Islam and Islamic Civilization
The Islamic Faith
Illustrated Text of the Koran

These pages come from a Koran of the late 8th century. Muslims believe the Koran is an infallible transcription of God’s message to Muhammad. As the messenger of God, God gave Muhammad the responsibility of relaying God’s message to all believers. Divided into 114 suras, or chapters, the Koran is meant to be recited or chanted as part of Islamic worship.
The Koran is at the center of Muslim life. They recite verses from it in their daily prayers and at important public and private events. Many Muslims also memorize this holy scripture so that they can keep it in their hearts. Before touching the holy book, Muslims follow rituals for purification, including washing and preparing the mind, body, and spirit. Care must be taken that the Koran does not come into contact with any unclean substance, and it is never to be laid upon the ground.
Inscription of buildings with verses from the Koran symbolizes the living presence of the holy book in Islamic civilization.
The Five Pillars of Islam
Five Pillars of Islam

• Profession of Faith – “There is only one god and Mohammed is his Prophet"
• Pray five times a day
• Give alms to the poor to equalize life’s inequities
• Observe the hole month of Ramadan by fasting
• Make a pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime
Prayer in a Mosque
Give money to the poor
Fasting during the holy month of Ramadan is followed by a Bedouin celebration.
Pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime
ISLAM
Submit to the Will of God
Strengths of the Islamic Faith

• Provided straightforward doctrines. Islam was strongly monotheistic and promoted absolute obedience to God’s will since he was the creator of the Universe.

• Provided people a sense of political, social, and economic security within the community called the Umma.

• Provided followers with a cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic faith, culture, government, and social life.

• Brought a code of law and a written language to people who had not previously had them. Provided a revitalized trade network.

• Focused on the Koran as the poetically written, absolute uncorrupted word of God as revealed to Muhammad.

• Avoided pictures of God and Muhammad due to fear of worship of idols (idolatry).

• Articulated Muhammad’s vision which was a comprehensive belief in God’s plan for the earth and an attempt to establish a unified, egalitarian, moral and social order.
Weaknesses of Islam

• Intolerance
• Insistence on conformity of beliefs and persecution of infidels
• Fanaticism
• Harsh punishments for those convicted of crimes
• Jihads
Comparison between Islam and Christianity

- Monotheistic
- Koran
- Alms to poor 2.5% of income
- Heaven, hell, angels
- Egalitarian
- Redemptive suffering
- Sharia Laws
- Jihad
- Pilgrimage
- Absolute beliefs

- Monotheistic
- New Testament
- Alms to poor 10% of income
- Heaven, hell, angels
- Egalitarian
- Redemptive suffering
- Canon Laws
- Crusade
- Pilgrimage
- Absolute beliefs
Peacemaking in Islam

• Muhammad’s original vision was to live in peace and tolerance and unite tribal peoples under one faith.

• Muhammad had a reputation for mediating clan and tribal disputes and a reputation for justice, trustworthiness and honesty.

• Muslims submit to the will of God and, in submitting, they find peace. “Peace is on him who follows the Quran’s guidance,” and those who “believe and do good enter gardens beneath which rivers flow to abide in them by Allah’s permission: the greeting there is Peace.” (Quran 20.47 and 14.23)

• Each pillar of Islam contributes to individual and collective peace in its own way.
• “War can be waged against unbelievers and peace can be initiated with unbelievers if there is an alliance or if they come to you exhausted from fighting.” (2.11)

• “Muslims will find allies, but if they suddenly get thrown headlong into conflict and do not withdraw and the enemies do not offer peace, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them; against these Allah has given you clear authority.” (4.91)

• Jihads were means of pacifying non-believers who threatened the faithful or used when their survival was threatened.

