her child is born.

# **BIRTH, NAMES AND BIRTH CONTROL**

## **BIRTH**

At the birth, every Muslim baby should be given a bath after birth to remove any impurities. Then the call to prayer "Azaan", should be recited into the child's right ear and the call to a congregational prayer "Iqamah" into the left ear. This is usually done by the father or any other male Muslim or by the local Imam. These words should be the first the child hears and are regarded as an introduction of the new born to Islam. In Islam when a child is born, the head of a baby is shaved. The hair is then buried. Before the burial the hair is weighed and the equivalent weight of silver is given to the poor in charity. The name may be chosen by the parents or by the Imam or by consultation between the two. All this ought to take place by the 7<sup>th</sup> day.

It is a requirement of Islam that all boys must be circumcised. In most families this takes place soon after the birth. It is done not only on the grounds of health, but Islam strictly requires this and it is a symbol of being a Muslim. The circumcision may be carried out privately or by a General Practitioner. FGM or girls circumcision is not Islamic and Islam forbids such terrible cruelty to girls.

## **MUSLIM NAMES**

The names of most of the Muslim families, usually, have the same surnames for all family members. However, some Asian Muslim families from the South Asian sub-continent might have different names. For the reason that people are identified by their fathers' names, by their village name or by their tribal names. But in the British born Asian Muslims, this is no longer a problem as such because they have adapted their fathers' names' as their

surnames. So it became easier to sort the family matters regarding the family.

However, problems remain in understanding some names of Arabic origin. For example Abdul Rashid is one single name in Arabic but most people believe that it might be two names. This problem is still persistent because there are lots of such names. Almost all Arabic names starting with Abdul must have another part to complete one single first name or a surname. The other daunting issue is the pronunciation of long Arabic names or the extended family names which is very difficult to resolve unless one becomes familiar with correct pronunciation of Arabic language. Some Muslim women's names cause difficulty such as Bibi and Begum, which is a tradition that such names are to be added to the first name. They are not surnames as some people assumed here in this country.

Asian Muslims from Indian and East African origin usually have surnames shared by the whole family.

## **BIRTH CONTROL**

Contraception is not allowed in Islam. It is regarded as an interruption in the gifts of Allah. It is allowed in some cases when a mother's health would suffer. The scholars could be informed and they can advise about contraception. Abortion is absolutely forbidden in the holy Qur'an. Islam regards abortion as wrong and is permitted only to save the life or health of a mother.

Infertility treatment is allowed in Islam. Scholars acknowledged infertility treatment. Scholars who allow treatment for infertility are only allowing using sperm from the father and third party involvement is not permitted for ethical reasons.

# DEATH AND BURIAL

A Muslim believes that apart from Allah, everything in this world will finish one day, so there is death for everything and everyone.

The death of a loved one is regarded as a departure from the temporary world. In Islam the time of death is predetermined by God (Allah). One should remain satisfied with Allah's decision. Muslims believe that life and death are in the hand of our creator Allah.

In Islam, crying and excessive expression of grief and sorrow is not allowed but traditionally such acts are seen in the Muslim community. Devoted people and British born Muslims will be seen as well disciplined during bereavement. Some women are traditionally seen as very openly expressing their grief.

In Islam it is the duty of the community, the whole family and friends to visit a bereaved family to comfort them and to share their grief. It is regarded as an obligation for neighbours to help the family and to prepare food for them and send it to their house and host their guests for three days and three nights. At the time of death someone from the family will sit by the bed of the dying person to recite the holy Qur'an and the (Shahadah) declaration of faith; (Which means there is no God but Allah and the Prophet Muhammad is his Messenger) so this can be the last words of the dying person to show that the person passed away with faith and also to give comfort to the dying person. The recitation of the holy Qur'an can be done by any family member or by any practising Muslim in case the death occurs in hospital. There is no confession in Islam to any one but only to Allah (God).

In any such cases where no family members are present, then any Muslim person can be asked for help. The best practice would

be to ask the family in advance that in such case who they wish to be contacted or which local mosque should be contacted. The local mosques and community leaders would willingly help. The mosques and community organisation contact details can be obtained from Mosques' Directory which is now available on the internet.

