



# Islam: Beliefs and teachings

## ■ The foundations of faith

### ▶ The six articles of faith in Sunni Islam

**Creed** a set statement of faith that all religious believers follow.

There is no official **creed** in Islam, but for Sunni Muslims there are six central beliefs, or articles of faith, which define their understanding of God. This teaching can be found in the Hadith, where Muhammad is recorded as saying: ‘You must believe in Allah, his angels, his holy books, his messengers, in the Last Day and in fate (both in its good and in its evil aspects).’

- 1 **Allah** (God): the unity and oneness of God is called Tawhid. Like Jews and Christians, Muslims believe in one God. The Arabic word for God is Allah, which simply means ‘the (al) God (ilah)’.
- 2 **Malaikah** (angels): God created angels to interact with human lives, bringing his divine message. Each Muslim has two guardian angels who record that person’s good and bad actions.
- 3 **Holy books**: God has revealed his word to humans in the Qur’an. This tells Muslims all they need to know about how to live their lives. Other inspired scriptures include the Tawrat of Musa (Torah), the Zabur of Dawud (Psalms) and the Injil of Isa (Gospels).
- 4 **Risalah** (prophethood): God has spoken through numerous prophets throughout time, including Adam, Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus). However, Muhammad is the greatest prophet.
- 5 **Akhirah** (the afterlife) Belief in the final judgement and life after death. This life is a preparation for the eternal life that follows. On the last day there will be a time of judgement, when Muslims will have to account for their lives.
- 6 **Al-qadr** (God’s predestination): God is responsible for everything and has set out a divine destiny for all things. God has written down all that has happened and all that will happen in the universe. However, this does not take away human free will.

**Jihad** striving to do what is right, for God. The greater jihad is the struggle that each person has, as an individual, to follow God’s will in their life. The lesser jihad is the fight to defend Islam (holy war).

**Submission to the will of God** Islam means ‘submission’; following the Five Pillars and the rules of Shari’ah law are a sign of being a true Muslim.

Although these six beliefs are central to the Islamic faith they are not the only important beliefs. Others include: the creed, the **jihad** and **submission** to the will of God.

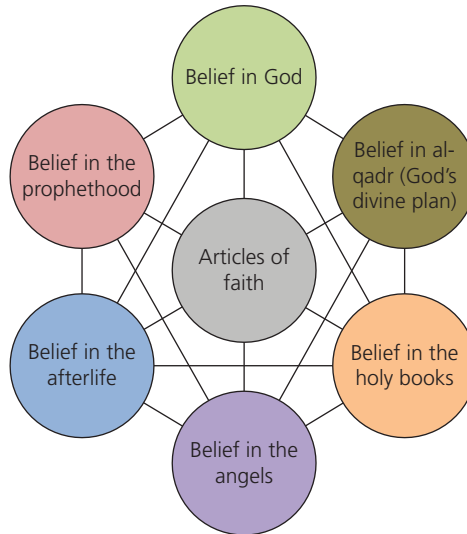
## Task

The six articles of faith in Sunni Islam

Create a mind map around these six articles of faith. Write out the six key beliefs on a large sheet of paper and add in the following ideas, linking them in where you think they belong:

- Prophet Muhammad
- Angel Jibril
- The Qur'an
- Free will or predestination?
- The afterlife
- One God (Tawhid)
- Ibrahim, Musa and Isa
- Two guardian angels
- Revelation from God

Can you think of six more of your own to add to the diagram?



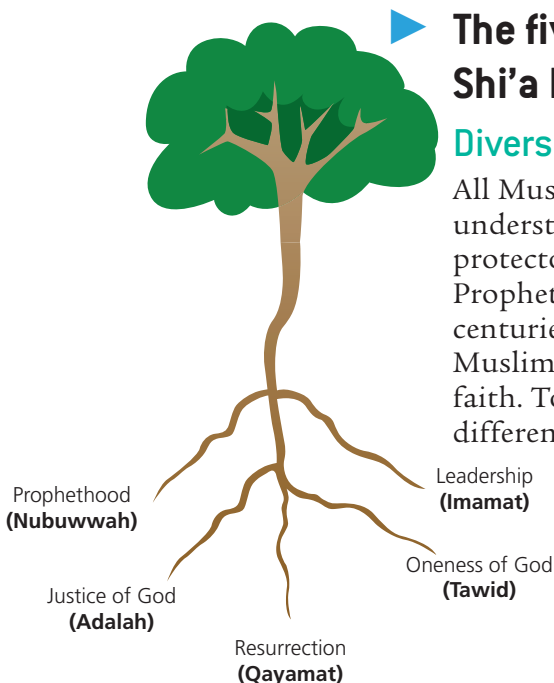
## The five roots of religion in Usul ad-Din in Shi'a Islam

### Diversity of beliefs in Islam

All Muslims share the central beliefs of the Islamic faith: the understanding that there is one God (Allah) who is creator, protector and judge; the belief that Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets, to whom God revealed the Qur'an. However, over the centuries, as Islam developed in different cultures and societies, Muslim scholars developed different ways of understanding the faith. Today there are some significant differences in the way different Muslim groups interpret these truths.

### The five roots of religion (Usul ad-Din)

Shi'a Islam emphasises the importance of five fundamental principles which are sometimes called the 'roots of religion'. Every individual must make themselves aware of these truths as the foundation of their faith.



**Usul ad-Din**, the five roots of religion, can also be referred to as the 'foundation of faith'. They are:

- ▶ Oneness of God (Tawid)
- ▶ Justice of God (Adl or Adalah)
- ▶ Prophethood (Nubuwwah)
- ▶ Leadership (Imamat)
- ▶ Resurrection (Qayamat).

1 The oneness of God (Tawid): There is one God who has no equals; he is a divine unity. He cannot be compared to anyone or anything. He is perfect and unique and he possesses infinite power and knowledge. He is immortal (he was never born) and has no partner or children. He alone should be worshipped.

*'Say, "He is God, [who is] One, God, the Eternal Refuge.'*

Qur'an 112:1–2

2 The justice of God (Adl or Adalah): God is perfect justice, fairness and wisdom. He does not wrong anyone and he will not tolerate wrongdoing. He cannot abuse his power by performing acts that go against his own nature to be just and fair. Humans must be responsible for their own actions, good or bad.

3 Prophethood (Nubuwwah): God has appointed prophets and messengers to guide human beings, showing them how to live in peace and submission to God. According to some Islamic sources, God sent 124,000 prophets; some of these brought divine scriptures with them, from God. Muhammad was the Seal of the Prophets, meaning that he brought the final, perfect and unchanging message from God.