• The **Islamic Law of Nations** written in the 800’s established where war could be carried out “only when non-Muslims lack legal authority to enter into discourse.” (Z. Karabell, *Peace be Upon You*, 2007, p. 13)
• “Religion is conceived as a limit on war” by the majority of Muslim theologians, jurists, and scholars historically and presently (J. Kelsay, Islam and War, 1993, p. 47)

• When Muhammad and his followers fled to Medina, they negotiated the Charter of Medina (622) with the Arab and Jewish tribes of Medina. This charter was notable for its inclusiveness and tolerance. Muhammad was an inter-tribal religious and political leader. The Charter promoted religious freedom and tolerance, prohibited violence, and established a system for conflict resolution. Its terms were violated, and Muhammad expelled a Jewish tribe which allied with his enemies in Mecca and invaded Medina. In 628, Muhammad negotiated the Treaty of al-Hudaybiyyah halting the war for 10 years.
After Muhammad’s death his companion, Abu Bakr, took control of the Arabian peninsula. Within decades the Muslims conquered parts of the Byzantine and Persian empires and north Africa. These conquests were largely nonviolent because the inhabitants sided with Muslims against their own rulers. The few who resisted the Muslims were forcefully taken over. Muslims used “words not swords” and left infrastructures intact. As long as subjugated people paid taxes, they were legally and financially protected. Many willingly converted.

Pax Islamica and Islamization sustained the newly forming civilization.

Around 600 AD a fateful schism between Shia’s and Sunnis occurred. Shias believed the heir to Muhammad should be a blood relative while Sunnis felt strong devotion was enough.

Baghdad, known as the City of Peace, became the capital of the Abbasid Dynasty of caliphs (749-1258). It was a cosmopolitan center where a cooperative spirit encouraged intercultural learning.
Monotheism doesn’t mean “we’re number one”

A twisted monotheism occurs when believing in only one God means there is only one truth. In that case the followers of a monotheistic faith could believe “We have the one truth, and you don’t.” They could also believe “If my God is true, yours must be false.” That is, “for my claim to win, yours has to lose.”

However, if we believe in a creator God who created all that exists, that means all creatures come from God, and this is inclusive. This then means, at the root of existence, conciliation, not discord, was the controlling principle. This vision of oneness made the monotheistic religions meaningful. Rather than being religions of divisiveness and warfare, they were religions of oneness and peace.
Harun al Rashid (786-809) was most famous Abbasid caliph
The Rapid Spread of Islam
Spread of Islam

In the 600’s and 700’s AD Islam spread through conversion and military conquest throughout the Middle East and North Africa. By 733, just 100 years after the death of Muhammad, an ordered Islamic state stretched from Spain to India.
The Spread of Islam. The rapid spread of Islam created within a century a unified cultural and economic zone from India to the Atlantic Ocean within.
Reasons for the Rapid Spread of Islam

• Sassanid (Persians) and Byzantine (Greek Orthodox) empires, the two large empires in the Middle East, were weak in the late 600’s CE after fighting each other for 400 years. By 661 Muslims had conquered the Sassanid Empire and part of the Byzantine Empire.

• Many Christians in Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey converted to Islam because they didn’t respect their bishops.

• Muslims conquered North Africa and most of Spain often nonviolently.

• From 661-750 the Muslim world was ruled by the Ummayad Dynasty in Damascus

• From 750-1258 the Muslim world was ruled by the Abbasid Dynasty in Baghdad. The caliph was the combined political and spiritual leader.

• Muslims tried to convert people, but protected Christians and Jews as “peoples of the book” and gave Zoroastrians legal status. These people weren’t taxed as much as pagans.

• Sometimes cash payments were given to people to convert.
Situation for Muslim Women
Islam brought improvements

- Pre-Islamic practices included female infanticide, slavery, and women purchased for marriage. Muhammad believed women were oppressed. Therefore, under his beliefs, women could:
  - consent to marriage,
  - divorce under certain conditions like desertion,
  - own and inherit property,
  - worship in the mosque in the early years of Islam.
The Koran also had passages in chapter 4 where women were subordinated:

- Early arranged marriages
- Few options other than marriage
- Birth control frowned on
- No abortions
- Divorce for women frowned on, but men could divorce
- Father got custody of children in divorce
"Those women who seem naked even when dressed, and those who walk flirtingly, and those who plait their heads like the humps of camels, thus inviting people's attention, will not enter Paradise nor will they smell its fragrance even though its fragrance can be smelt from a very long distance."