After the death, the dead person's body should be straightened, the eyes should be closed, chin should be tied with a piece of cloth, the face should be turned towards the right and both legs should also be straightened and both toes should be tied with a cloth this is for a short while immediately after the death so the body shape remains normal. The last washing, which is called 'ghussal', will be given to the body by the Muslims themselves. This is usually arranged by the funeral director or the local mosque. After the ghussal (washing), the body is put in white clothes (kafan) and then placed into the coffin. Still born babies or a miscarried foetus should also be given to parents for burial or the hospitals make such arrangements for it.

Islam regards that our bodies belong to our creator God (Allah) and therefore, no part of body should be removed after death. Post-mortem examinations are forbidden unless absolutely necessary for legal reasons. If a post-mortem is legally required then it should be clearly explained to the family. Islam regards suicide as a major sin and euthanasia is strictly prohibited.

In Islam it is a requirement that the bodies must be given a proper burial and mustn't be cremated. According to the teachings of Islam the burial should take place as soon as possible. Muslims have their own plots in most cemeteries in big cities. The burials are organised by the local mosque, and the local community.

# MUSLIM FESTIVALS

The Islamic calendar consists of twelve months, each lasting for approximately 29 or 30 days depending on the sighting of the moon. Muslims follow the Lunar calendar as opposed to the solar calendar, consequently, the Islamic year is made up of 354 days instead of 365 days. The Muslim calendar therefore occurs 10 or 11 days earlier each year.

The various festivals are as follows. The month of Ramadan is the 10th month of the Islamic calendar and is a very holy month. Eid-ul-Fitr is celebrated at the end of Ramadan, by wearing new clothes and visiting one another. The second most significant event is Eid-ul-Adha (the festival of sacrifice) which is another major festival in the year. It is celebrated during the month of Dhul Hijjah, at the time of Hajj to remember Prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham's) (PBUH) willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail (Ishmael) (PBUH) in accordance with Allah's command, and Ibrahim's (PBUH) obedience was rewarded by an animal replacing his son. Muslims usually sacrifice an animal and the meat is shared with the poor and with relatives.

There are some other occasions which Muslims regard as important and some Muslims may celebrate them.

During celebration and festivals, members of the Muslim community hold special prayer services and pay visits to their loved ones. Therefore, hospitals, schools, the police, prison authorities and others who work with the Muslim community should be aware of such events. Some sort of arrangements need to be made in order to provide facilities for celebrations and meeting relatives and / or friends. Local mosques can be requested for visits and information.

# MUSLIMS AND EDUCATION

Islam imposes a clear decree on parents to educate their children. It is the duty of every Muslim to teach their children as a minimum, literacy and numeracy which enables their children to understand their religion and the holy Qur'an. Most Muslim children are therefore, literate in Arabic.

The needs of Muslim children at school are very important and there are some concerns amongst parents and community leaders. Firstly, language may create a problem because Muslim children may have learnt their first language, followed by English, and then Arabic (which is linked to their religion). The teachers should not discourage the children from coping with these languages. English is important for growth and progress in their education, the first language is also important for retaining identity and recognition within the family unit. It is very important for Muslims to be given the opportunity, both in and out of school, to learn these three languages in order to ease the conflicts within the system.

Muslim children face additional problems. Some of these problems are similar to those that may be faced by children from other minority groups; those that are associated with various social agencies that communicate with a different understanding. Muslim children may face more difficulties, due to their parents Islamic and Ethnic backgrounds. These difficulties can come from a number and combination of sources: from their peer group inside and outside their school, the school environment, the teachers, the textbooks, the mass media, and the society in general, can all work individually or in combination to place confusing and conflicting demands on the child.

Muslim children therefore, need a high degree of understanding from their home and school. They need to be provided with moral support from the family, guidance from the mosque, and religious tolerance from the teachers and community workers. Only then, will young Muslims learn to fulfil their rights and obligations as Muslims and as British citizens, without any problems.

A major problem faced by Muslim children is co-education. Islam is strictly against co-education for children over the age of 10 years. This is the reason that Muslim parents are clearly advocating single sex education for boys and girls. This is a simple religious need.