4 Leadership (Imamae): All Muslims believe that Muhammad was the last prophet, who brought the final scripture (the Qur'an) to humanity. Shi'as believe that, after his death, God appointed 12 infallible Imams to guide the Muslim community, leading them on the path set by the Prophet Muhammad. These Imams are part of what Shi'as call Ahl al-Bayt (the Family of the House). In other words, they are part of Prophet Muhammad's extended household.

Of these 12, 11 have been killed. They believe that the 12th (or hidden) Imam is still alive, but is in hiding (occultation), waiting to reappear and rule on earth with justice. They sometimes refer to him as the Mahdi.

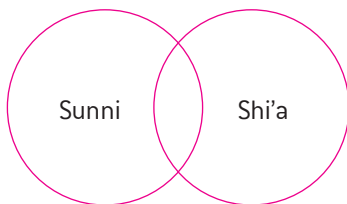
5 Resurrection (Qayamat): The belief that, on the Day of Judgement, there will be a resurrection, when all human beings will be physically raised to life to be judged by God. He will reward the good and punish the evil.

*'So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.'*

Qur'an 99:7–8

## Task

Using the information here and on Pxxx (Key differences between Sunni and Shi'a beliefs and practices) compare and contrast Sunni and Shi'a beliefs about imams.



Sunni and Shi'a beliefs about imams

## ■ The Nature of God (Allah)

### Key Concept

**Tawhid** 'Oneness' in reference to God. The basic Muslim belief in the oneness of God.



**Allah** the Arabic word meaning God. Muslims believe that they worship the same God that spoke through Musa (Moses) and Isa (Jesus).

The single most important belief in Islam is **Tawhid**, the oneness and unity of God. There is one God (**Allah**) who is the universal God of all humanity.

Muslims believe that God is:

- ▶ **Immanent:** God is always close by. The Qur'an says that God is closer to each one of us than the veins in our necks (50:16).
- ▶ **Transcendent:** God is beyond all things, not limited by the rules of nature.
- ▶ **Omniscient:** God has all knowledge, nothing can be hidden from him.
- ▶ **Beneficent:** God is always kind; he loves us.
- ▶ **Merciful:** God is always fair; he forgives us if we are sorry.
- ▶ **Judge:** on the last day, God will be our judge.
- ▶ **Creator:** God is the beginning; he is the cause of all that exists.

'God witnesses that there is no deity except Him, and [so do] the angels and those of knowledge – [that He is] maintaining [creation] in justice. There is no deity except Him, the Exalted in Might, the Wise.'

Qur'an 3:18

In Shi'a Islam there is an emphasis on **Adalat**, the Justice of God. This is one of the five roots of religion (Usul ad-Din).

The Qur'an teaches that it was God 'Who created the heavens and the earth' and that 'He has power over all things.' (46:33)

### ▶ Al-Fatihah, the opening

The al-Fatihah is the first surah (chapter) in the Qur'an. It means 'the opening', and many Muslims learn to recite it from memory in their daily prayers.

*'In the name of God, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful. [All] praise is [due] to God, Lord of the worlds – The Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful, Sovereign of the Day of Recompense.*

*It is You we worship and You we ask for help.*

*Guide us to the straight path – the path of those upon whom You have bestowed favour, not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray.'*

Qur'an 1:1–7

### Tasks

- 1 Copy out the al-Fatihah in your book.
- 2 Why do you think Muslims might try to learn this passage by heart?
- 3 Choose three things it says and write down what they teach Muslims about God.



Al-Fatihah in calligraphy

## ► The 99 names of God

The word 'anthropomorphism' comes from 'anthros' meaning man and 'morph' meaning shape. In some religious traditions it is acceptable to picture God in human form (for example in some Christian art). Islam rejects this sort of anthropomorphic representation.

'Whenever I am in a difficulty, I remember God with his words and through his names. There are ninety-nine names for God and we remember them for different purposes.'

Musarat S

In Islam, God is not to be confused with any living creature; he is beyond all things and cannot be pictured as a physical being. God is outside our human understanding, but for Muslims he lies at the very centre of everything we think and do. So, how do Muslims 'see' God?

The Qur'an and the Hadith have many different 'names' for God, not as a person, but using words that describe his qualities and attributes. They use names like: King, Protector, Wise, Eternal, Light, etc. These are known as the 99 beautiful names of God.

In fact, there are different lists of these names, recorded through different traditions of Muslims, but reciting these names has been a powerful form of prayer for Muslims through the centuries.

'Vision perceives Him not, but He perceives [all] vision; and He is the Subtle, the Acquainted.'

Qur'an 6:103



Calligraphy showing the 99 names of God

### Task

Here are some of the 99 names of God:

Giver of life, Protector, Just, Generous, Guide, Ever-forgiving, Watchful, Creator, Watcher, Compassionate, Avenger, Tremendous, Mighty, Finder, Patient, Knower, King, Gentle.

Copy out the table below. Put each of the 'names' of God in the list above into the column you think it most relates to.

Then compare your table with your neighbour's. Did you have different ideas? Why?

Transcendent: beyond all things	Omniscient: all-knowing	Beneficent: always loving	Merciful: kind and forgiving	Judge: decision- making, fair	Creator: maker, designer

## ▶ God: One, eternal and absolute God

### One God (Tawhid)

Islam is a **monotheistic** faith; it teaches that there is only one God. There are no other divine beings and it is a sin to compare God to other 'false' gods. Muslims reject the Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God. The passage 'He **begetteth** not, nor is he begotten' (Qur'an 112:3) makes it clear that God has no children and he is not the child of anyone.