The Qur'an lays down the code of conduct for women in the following words: “And play your role by being in your houses and do not keep exhibiting your beauty and decorations like what used to happen in the Jahiliyyah period (before Islam).” (33:33)
Muslim Contributions to Humankind
Muslim Schools
“Kings are the rulers of the people, but scholars are the rulers of Kings.”

Traditional saying
A madrasa is a place for learning and prayer. This view into the courtyard of the Madrasa Chahār Bāgh in Eşfahān, Iran, shows the domed mosque, central pool, and rooms around the courtyard for study and accommodation. The madrasa was built from 1706 to 1714.

Madrasa, Eşfahān
Muslims became heirs of the legacies of Greco-Roman, Byzantine, and Persian cultures. They were willing to learn from their conquered peoples.

In the 700’s and 800’s AD, Arabs translated Greek, Syrian, Persian, and Indian scientific and philosophical works. Afterwards these works were preserved on paper manufactured in Baghdad in the 700’s having been learned from Chinese papermaking. Then these works were given to Europeans thus enriching European civilization.
While Islamic scholars have been duly praised for preserving and sharing Greek, Byzantine, Persian, and Indian learning, they also made many contributions of their own in:

• Mathematics;
• Astronomy (later informed Copernicus),
• Natural sciences,
• Glass-making- led to discoveries in optics,
• Chemistry, high temperature metallurgy,
• Medicine- Ibn Sina (980-1037) known as Avicenna in the West, understood the contagious nature of disease.
• Agriculture- Arabs brought sugar cane, bananas, mangoes, spinach, coconut palm, eggplant, artichokes and cotton from India from 700-900 AD
Glass was first discovered and developed in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Egypt. Techniques included blowing, casting and pressing, wheel cutting, and stamped and applied decoration. When Muslims conquered the Sassanid Empire, glassmaking, they became heirs to the most advanced techniques of glassmaking. By the 800’s AD in Baghdad a distinctively Islamic style had been established famous for its exquisite craftsmanship. This glass was traded all over Eurasia and became important in the vast new empire of Islam. In Syria in the 1200’s and 1300’s the most glorious glass was produced. In Aleppo and Damascus glass was created which was decorated with birds, animals, flowers, and it was gilded, enameled, and engraved. Arab thinkers at this time were also revolutionizing mathematics, geometry, optics, and chemistry.

Mongol invaders forced glassmakers to leave the Middle East and nearly wiped out this industry by 1400 AD. Venice then began to fill the need for glass. But in the period from 700 to 1400, the leading glass-making region in the world was within Islamic civilization.

When Mongols and Ottomans were conquering and destroying, some Muslim glassmakers fled to Europe and transmitted their know how to Europeans who evolved lenses, prisms, spectacles, and mirrors.
Mosque glass lamp with inscriptions from Koran
Through the centuries Mosques were illuminated with glass oil lamps.
Enameled and gilded glass vase from 1300 given to Yemeni sultan
Muslim Architecture
The Dome of the Rock, one of the oldest mosques, was built to honor the glory of Islam. Set in the heart of Jerusalem on the holy rock where Muhammad rose into heaven, it is located near the Wailing Wall of the Jews and the oldest Christian church in Jerusalem. Constructed as an octagon with marble columns and ornaments, the exterior contains mosaics and tiles of precious stones.
The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, built in 691
Cordoba, Spain, a city with considerable Muslim influence
This mosque in Córdoba, Spain, was begun in ad 786, while the city was the capital of Moorish Spain. Although the mosque became a Christian cathedral after the Roman Catholics of Spain re-captured Córdoba in 1236, the building retains its Islamic heritage. The mosque features columns that support arches decorated with stripes of alternating colors. Layered in two tiers, these distinctly Moorish arches convey a light and airy feeling to the interior of the building.
Alhambra palace and fortress in Granada Spain is considered a perfect expression of Islamic art - features reflecting pools, lacelike decorations and is framed by snowcapped mountains.
Mosque in Burkina Faso
The sloped construction of this mosque is in the architectural style of the Bobo Dioulasso region in eastern Burkina Faso. One-half of the people in Burkina Faso are Muslims.
Mosque in Nouakchott

