

The Muslim Community in Scouting



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The values, ethos, educational focus and international scope of the Movement are all compatible with Muslim teaching. Young people in Scouting are encouraged to respect and love God and other people and to cultivate a sense of moral responsibility which are also fundamental principles of Islam.

Almost a third of the 25 million Scouts world-wide are Muslim, and 250,000 of the two million Muslims in the United Kingdom are children and young people of school age. The majority of Muslims living in the United Kingdom have their origins in the Punjab province and the Mirpur Districts of Pakistan; in Bangladesh; in the Gujerat state of India and in the Middle East and African countries of Egypt, Morocco and Somalia. However, it is more often the case that they will now be second or third generation Muslims who have been born and brought up in the United Kingdom.

Muslims live according to a religious code of Islamic values and behaviour which embraces their culture, morals, family, social relationships, finance, justice, food and dress. It is a complete way of life with an emphasis on what unites people rather than on what divides them. This leads Muslims to view themselves as one nation, regardless of country of birth or national identity. As with any world religion, Islam is made up of millions of individuals and each person finds their own way of expressing their belief. This factsheet aims to highlight the major common elements that exist amongst the majority of Muslims.

Muslims submit themselves to the Islamic faith – a faith that can be traced back to the prophet Mohammed who lived between 570-632 CE (Common Era – the term that is used by non-Christians for AD). **Islam** means submission to the will of **Allah**, which is the Arabic name for the **one and true God**. Muslims believe in one God, a supreme being and creator of all humanity and Earth. The two complementary foundations of Islam are belief and action: Muslims believe in the

oneness of God and in practising that belief. Allah is everywhere and has revealed his message to us through his Messengers and Prophets.



ISLAM

Mohammed (peace be upon him) is the last and most important prophet. Through him, Allah revealed his final word which was collected in the Holy Book the Qur'an (also written '**Koran**'). Despite his centrality to the Islamic faith, Mohammed is not the founder of the faith, but the prophet (**nabi**) and messenger (**rasul**) of Allah; it is Allah who is the source of Islam.

Muslims strive to adhere to the five pillars of faith.

1. **Shahadah:** to declare the belief that Allah is the one Supreme Being and Mohammed is His servant and final messenger.
2. **Salat:** formal prayer which is observed five times a day at prescribed times.
3. **Sawm:** to fast during the month of Ramadhan from dawn until dusk. (i.e. abstaining from eating, drinking and smoking.)
4. **Zakat:** an obligatory 2.5% of a Muslim's untouched wealth is given annually for the welfare of the community.
5. **Hajj:** pilgrimage – every Muslim strives to visit Mecca at least once during their lifetime.

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Other aspects of Islam associated with the five pillars of Islam include:

Muslims believe in Allah, Mohammed (peace be upon him) and the Qur'an and follow a religious code which teaches respect and the love for Allah and for other people, as well as generosity and modesty.

THE HOLY BOOK - QUR'AN

Muslims believe that Allah has sent his guidance to humankind through the prophets and that these have been sent with a number of important books:

- **Torah** - revealed to Moses;
- **Psalms** - revealed through David;
- **Gospels** – revealed to Jesus.
- **Qur'an** –revealed to Mohammed (peace be upon him)

The Qur'an, which is wholly comprised of Arabic verses, is believed to hold the final and unchanged word of Allah as revealed to the Prophet Mohammed by the Angel Gabriel. It is handled with reverence and respect and the verses are learnt by heart and read widely. The guidance from Allah covers all aspects of the Islamic faith - prayer, ethics, social relationships, economics and law. Muslims also follow the practice of the Prophet known as **Sunnah** and traditions which are known as The Hadith, are set down in different compilations like: Sahih Al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Suman Iman Ahmed...etc.

Muslims recognise the Bible as a holy book and have a deep respect for the prophets who are mentioned within it. The life stories and the words of Abraham, Moses and Jesus are contained within the Qur'an. Jesus is recognised and revered as a special prophet, yet not as the 'Son of God', but the Son of Mary. It is important that Leaders consider this when planning prayers for a Scouts Own or at the end of a meeting.

As well as undertaking everyday school work, Muslim children are expected to attend special classes after school until the age of 16. Here they learn Arabic so that they can study the Qur'an, also they learn religious teachings. These classes often require extra home work, so it is important to remember that children of this age often have other obligations before they can attend Scouting activities.