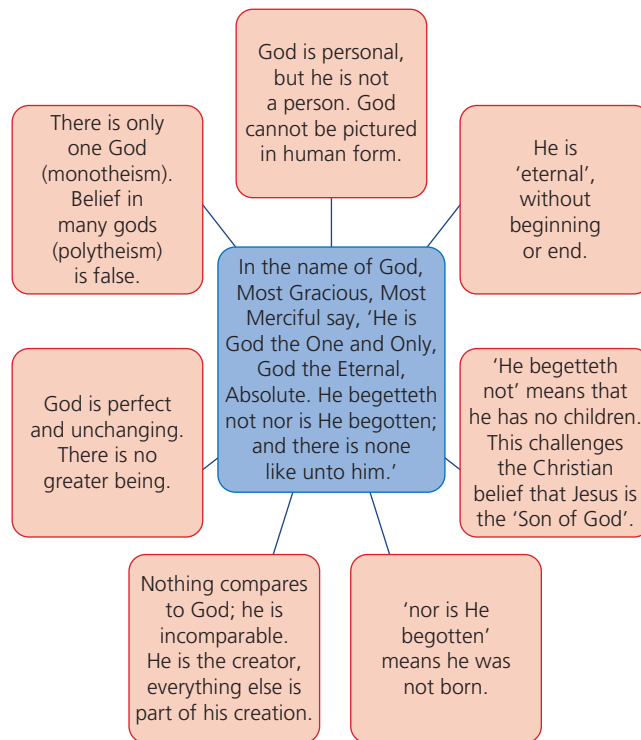
**Monotheism** belief in one true God.

**Beget** to bring a child into existence, or to create offspring.

**Surah** a chapter from the Qur'an.

### Task

This mind map shows **Surah 112–4** from the Qur'an, with notes around it to explain some of its meaning. This passage sums up the nature of God and is one that many Muslims will learn by heart.



- 1 Make a list of the qualities and attributes of God mentioned in Surah 112.
- 2 Using the information in Source A, write a paragraph to explain what Muslims believe about God. Include two quotations from Surah 112.

'There's nobody and there's nothing like Allah. I love him. I can't see him, but I know he's beneficent, merciful, master of the Day of Judgement.'

K Farzana (From *Committed to Islam* by Silvia Sutcliffe)

## ▶ The sin of shirk

**Shirk** associating other beings or things with God.

Islam warns of the sin of **shirk**. This is when a person worships something else other than God. There is one God and there can be no pictures to represent him. Muslims must worship the true God, not the image of him, created by human hands.

The prophets bring the word of God, but they are only human; God is divine.

For most Muslims, it is a sin of 'shirk' to show a picture of the Prophet Muhammad.



This text means Allah in Arabic. To worship anything other than Allah is to commit the sin of Shirk.

## ▶ Revelation: God reveals his truth

### Bringing God's message

Islam teaches that, God does not communicate directly with humans, but instead he uses special beings (humans and angels) to carry his message to us.

*'We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob . . . Moses and Jesus, and that given to all prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another.'*

Qur'an 2:136

### God's duty to guide us

Muslims believe that, because all humans have a duty to serve God, he must have shown us what his will is. As humans, we can only know what is truly right and wrong by understanding God's laws. Since God is just, it makes sense to believe that he must have shown us the right path to follow.

## ▶ Revelation of God's inspired truth

**Revelation** a message sent by God and 'revealed' or 'shown' to the human mind.

**Revelation** is the idea that God has made known his special truth to humans. Islam teaches that the prophets received God's divinely inspired message, instructing humans how to live. God's final and perfect message was given to the Prophet Muhammad, sent down to him over the last 23 years of his life. Each passage was memorised and recorded by his followers and then later written down to form the Qur'an, the final revelation.

*'This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those conscious of God.'*

Qur'an 2:2

**Fitrah** the natural instinct all humans have, from birth, to know and worship God.

**Taqwa** having an awareness of God in every aspect of life.

**Hanifs** people who lived in Arabia before the Prophet Muhammad and who believed in one God.

## Task

Create your own word file.

Make a list of the following terms, adding a definition for each in your own words:

- shirk
- revelation
- fitrah
- taqwa
- hanif
- rasul
- risalah



## Fitrah, the need for God

Islam teaches that we are all born with an instinctive need for God. This is called **fitrah**. It is the natural spirituality that connects us to our creator, making Muslims aware of God's presence and drawing them to worship him. This is where our conscience comes from, helping us discern right from wrong.

## Taqwa, awareness of God

**Taqwa** is the desire for a personal connection with God. Muslims try to live in a state of taqwa, the awareness of God. The Qur'an refers to taqwa as the highest quality of a Muslim, leading them to show worship and submission to God. Taqwa is often understood as a shield against wrongdoing; it allows Muslims to live as God would want, protecting them from evil.

*'O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you. Indeed, God is Knowing and Acquainted.'*

Qur'an 49:13

## Hanifs, the devout people

Islam teaches that, long before the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, in pre-Islamic Arabia, there were groups of people known as hanifs. The hanifs rejected idol worship; they believed in one Supreme God, creator of the universe, the God of Ibrahim who had sent revelations to the prophets through the ages. It is said by some Muslims that Muhammad's grandfather was a hanif and through him Muhammad learnt the practice of spending time alone in the desert to fast and pray.



Fitrah is the natural instinct that all people are born with to worship God



## Risalah: prophethood

### Key Concept



**Prophethood or 'risalah'** The term used of the messengers of God, beginning with Adam and ending with the Prophet Muhammad.

A '**rasal**' a prophet. 'Risalah' means bringing prophecy from God.

### Divine wisdom

Muhammad did not write the Qur'an from his own words; he was the channel through which God spoke. Islam makes a clear distinction between the divine revelation of the Qur'an and the human words of the Prophet Muhammad, which are preserved in the Hadith.

The channel of communication between God and humanity is called **risalah**; the prophets are our guides. They are human beings chosen to carry guidance from God to people, but their wisdom does not come from within themselves; it comes from God.

*'And We have already sent messengers before you and assigned to them wives and descendants. And it was not for a messenger to come with a sign except by permission of God. For every term is a decree.'*

Qur'an 13:38

The Qur'an teaches that every generation has been given its own prophet, bringing God's message in a book. The message brought by the Prophet Muhammad is essentially the same message as had been preached by all the prophets back to Adam: the need to worship the one, true God, who will be the judge of all.

*'And We send not the messengers except as bringers of good tidings and warners.'*

Qur'an 6:48

*'People, no prophet or messenger will come after me, and no new faith will emerge.'*

Muhammad's last sermon (Hadith)

### ► Muhammad is the last and greatest prophet

Muslims believe that through history, God has communicated to humans through revelations and the last and greatest of these revelations was given to the Prophet Muhammad. Muhammad did not come from a rich family and it is likely that he could not read or write. He was not a learned man or a scholar, but he was very **devout**. He would take himself off for days to meditate in a cave in the desert, seeking God. Muslims believe that God chose Muhammad as a prophet because he was a humble, honest man; a man he could trust with such a special message.