A mosque in Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania. Islam is the state religion of Mauritania and is professed by nearly all Mauritanians.
Mosque in Esfahan, Iran
Mosque in Bosnia and Herzegovina
The Ottomans conquered most of Bosnia in 1463, and by 1483 controlled most of Herzegovina as well. The two territories, then separated, remained provinces of the Ottoman Empire for the next 400 years. Here, a mosque built by the Ottomans stands near Mostar. Mostar was severely damaged as a result of the civil war that followed Bosnia and Herzegovina’s declaration of independence from Yugoslavia in 1992.
Sultan Ahmet Mosque

One of the principal mosques in İstanbul, Turkey, the Sultan Ahmet Mosque is also known as the Blue Mosque for the color of the tile-work and decorated interior. Built between 1609 and 1619, it was named for the ruling sultan of the time.
Mosque in Tajikistan

A majority of Tajikistan’s inhabitants are ethnic Tajiks, who are predominantly Muslim. Under Soviet rule (1921-1991), religion was severely restricted; mosques were closed and religious practice was prohibited outside of state-sanctioned places of worship. Restrictions were eased somewhat in the mid-1980s, but it was not until Tajikistan became independent in 1991 that Muslims were again able to freely practice their religion.
Kazimayn Mosque

The 19th-century gold-domed Kazimayn Mosque is near Baghdađ in Iraq. This famous temple contains the tombs of revered Shia Muslim leaders.
The Imam Al Abbas Mosque is located in the central Iraqi city of Karbalā‘. The city is a center of pilgrimage for Shia Muslims.
Muslim Art
Book illustration was an essential Islamic art, which flourished from the 7th to the 18th century. This manuscript shows Abu Zayd preaching in the mosque of Samarqand. Islamic art focused on book arts rather than easel painting because it was believed that art should serve a function, that of education.
Muslim Literature

Tales from a Thousand and One Arabian Nights

The Book of Kings by Ferdowzi (940-1020)

Rubaiyat by Omar Khayyam (1100’s AD)

Rose Garden by Sadi (1210-1292)

Persian Shakespeare

Persian Poet Rumi of 1200’s AD
Call to the Dance by Rumi
Come!
But don’t join us without music
We have a celebration here
Rise and beat the drums.
Whatever your thoughts are
We are far, far from them.
This is the night of light
This is the night we whirl to ecstasy
Tonight each flaming heart is a friend of music
You are made of feeling, thought and passion;
The rest is flesh and bone
We are the soul of the world
Not heavy or sagging like the body
But part of the spirit’s treasure.
A Brief History of the Middle East
From ancient times the Middle East has been the site of the civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome and several empires wherein lie the roots of Islam.
The first civilization was Mesopotamia from about 550 BC under Cyrus I.
Ruins of Persepolis, capitol of Persian Empire, established 550 BC
The Persians ruled over a vast empire and eventually invaded Greece under Darius I, (Battle of Marathon in 490), and under Xerxes I (Battle of Salamis in 480). The Persians were finally pushed out of Greece in 479. Later, about 334 BC, Alexander the Great invaded Persia and conquered that Empire in 332 BC.
Greeks and Seleucids Rule Middle East, 312-250 BC
Parthians (Arsacids)- 250 BC-224 AD) defeated Alexander’s successors, the Seleucids, and built Parthia into a superpower which rivaled the Roman Empire.
Sassanids 224-651 AD
Muslim Expansion in North Africa under the Umayyad Dynasty, 661-750 CE

- Tangier
- Carthage
- Kairouan
- Tripoli
- Cairo

R. Nile
Baghdad, capital of Abbasid Caliphate
Manuscript from Abbasid Dynasty, 750-1258
Ismail I conquered all of Iran and established the Safavid dynasty in 1501. This 17th-century mural shows him fighting an Uzbek khan.