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

The place of worship is the Mosque. Any clean place where prayers could be held is regarded as a place of worship; this includes a Muslim home.

Before praying, Muslims wash their hands, feet and face. They remove their shoes when entering the Mosque as a mark of respect, and they cover their head with a cap or headscarf during prayer time. Muslims pray five times a day facing the direction of Mecca (east from the United Kingdom). There are set times – early dawn, mid-day, afternoon, sunset and late evening – which creates God consciousness (**Taqwa**) amongst Muslims everywhere. Prayer itself consists of verses from the Qur'an, and a number of movements from standing to kneeling to prostrate positions. This acts as a form of meditation in which the person praying is able to concentrate wholly upon Allah. It is for this reason that men and women pray separately. It is important that all Scouts are made aware of the importance of prayer for Scouts who are Muslim so that they are able to understand why their friend may not be able to join in with every activity and so that they do respect the time taken for prayer.

The Mosque is not just a place of worship. It is a place where Muslims can meet together to discuss community matters, where they can carry out individual or communal prayer and meditation, where children come to learn the Qur'an and where children can play and socialise together. The Mosque is the focal point of any Muslim community or neighbourhood and provides a wide range of activities for members of the local community.

Islam does not have priests, as each Muslim owes allegiance only to Allah. However, the **Imams** are specially recognised members of the Muslim community who may know more about Islam than others in the community and may lead congregational prayer. Additionally, they may look after the religious welfare of their community and tend to the social and domestic needs of individuals. The Iman is an excellent contact to make if you are interested in encouraging young Muslims to become Scouts. They have considerable influence within the local community and will help you to explain both the concept of Scouting and the religious policy of the Association.

HOLY DAYS AND FESTIVALS

The Muslim calendar is based upon the lunar year; when a new moon appears this denotes a new month. It also means that the Islamic year is shorter than the year denoted by the Gregorian calendar, which is based upon the movement of the Earth around the sun. It is worthwhile enquiring when the festivals listed below are due to take place to enable you to include some activities for all Scouts in your Group and to anticipate the absence of Scouts who are Muslim from meetings.

Friday is the holy day during the week and special prayers are conducted at mid-day called the **Jum'ah** or general assembly.

Ramadhan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is an important time for Muslims. It celebrates the revelation of the Qur'an to Mohammed as a guide to humanity and Muslims are expected to fast between dawn and sunset throughout the month. Nothing is supposed to pass the lips during the daylight hours and meals are taken in the time after sunset and before dawn in the morning. Young children below the age of nine are not expected to observe the fast, but if they choose to nobody in the community can deny them their choice. Fasting is designed to help Muslims be conscious of Allah and to remind them of the suffering of the poor and hungry. Muslims must also abstain from lying, fighting and anger as well as from material things.

Eid-al-Fitr marks the sighting of the new moon and the successful end of Ramadhan. The festival last for three to four days and is a time for celebration and parties. Presents are distributed, new clothes are worn, and people will gather together or visit relatives to celebrate their faith.

Eid-al-Adha is the Festival of Sacrifice and takes place on the tenth day of the twelve month of the Islamic year. It celebrates the story of the offer of **Ismail** as a sacrifice to Allah by **Abraham**. Part of the celebration involves the sacrifice of an animal (one third of the meat is then given to the poor). The festival enables Muslims to remember that they must sacrifice everything in their quest for obedience to Allah.

Miladan'Nabi is a celebration of Mohammed's birthday and is celebrated by the majority of Muslims.

PILGRIMAGE

All Muslims are expected to perform Hajj and visit Mecca in Saudi Arabia at least once in their life time, if they can afford to do so. Mecca is the birth place of Mohammed and is also the place where the 'House of Allah' (**The Ka'aba**) is situated. The Ka'aba is the focal point for Muslims when they pray and it is towards this that they turn (east from the United Kingdom).

BEHAVIOUR AND VALUES

Muslims strive to demonstrate a variety of personal qualities which include:

- good manners, truthfulness and forgiveness of others;
- maintenance of bodily cleanliness;
- respect for the rights of others;
- respect for living things.