*'God chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him].'*

Qur'an 42:13



Names of the 25 prophets mentioned in the Qur'an

**Devout** devoted to God.

## ▶ Bringing God's message

### Key figures in the Qur'an

Islam teaches that God has sent many prophets throughout history; 25 of them are mentioned by name in the Qur'an, going right back to the creation of the world. Many of these prophets are characters from the Jewish and Christian scriptures (what Christians refer to as the Bible). However, Islam teaches that, over the centuries, the messages from these prophets have either been lost or become corrupted, so there was a need for a final revelation. Muhammad is known as the Seal of the Prophets, because his revelation of the Qur'an was God's final and absolute word.

'To every people was sent an apostle.'

Qur'an 10:47

Muslim tradition says that, in total, there have been around 124,000 prophets and that, once a prophet had been called by God, he lived a sinless life. Muslim authors put PBUH (peace and blessings be upon him) after a prophet's name to show them a deep level of respect.

In Islam the major prophets (apart from Muhammad) are: Adam, Ibrahim, Musa, Dawud, and Isa.

## ▶ Adam

Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets, because, when you put a seal on something you close it up. It is the final act, showing that nothing more can be added.

**Adam** is said to be the father of the human race. According to the Qur'an, God formed Adam from a handful of soil of many colours. This represents the diversity of people on earth. Eve was created from Adam's rib and they lived together in paradise. They were commanded not to eat from a particular tree, but the devil was able to convince them to taste its fruit. As a result, they were banished to earth. However, Adam confessed his sin and was forgiven, becoming the first prophet.

Muslims believe that Adam was created as God's 'khalifah' (his representative on earth). It was to be his job to rule in the place of God. Tradition says that he built the first **Ka'ba** in Makkah.

## ▶ Ibrahim

**Ka'ba** known as the House of God, the black covered, cube-shaped building at the centre of Islam's holiest mosque in Makkah.

**Polytheism** belief in many gods.

**Monotheism** belief in one true God.

**Ibrahim (Abraham)** is regarded as a hanif. This means that he had an inner knowledge that there is really only one true God. For this reason, he is seen as the greatest of the prophets before Isa (Jesus). He was born into a family of **polytheists**, but he rejected these beliefs in favour of **monotheism** and became a Muslim (one who bows down to God).

*'Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was one inclining toward truth, a Muslim [submitting to God]. And he was not of the polytheists.'*

Qur'an 3:67

Ibrahim had two sons who were both prophets: **Ishma'il** (the prophet to the Arabs) and **Ishaq** (the prophet to the Jews). For Muslims, Ishma'il is the more important, because he is an ancestor to Muhammad.

When Muslims go on Hajj they remember the distress of Hajar (Ishma'il's mother) as she ran between the hills of Al-Safa and

Al-Marwah in search of water. They also remember how God instructed Ibrahim to sacrifice Ishma'il. When Satan tried to tempt Ibrahim to disobey God, telling him to refuse to sacrifice his son, Ibrahim drove the evil one away by throwing stones at him.

There is a tradition that God revealed a holy book to Ibrahim, known as 'the scrolls of Ibrahim' or the 'Sahifah'. The Qur'an mentions this book, but no record remains of it today.

## ▶ **Musa**

**Musa (Moses)** is remembered by Muslims as one of the most significant prophets. The teachings of Ibrahim had been forgotten and his book lost, so a new prophet had to be sent. Musa led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land. Islam teaches that he was given the word of God, known as the Tawrat (Torah), but the people were disobedient and the message became distorted.

## ▶ **Dawud**

**Dawud (David)** was Israel's greatest king, who made Jerusalem a holy place for Muslims. He received the word of God in the Zabur (Psalms), beautiful hymns of praise to God.

## ▶ **Isa**

**Isa** is the Islamic name for **Jesus**. Apart from Muhammad, Isa (Jesus) and his mother Maryam (Mary) are the most prominent figures in the Qur'an. It recognises Isa as a prophet and as a successor to Moses. He was given the Injil (Gospel) and he performed miracles. However, Muslims deny the Christian teaching of the Trinity (page xx) and reject the belief that Isa is God. They say God is 'one' not 'three'.

*'We gave Moses the Book and followed him up with a succession of apostles; We gave Jesus ... signs (miracles) and strengthened him with the holy spirit.'*

Qur'an 3:87

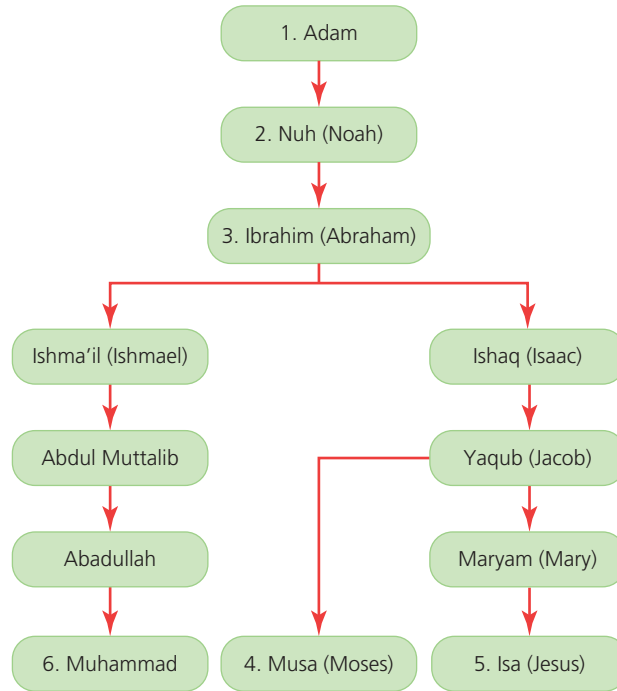
The Qur'an teaches that, although it appeared as if Isa (Jesus) had been crucified, in fact he did not die. God could not allow evil men to triumph over his prophet in such a way. Instead, Isa was taken up to heaven and will reappear in the second coming when God judges the world.

*'And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them.'*

Qur'an 4:157

## Task

Write out the name of five of these key figures in Islam and make a list of the things Muslims believe are special about each one.



■ The Tree of Prophets: Islam teaches that Ibrahim (Abraham) was father to Ishaq (Isaac) and Ishma'il (Ishmael). Musa (Moses) and Isa (Jesus) are descendants of Ishaq. Muhammad is the descendent of Ishma'il.

## ▶ The Prophet Muhammad: his early life in Makkah

### What makes Muhammad so important?

The **Sunnah** is the record of all that Muhammad said and did and this helps guide Muslims today, to live a life that is pleasing to God.