Regarding Religious Education, Islam strongly advises parents to teach their children about their religion, as it is based on a shared belief that family stability depends on religious commitment and values and morality. Islam regards religious education as very important and Muslims believe that all religions should be given their parts in religious education in schools. Britain as a nation has shown a great respect and tolerance toward a multicultural society. It is, therefore, important that religious education must be taught in schools.

One of the most important aspects of education is sex education. According to Islam, teaching the development of body organs and sex education to a mixed group is not agreed upon but sex education is essential. Islam directs that sex education should be taught by a teacher of the same sex as the students or by the parents. It is important that if some children do not wish to participate in sex education they must not be forced to do so. Their parents will fulfil this necessity if a teacher of the same sex is not available to teach them.

The wearing of uniforms can sometimes cause concern. To cover legs and the hair is very important for girls. Most schools acknowledge this problem.

In Physical Education, it is most important that it is not mixed. Swimming groups should be segregated. Girls are not allowed to wear clothes which expose their bodies in front of males. After P.E. lessons, Muslim children are not allowed to have mixed showers. They are not allowed to mix without proper clothing. They should have individual cubicles for showers. Some of these requirements are met in some schools.

Dietary problems can arise as Muslims children should have 'vegetarian or Halal' foods which should not contain animal fats. Muslim children must not be asked to take part in cookery lessons where pork is to be used.

It is recommended that schools, colleges, universities, youth clubs and other organisations, should have contact and a good relationship with mosques and the local community. They could invite Imams, parents and community leaders to schools.

In some schools during religious education rather than prayers being said, they select stories from various religions. In collective assemblies, the telling of such good stories can be used to cover all religions.

# MUSLIMS AND POLICE

Muslims usually keep away from crimes, this means they have a good relationship with the police. However, in some areas, the crime rate amongst Muslim community is high.

Muslims in custody or in prison are given the right to practice their religion. Sometimes religious practice affects Muslim prisoners and Muslim offenders in jail. Looking at the past experiences Muslim offenders in hostels and prisons have practised their religion, with the help of local Imams, this has shown that it had a good effect on them.

It is important for police and prison authorities to recognise the importance of the language and cultural needs of Muslims. It is recommended that Muslims be allowed to participate in their festivals, by arranging such necessary services.

# **MUSLIMS AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

Family problems are common in every community, and family problems exist in the Muslim community as well. Social problems are on the rise. Should problems occur, Social Workers are required to understand the values of Islamic culture.

Islam is strictly against any form of child abuse. Where social problems occur, Islam strongly believes in consultation. If a family problem exists, all other family members should offer support and offer solutions for the problem whether it is related to divorce or any domestic matter.

Should child abuse occur, children must be referred to a safe custody and to other Muslim parents. Language and cultural backgrounds must be observed during conversations and interviews by the Social Workers.

# **GLOSSARY TERMS COMMONLY USED BY MUSLIMS**

## **Greetings**

<i>Assalamo Allaikum</i>	Peace be on you.
<i>Wa' Alaikum As-Salam</i>	Peace be on you also.
<i>Allah Hafiz</i>	Good-bye.
<i>Eid Mubarak</i>	Happy Eid.

## **Invocations**

<i>Bismillah-ir-Rahmah-nir-Rahim</i>	In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
<i>Insha-Allah</i>	If Allah wills.
<i>Alhamdulillah</i>	Praise be to Allah.
<i>Allahu-Akbar</i>	Allah is the Greatest.
<i>Jazakallah Khairan</i>	May Allah reward you
<i>Shukran or Shukriya</i>	Thanks.

## **The five daily prayers**

<i>Fajr</i>	This is the first daily prayer said early in morning after dawn.
<i>Zuhr</i>	Midday prayer.
<i>Asr</i>	Mid-afternoon prayer.
<i>Maghrib</i>	Prayer just after sunset.
<i>Isha</i>	Evening prayer, recommended before midnight.