For example:

- Muslims follow the guidance given in the Qur'an and the Hadith that cruelty to animals is forbidden. Animals should not be killed without a legitimate reasons in Islamic law:

He who kills a sparrow needlessly is accountable to Allah on the Day of Judgement (The Hadith)

- Muslims strive to educate themselves and to work hard as they see this as part of their religious duty to Allah and the Qur'an enjoins this when it says:

My Lord. Increase me in knowledge (Q:20114).

Every Muslim has to set aside a certain amount of their income to give to the poor and needy as helping others is part of the Islamic code and is the practice (**sunnah**) of the prophet.

Muslims are forbidden to gamble or bet money in any form but wealth can be accumulated through legitimate means and expected to be used for the benefit of the Islamic community.

Contact between older boys and girls is actively discouraged, and men and women – even husband and wife – do not embrace in public together.

THE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

The family is central to Muslim people. Extended families, where members look after one another, are key and there is deep respect for the elders of the community. People live in tight-knit communities which are responsible for the members within it.

Although Islam affirms the equality of men and women as human beings, rules governing the roles and behavioural conduct of the sexes differ. Public and social contact between men and women is discouraged unless it is necessary, such as at educational institutions, work places and social gatherings.

O Lord! Lord of my life and of everything in the universe! I affirm that all human beings are brothers unto one another (The Hadith).

NAMES AND NAMING

The Muslim naming system is extremely complex. Children may have up to four names and the name by which they are usually called (their personal name) is often not their first name. It is therefore best for Leaders to clarify from the beginning exactly which name the child wishes to use. Muslim names may be taken from the Qur'an or from important Islamic personalities. Each Muslim has their own first name and family name. In this country Muslim women often add their husband's last name to their own for official purposes.

FOOD

It is important not to include any kind of meat derived from pigs in meals or snacks. It would also be inappropriate to use potted meats, meat or fish pastes, pate or lard and avoid any food that states that 'other meats' have been used in the recipe. Muslims may also insist on meat which has been prepared using lawful means; that is killed to allow the blood and bacteria to escape naturally and the name of Allah recited over the animal while it is slaughtered (this is known as halal meat). The best way to avoid confusion is to provide fish or vegetarian food which can be enjoyed by everyone. There may also be a Halal butcher in the local area.

Before a meal Muslims wash their hands and offer thanks to Allah '**Bismillah**' ('in the name of Allah') and afterwards '**Alhamdulillah**' ('all praise be to Allah'). Muslims do not drink alcohol and usually prefer to avoid areas where alcohol is served.

DRESS CODE

Muslim girls and women will keep their bodies covered and dress modestly, especially after puberty. Although, some young Muslim women in the United Kingdom will wear the **Hijab** (traditional clothes covering the hair and face) others will choose modest, loose fitting clothes which do not emphasise their body shape. They will usually keep the arms and legs covered.

No prescribed dress has actually been given for Muslim men, but a male should cover himself from below the navel to the knees.

SCOUT MEETINGS

Muslims are expected to attend the Mosque for congregational prayers at mid-day on Fridays (the holy day) but after that they may be free to participate in Scouting activities. Mixed Beaver Scout Colonies and Cub Scout Packs may be possible, provided the Leaders were all female. Mixed Scout Troops would not be possible because Muslims discourage contact between young women and men. It is worth consulting with Community Leaders about all mixed provision.

THE PROMISE

Muslims can use either the phrase 'duty to God' or 'duty to Allah' in the Promise. The choice should be given to them as to which they would prefer to use.

CAMP

Scouts who are Muslim will want to practice their faith whilst at camp and therefore consideration will need to be given to this during the planning stages. A compass activity could be devised to locate the direction of Mecca. A tent for prayer could then be pitched with a clean groundsheet inside which could be used by all campers as a quiet area at any time during the camp.

Food at camp should not cause problems as fish is quite permissible and vegetarian options will be suitable for all campers.

It may also be possible to arrange the camp programme around the five set of prayer times if preparation is made beforehand to find out exactly when these should take place.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The SHAP Working Party on World Religions in Education publishes an annual calendar of festivals which will list the appropriate dates for a particular year. The calendar is available from:

SHAP Working Party,
c/o National Societies R.E. Centre
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If you would like to know more about the Muslim Community a useful book to read is *The Muslim World* by Richard Tames; published by McDonald & Co. (ISBN 0356 07520 6).