Islam teaches that Muhammad is the last and the greatest prophet, sent by God. He is a role model for Muslims because of the moral and prayerful way he lived his life. Unlike Jesus he performed no miracles; he was born, lived and died an ordinary man, but Muslims see him as the perfect example of a human being.

As a young man Muhammad was known as al-amin, meaning the trustworthy one.

### Who was Muhammad?

Muhammad was born in Makkah (in Arabia) in 570 CE, but by the age of six he had become an orphan. As he grew up he gained a reputation for truthfulness and intelligence, working as a shepherd for his uncle. In his twenties he entered the service of a wealthy merchant named Khadijah and he so impressed her with his honesty and character that Khadijah proposed marriage. They married and had four daughters, and two sons (who sadly died in infancy).

### Life in Makkah

As he grew older, Muhammad began to feel troubled by the corruption and cruelty he saw in Makkah. He believed that the worship of idols by the people of Makkah was wrong and that there was really only one true God.

## Laylat-ul-Qadr, the Night of Power

He started to spend more time alone in prayer and solitude and one night, in the year 610 CE, while he was praying in a cave near Makkah he had an experience that would change his life. As he sat meditating, the Angel Jibril appeared before him and ordered him to recite the words that had miraculously appeared before him. Muslims call this event Laylat-ul-Qadr, the Night of Power and they remember it today on the 27th day of Ramadan. It is one of the holiest days of the Muslim year.



Pilgrims at the Cave of Hira' where the Qur'an was first revealed to the Prophet Mohamed on Laylat-ul-Qadr, in 610 CE

'Surely We revealed it (Quran) on the Night of Qadr – And what do you know about what Night of Qadr is – The Night of Qadr is better than a thousand months – The angels and the Spirit descend in it by the permission of their Lord every command – It is peace till the break of the morning.'

Qur'an 97:1–5

## The revelation of the holy Qur'an

These revelations were to continue for the next 23 years, until Muhammad's death. He did not always see the Angel Jibril; sometimes he heard a voice speaking to him; sometimes these revelations took place while he was in prayer, at other times when he was going about his everyday life.

*'Not once did I receive a revelation without thinking that my soul had been torn away.'*

Hadith

## Prophet Muhammad's message

The message Prophet Muhammad brought to the people of Makkah was:

- ▶ There is one true God, Lord of goodness and power.
- ▶ We need to show thanks to God through worship.
- ▶ There will be a judgement day where God will judge our lives.

Many in Makkah did not receive this message well; he was ridiculed and insulted. However, some did follow him and they became known as 'Muslims'.

## Task

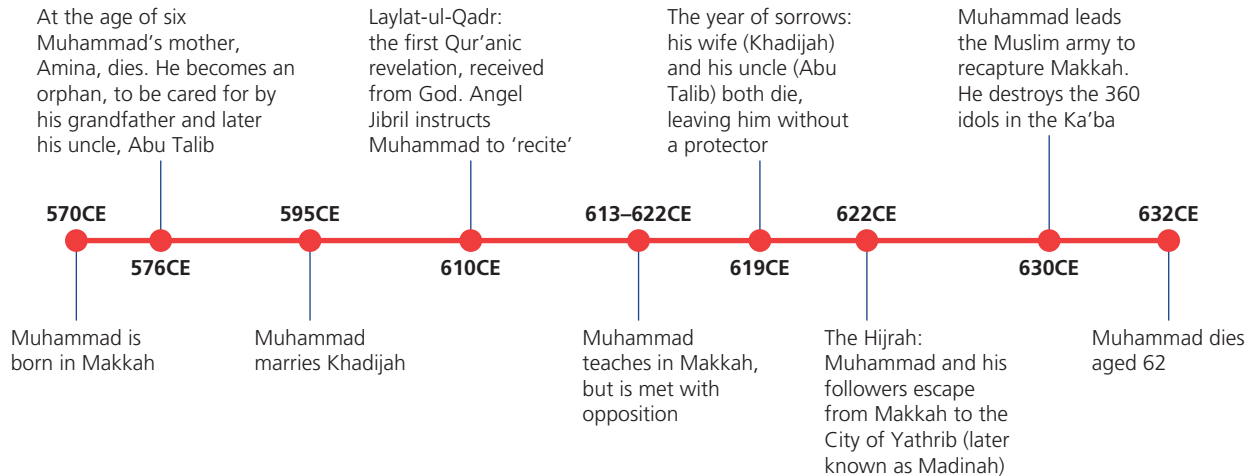
Copy out the timeline in Diagram A and add your own information to it from these pages.



'Say, "I am not something original among the messengers, nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I only follow that which is revealed to me, and I am not but a clear warner."

Qur'an 46:9

Diagram A  
Timeline: Life of Prophet Muhammad



Muhammad's life

## ▶ The Prophet Muhammad: the Muslim community in Madinah

### Opposition in Makkah

In the years following his first revelation, Prophet Muhammad gained some followers in Makkah, but his ideas also angered many. Makkah was a centre for pagan pilgrims who came to worship the idols in the Ka'ba, bringing great wealth to the city. Muhammad began preaching openly that the worship of idols offends God and that these idols were no more than useless bits of wood and stone.

His message, that God is merciful, but that there will also be a Day of Judgement caused many to turn against him and threaten violence. For nearly ten years Prophet Muhammad struggled to gain converts in Makkah, with little success and then tragedy struck: two of his closest supporters, his uncle and his wife Khadijah, died. This was a devastating blow.

### The Hijrah: migration from Makkah to Madinah

Not long after, while teaching in Makkah, Prophet Muhammad was approached by some pilgrims from Yathrib, a city some distance to the north. They were impressed with his message and invited him to visit, to judge their community disputes. He agreed and sent some of his followers ahead of him.

Prophet Muhammad and the 'Muslims' faced fierce opposition and persecution from many in Makkah. One of his followers, Bilal, a black slave, was taken and left to die in the hot desert sun, with a huge rock placed on his chest.

Ali was Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. Shi'a Muslims refer to him as the first Imam and look to Ali as Muhammad's rightful successor.

There is a story that tells how, as he fled from Makkah, Muhammad had to hide for his life in a cave. Soldiers hunting him came upon the cave, but a spider had miraculously woven a web over the entrance which convinced them that no one had entered recently.

Muslims follow a lunar calendar which is 11 days shorter than the Western calendar. Each year consists of 12 'lunar' months (cycles of the moon) lasting a total 354 days.

Muslims regard Prophet Muhammad as the greatest of all men: the Seal of the Prophets, the servant and messenger of God.