## Other Arabic terms

<i>Adhan</i>	Call to prayers. (the five daily prayers)
<i>Akhirah</i>	The Hereafter.
<i>Arkan</i>	Pillars (of Islam).
<i>Awrah</i>	The private parts of the body which a Muslim should not expose.
<i>Dunya</i>	World/Worldly life.
<i>Eid a/-Adha</i>	Festival of sacrifice.
<i>Eid a/-Fitr</i>	Festival of breaking the fast Celebrated at the end of Ramadan.
<i>Fard</i>	Obligatory. e.g. obligatory prayer.
<i>Fiqh</i>	Jurisprudence.
<i>Ghusl</i>	Complete bath after sexual intercourse or nocturnal emission.
<i>Hadith</i>	Reported traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).
<i>Hajj</i>	Pilgrimage to Makka.
<i>Halal</i>	Permitted. Eg. Ha/al food.
<i>Haram</i>	Prohibited. Eg. Alcohol is Haram.
<i>Hifz</i>	To memorise the Quran.
<i>Ibadah</i>	Ritual worship; but all good actions are an act of worship.

<i>Iftar</i>	Breaking the fast after sunset.
<i>Imam</i>	The person who leads the prayer: a religious leader.
<i>Iman</i>	Faith; conviction.
<i>Islam</i>	Submission and peace.
<i>Jamaah</i>	Congregational prayer.
<i>Jihad</i>	To struggle and strive both an internal and external struggle.
<i>Jumah</i>	Friday.
<i>Kabah</i>	The House of Allah - focal point in Makkah towards which all Muslims turn to prayer.
<i>Khalifah</i>	God's representative on earth (an Honor given to man by God i.e. Prophet Adam); the Caliph or head of the Muslim government.
<i>Mahr</i>	Dowry gift paid to the wife by the husband. It is the compulsory part of the marriage contract and an exclusive property of the wife.
<i>Makruh</i>	Not forbidden, but strongly discouraged.
<i>Mubah</i>	Permitted through silence.
<i>Qari</i>	A reciter of the Ouran; in a Melodious voice with proper rules of Al- Tajwid (the science of recitation of the Ouran).
<i>Qiblah</i>	The direction towards which Muslims face in their prayers.

<i>Quran</i>	Literally means reading. The Last Divine Revelation of Allah.
<i>Ramadan</i>	The Muslims' sacred month of fasting; The ninth month of the Muslim lunar calendar.
<i>Rasul</i>	Messenger. Rasulallah means the Messenger of Allah.
<i>Risalah</i>	The Prophethood. Beginning with Adam and finishes on Mohammad.
<i>Salah</i>	Prayer.
<i>Sadaqah al-Fitr</i>	The money paid to the needy before Eid al-Fitr by those who can afford, to enable the poor to participate in the Eid festivities.
<i>Salatul Jumah</i>	Friday congregational prayer.
<i>Sawm</i>	Fasting. Particularly in Ramadan, but also during other times as well.
<i>Shahadah</i>	Testimony. Declaration of belief in The Oneness of Allah (rawhid).
<i>Shalwar/Sirwal</i>	Trousers.
<i>Shariah</i>	Islamic law contained within the Quran and the Sunnah, Ijmaa and Qiyas.
<i>Suhur</i>	Early morning meal taken before dawn with the intention of fasting.
<i>Sunnah</i>	The reported traditions and sayings of Prophet Muhammad.
<i>Tarawih</i>	Special night prayers during the month of Ramadan.

<i>Tawhid</i>	Unity. The basic concept of Islamic teaching of the Oneness of Allah.
<i>Tayammum</i>	The symbolic purification before prayer when running water is not available.
<i>Umrah</i>	Lesser Pilgrimage which can be performed at any time other than the days of Hajj.
<i>Wajib</i>	Expressly imposed but not obligatory as Fard.
<i>Wudu</i>	Ritual washing (purification) before prayers, which entails washing the face, arms, and feet.
<i>Zakah</i>	Welfare due, given annually to the poor and distress
<i>Madrasah</i>	Supplementary School
<i>Daru-Uloom</i>	Seminary

**The Islamic studies traditional curriculum (Ders-e-Nezami)**

**Tajweed (Qura'nic recitation)**

**Tafseer (Qura'nic translation and interpretation)**

**Hadith (accounts of what the Prophet did, said, or approved)**

**Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence developed by one of the four main schools of jurisprudence)**