Now, as he planned to leave, it became clear that his life was in danger; there were people plotting to kill him. Ali insisted on staying behind in Makkah, to act as a decoy, while Muhammad made the treacherous journey. This migration of Muhammad from Makkah to Yathrib is known as the Hijrah. It marks the start of the Muslim calendar.

## The first Islamic community is established

Prophet Muhammad was welcomed into Yathrib, where he came to be seen not just as a prophet communicating with God, but also as a political leader and military commander. He became the town's ruler and it was renamed Madinah (City of the Prophet). For the next ten years he worked to unite the different communities. There were many Jewish people in Madinah and Prophet Muhammad had expected them to become Muslims. However, some questioned whether the voice that spoke to him was the voice of their God. Many refused to believe that they should now turn towards Makkah to pray (instead of Jerusalem) and that they should fast during Ramadan.

## Muhammad returns to Makkah triumphant

In 630 CE Muhammad and his followers were able to return to Makkah, where they forgave their enemies and established Islam as a permanent religion. Muhammad was now accepted as the final and true prophet of God. He continued to lead his community until his death in 632 CE.

*'I leave behind me two things, the Qur'an and the example of my life (the Sunnah). If you follow these you will not fail.'*

Muhammad's final sermon in Makkah

### Task

- 1 What was Muhammad's message to the people of Makkah?
- 2 What roles did Muhammad take on when he arrived in Yathrib/Madinah?
- 3 Why do you think the migration from Makkah to Madinah marks the start of the Muslim calendar?
- 4 Why is it significant to Muslims that the people of Makkah finally welcomed Muhammad back in 630CE?



## Malaikah (angels)

### Communicating God's message

Islam teaches that angels are heavenly, immortal beings, God's first creation. According to the Qur'an, humans were formed from clay, but angels were made out of light. They are God's messengers, the channels through which we can become aware of his laws and his purposes in our lives. They are God's servants and they can take on many forms to carry out his commands, but unlike humans they have no free will. They are without sin and so they are able to enter into God's divine presence, but they can also communicate with humans.

The Qur'an teaches that the angels say to God: 'Glory to thee, of knowledge we have none, save what Thou hast taught'. (2:32). Angels have no knowledge of their own; they are channels for God's truth.

Diversity in belief between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims regarding angels

In general, Sunnis and Shi'as share common beliefs about angels.

According to the Qur'an, angels were God's first creation, they are immortal and they always obey the commandments of God.

Sunnis believe that God created the angels from light and they have no free will.

Shi'as, however, accept that angels do have a limited free will, although this will never lead them to sin or act against the will of God.

Shi'as also believe that it was through an angel that God made it clear to Prophet Muhammad that, following his death, Ali would be the next leader of the Muslim community. Further, they say that the angel Jibril visited Fatima sharing divine wisdom with her, thus confirming the importance of Ahl al-Bayt (Muhammad's household).

Fatima was Muhammad's daughter. She was married to Ali and was the mother of Hasan and Husayn.



Islamic art depicting angels

## The nature of angels

Muslims believe that, although angels are invisible, they exist everywhere, throughout the whole universe. They are never far away and they are always in contact with humans, especially when someone prays or thinks about God. They have no physical bodies, but the Qur'an describes them as having wings and they are always described as male.

## Angels mentioned by name

In the Islamic tradition there are countless angels, but the Qur'an and the Hadith mention some by name:

*'The Qur'an says "Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel – it is [none but] he who has brought the Qur'an down upon your heart, [O Muhammad], by permission of God", confirming that which was before it and as guidance and good tidings for the believers.'*

Qur'an 2:97

## Task

Create a table and write a summary of the roles or duties performed by these angels in the Islamic tradition.

Angel	Role or duties
Jibril (Gabriel)	
Mika'il (Michael)	
Israfil (Raphael)	
Azrail	
Raqib and Atid	
Munkar and Nakir	

- ▶ Jibril (Gabriel) is the angel of revelation. He is the archangel who is responsible for revealing the Qur'an to Muhammad and brings messages to God's chosen ones.
- ▶ Mika'il (Michael) is the archangel responsible for keeping the devil out of heaven and protecting faithful worshippers. He brings sustenance for the body and soul and rainfall for the earth, to water the land.
- ▶ Israfil (Raphael) is the archangel who will blow the trumpet on the Day of Judgement to announce the resurrection of all from the dead.
- ▶ Azrail is the archangel that takes souls at death.
- ▶ Raqib and Atid are the angels referred to in the Qur'an as the 'noble recorders'. They sit, one on each shoulder, noting down our good and bad deeds, to be read from the book on the last day.
- ▶ Munkar and Nakir are the two terrifying, judging angels who will question each person after their death, testing their faith.

*'The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and [so have] the believers. All of them have believed in God and His angels and His books and His messengers, [saying], "We make no distinctions between any of His messengers." And they say, "We hear and obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination."*

Qur'an 2:285



## ► Islamic holy books

### God's message

**Revelation:** a message sent by God and 'revealed' or shown to the human mind.

The Arabic word for book is 'kitab' (plural 'kutub'). The Qur'an is known as Umm-ul-Kitab, 'Mother of Books' (43:4).

The Qur'an refers to Jews and Christians as the 'People of the Book' (29:46). It teaches that Muslims should show particular respect to them, because they too worship the one, true (Abrahamic) God.

Muslims believe that God has sent messages and messengers to set out the laws and moral codes by which humanity should live. These communications are called **revelations** and the most significant among them is the Qur'an, God's final written word.

The Qur'an is believed to be a sacred text, perfectly inspired by God and thus free from any mistakes or distortion. However, Muslims do believe that God revealed his laws in stages, through his prophets. Muslims have respect for all previous scriptures from the messengers of God, but they see the Qur'an as the completion of these earlier books.

### God's perfect revelation

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the direct and perfect word of God. Sunni Muslims say that it has always existed and is with God in heaven, written in Arabic on a tablet of stone. The Qur'an introduces itself as being 'the guidance for the worlds' (3:96) and Muslims believe that God has sent down this guidance in the form of a book to give a solution to any human problem.

*'We have sent down to you the Book as clarification for all things and as guidance and mercy and good tidings for the Muslims.'*

Qur'an 16:89

### A guide to life

Muslims respect and honour the Qur'an and use it as a guide for their lives. It teaches them how to worship, how to treat other people and how to live good lives. They learn it by heart in Arabic, reading and reciting it daily; they take immense care in writing it out; they allow it to guide every action and thought.



The Qur'an is the perfect and direct word of God as revealed to Muhammad

### Kutub: holy books

The Qur'an names four other holy books, known in Arabic as kutub. These are from the Jewish and Christians traditions and, according to Islam, in their original form, they were true revelations from God. However, because they were not properly written down or preserved they are now believed to be corrupted. So, unlike the perfect Qur'an, they cannot be trusted as the true word of God.

- Sahifah: the Scrolls of Ibrahim, now lost
- Tawrat (Torah): the revelation given to Musa (Moses)
- Zabur (Psalms): given to Dawud (David)
- Injil (Gospel): the teaching given to Isa (Jesus)

### The Hadith: the sayings of Muhammad

There are collections of thousands of Muhammad's sayings, called hadiths, which form part of what Muslims called the **Hadith**. These are not revelations, because they are the words of the prophet, not the words of God. However, they have enormous significance for Muslims, because the whole of Muhammad's life is considered to be a 'living Qur'an'. As his third wife, Aisha, said of him: 'His way of life is the Qur'an'.

### Task

- 1 The Qur'an is a uniquely holy book in Islam. What other books that are sacred to Muslims?
- 2 Can you explain why do these books have special status?
- 3 Why do they have less significance than the Qur'an?

**Hadith:** an account describing the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad.

## ■ Akhirah, the afterlife

For Muslims, this world, here on earth, is not all that there is. Our human existence will continue after death; our earthly life is just a preparation for the eternal life to come (**Akhirah**). Our mortal lives are a test and we will be judged according to how we have lived. As humans, we have been given free will, so we are able to make choices about what to believe and how to treat others. We will be held responsible for these thoughts and actions when God comes to judge us on the last day.

'Every soul shall have a taste of death.'

Qur'an 3:185

The Angel Israfil will blow a trumpet to announce the Day of Judgement. The trumpet is constantly on his lips, awaiting the command from God.

## ▶ Signs of the end of the world

**Mahdi**: the long-awaited saviour who will come to rescue the world.

Islam teaches that there will be many signs to mark the end of the world, but the most important event will be the appearance of the man called the **Mahdi**. His return will coincide with the second coming of Isa (Jesus). A false messiah will also attempt to deceive the people. Other signs include: abundance of earthquakes, the spreading of killing, rejection of Islam, increase in dishonesty, drunkenness, obscenity, nakedness and fornication. Society will be full of terrible corruption and chaos.

## ▶ Day of Judgement: the test

Islam teaches that, on the **Day of Judgement**, the dead will be raised from their graves and all people will stand before God to be sentenced according to the way they have lived their lives. A book which represents everything an individual has done, is presented to each of them. If the person's good deeds outweigh the bad, then they will receive the book in their right hand and pass into heaven. If it is placed into their left hand, they will be among the damned.

On the Day of Judgement the **Book of Deeds** will be read, in which 'every small and great thing is recorded' Qur'an 54:52.

## How are people judged?

The Qur'an gives many warnings about the Day of Judgement and Muslims are encouraged to question themselves: Am I ready to face death? What have I done to prepare for that day?

'The challenge for me is the future, really, because I don't really know what's ahead for me and I can't prepare for it. The only thing I can prepare for is the Day of Judgement. No-one knows when the Day of Judgement is going to come. At any moment, we could find ourselves in front of Allah, answering for our actions, for what we've done. So I've got to be prepared for that every minute of my life.'

Andleeb S

## ► Judgement: heaven and hell

### God weighs our deeds



Muslims believe that God will weigh up our good and bad deeds and this will determine what happens to us after death.

God judges each person's actions, but intentions (**niyyah**) are also taken into consideration.

- If the person has the intention to do a good deed, but was unable to carry it out, this is counted as a good deed.
- If they intended and carried out a good deed, this is counted as ten good deeds.
- If the person intended a bad deed, but did not do it, that is counted as a good deed.
- If they intended and carried out a bad deed, God records that as one bad deed.

### God tests people's faith

The two terrifying judging angels, **Munkar** and **Nakir**, will question each person, testing their faith. In order to give the correct answer to their questions, it is not enough just to learn to recite the **Shahadah**. If the person has not truly lived a life of submission to God, following the Five Pillars, they will be incapable of giving the right response on the day.

The three questions the angels Munkar and Nakir will ask are:  
Who is your Lord? Who is your prophet? What is your religion?

### Barzakh

Only God knows when the Day of Judgement will come. Muslims believe that, for those who die before that day, the angel of death, Azrail, will come to take their souls to await the day. They will be kept in a state of **barzakh** (waiting) until the sound of the final trumpet is heard.

**Shahadah:** the declaration of faith: 'There is no god but God and Muhammad is his prophet'.

**Barzakh** a place of waiting, after death until the Day of Judgement.

### Life beyond death

Islam provides the most graphic descriptions of what awaits after death. Heaven and hell are described as very real places, but some Muslims interpret these descriptions symbolically, since what exists beyond death must exist in a different dimension from our own world.

### Heaven (Janna): a state of joy, happiness and peace

After judgement, people will pass over the very narrow Bridge of As-Sirat. Those who have been blessed by God will successfully cross to heaven (**Janna**) on the other side. This will include those who have lived faithful and moral lives, those who have been persecuted for their faith in God and those who have fought for God.

Muslims believe that heaven is a reward for living a good life, so everything that one longs for on earth will be found in paradise: beautiful gardens, delicious food, gently flowing rivers, lovely serving maidens and reclining couches.

### Hell (Jahannam): a state of torment and suffering

The wicked, those whom God has damned, will fail to pass over the As-Sirat Bridge. In trying to cross they will fall into hell. Hell (**Jahannam**) is a place of terror, where the damned will face boiling

The Qur'an describes heaven as a place of contentment, using images of a green garden, full of flowers, fruits and fountains.

*'In paradise, I prepare for the righteous believers what no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, and what the deepest mind could never imagine.'*

Hadith

## Task

Make a list of the following terms, adding a definition for each in your own words:

- akhirah
- Mahdi
- barzakh
- Janna
- Jahannam
- Bridge of As-Sirat
- Munkar and Nakir
- Day of Judgement



water, scorching fire and black smoke. As well as experiencing the physical torment, those condemned to hell will suffer because they are separated from God, without hope of return.

*‘These are two adversaries who have disputed over their Lord. But those who disbelieved will have cut out for them garments of fire. Poured upon their heads will be scalding water’*

Qur’an 22:19

## Key questions about the afterlife

### Does hell last forever?

#### Yes

Most Muslims believe that hell is forever. The Qur’an seems to teach that after judgement, those sent to hell will stay there forever.

*‘But whoever returns to [dealing in interest or usury] – those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide eternally therein.’*

Qur’an 2:275

#### No

Some Muslims today believe that for certain people hell may only be temporary experience. Maybe bad Muslims only be sent to hell for a short period and those who repent may be pardoned.

*‘So whoever has received an admonition from his Lord and desists may have what is past, and his affair rests with God.’*

Qur’an 2:275

### Can a god of mercy condemn people to hell?

#### Yes

Islam teaches that God has set fair rules to live by and the wicked have been given many opportunities to repent. The Qur’an says that God punishes those who are disobedient according to ‘what they have earned’ (so those who do good, earn a place in paradise; those who cause harm to others earn a place in hell). Only the most wicked and ruthless people will go to hell.

*‘So I have warned you of a Fire which is blazing. None will [enter to] burn therein except the most wretched one. Who had denied and turned away.’*

Qur’an 92:14–16

#### No

Some Muslims find it hard to believe that a god of mercy would send people to an eternity of suffering. How can it be fair to give an infinite punishment for a finite sin?

### Do Muslims only follow Shari’ah rules because they are frightened of God’s judgement?

#### Yes

Some might argue that Muslims are only obedient to God’s divine laws because they are fearful of the threat of hell-fire.

Islam teaches that heaven is the reward Muslims will receive for following the Qur’an and the Sunnah.

No

Faithful believers happily live according to the Qur'an and the example set by Muhammad.

## Is suffering really a test for the next life?

Yes

Many Muslims would agree that this life is just a test. If we pass the test we will have shown that we are worthy of paradise, to live for eternity in unimaginable splendour and luxury.

No

A person with a non-religious worldview would reject the existence of an afterlife. They might also say that it is not fair to see this world as a test, because some people are born better off than others.

### Task

Give your own answers to the questions on this page, commenting on what you think of the Muslim viewpoints.



**Al-qadr** 'destiny', nothing takes place purely by chance. God knows and wills all future events.

Muslims say one of God's great names is '**Al-Alim**' meaning all-knowing one.

Predestination and free will: diversity in belief in Islam.

Although both Sunnis and Shi'as believe God is all-powerful and has a masterplan for the universe, there are differences in the way they understand the extent to which He controls the lives of human beings.

Sunnis tend to put more emphasis on the fact that everything is ordained by God. They believe that although humans have free will, nothing can happen without the will and knowledge of God.

Shi'as, on the other hand, allow more room for humans to use their own free will. Some Shi'as actually reject the idea of predestination. They say that God cannot be responsible for evil; humans must have free will to be independent of God's authority.



Some Muslims believe suffering is a test for the next life

## ► Al-qadr, God's divine plan

### God has eternal foreknowledge

Islam teaches that God is responsible for all things and that he has a divine plan for all of us (**al-qadr**). God has a masterplan; everything that happens is predestined to take place; it is all part of his design. He is the cause of all things and the whole of creation is under his control. God knows all things in the greatest detail, with accuracy that we, as humans, could never imagine.

### Everything is part of a larger plan

Muslims believe that we can never know the reasons behind the universe, but that it is all part of a larger picture. God is the all-knowing one; his knowledge is complete and perfect. He even knows the secrets of our hearts.

*'He knows what is within the heavens and earth and knows what you conceal and what you declare. And God is Knowing of that within the breasts.'*

Qur'an 64:4

*'O God, who knows the inmost secrets of our hearts; lead us out of the darkness into the light.'*

A prayer of Muhammad

## Insha' Allah, if God is willing

**Insha' Allah** 'if God allows it'. It comes from joining the Arabic words: 'Allah' and 'his will'. It is a very common phrase, for example 'I will get to school on time, Insha' Allah!'

Muslims believe that things which some people might call coincidences are, in fact, part of God's plan. The word **Insha' Allah** expresses the belief that all events are outside our own control; they are in the hands of God. When a Muslim says 'inshallah', they are acknowledging that they are in submission to God. They will only succeed in their own plans if God is also willing to make it happen.

*'And never say of anything, "Indeed, I will do that tomorrow," except [when adding], "If God wills." And remember your Lord when you forget [it] and say, "Perhaps my Lord will guide me to what is nearer than this to right conduct."*

Qur'an 18:23–4

## Can good come out of suffering?

If all things are part of the will of God, then that must include suffering, pain, diseases and disasters. It is easy to see how good can come out of things which cause us suffering, like training to run a marathon, but harder to understand how hurricanes and wars can be seen in a positive way. Islam teaches that painful experiences need to be viewed as opportunities for our own growth as human beings.

## ► Free will

Islam teaches that we all have free will and God will hold us accountable for our decisions on the Day of Judgement. Humans are not puppets or robots; we have the ability to choose right from wrong. God wants us to follow the 'straight path', but it is up to us to make the right choices. Central to Islamic thought is the idea that life is a test and we need to learn how to turn away from evil.

*'He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness]'*

Qur'an 30:41

## Task

- 1 Explain what Muslims mean when they say that God has a Divine plan
- 2 How do Sunni and Shi'a beliefs differ?
- 3 Do you think humans can have free will to make their own decisions if God has a predestined plan for our lives?

## ▶ End of section review

### Stickability

Key Concepts:

- Halal
- Haram
- Prophethood
- Shari'ah
- Tawhid
- Ummah

Key teachings about:

- the six articles of faith in Sunni Islam
- the five roots in Usul ad-Din in Shi'a Islam

Key skills

- Using WAWOS formula to answer evaluation questions

### Knowledge check

- 1 Write a short paragraph (roughly three sentences) to explain what Muslims believe about God (Allah).
- 2 In your own words, explain the difference between Sunni and Shi'a Islam.
- 3 How might Muslims differ in their views about prophethood?

### The Big Question

*'Belief in God is the most important Muslim belief.'*

#### Your task

Respond to the statement above, referring to both sides of the argument.

Aim for at least one paragraph for each side of the debate. Conclude your answer with a justification of your own viewpoint.

Agree (. . . submission to God lies at the heart of what it means to be a Muslim)	Disagree (. . . there are six articles of faith for Sunni Muslims. No one of these is more important than any other)

### Skills Link

- 1 Explain what is meant by Shari'ah law.
- 2 Explain why the Prophet Muhammad is important in Islam.