

Muslim Beliefs and Teachings Revision Guide:

Key terms

- **Muslim:** one who has submitted to the will of God and has accepted Islam
- **Islam:** the name of the religion followed by Muslims; to surrender to the will of God; peace
- **Allah:** the Arabic name for God
- **Tawhid:** the Oneness and unity of God
- **monotheistic:** a religion that believes there is only one God
- **supremacy:** supreme power or authority; a quality of God
- **immanent:** the idea that God is present in and involved with life on earth and in the universe; a quality of God
- **transcendent:** the idea that God is beyond and outside life on earth and the universe; a quality of God
- **omnipotent:** almighty, having unlimited power; a quality of God
- **beneficent:** benevolent, all-loving, all-good; a quality of God
- **merciful:** the quality of God that shows compassion or forgiveness to humans, even though he has the power to punish them
- **fairness:** the idea that God treats people fairly and impartially without favour or discrimination
- **justice (Adalat in Shi'a Islam):** the idea that God is just and fair and judges human actions, rewarding the good and punishing the bad

The Oneness of God and the supremacy of God's will

Tawhid: At the centre of all Islamic belief is the belief in one God—**Allah**. There is no other God but Allah and there is no one comparable to Him. We will never understand Allah as His nature supersedes our limited minds. We are made by Him but He is not Himself made. Begotten not made. He is eternal. (Without beginning or end/ not limited by time and space). **"He is God the One, God the eternal. He begot no one nor was He Begotten. No one is comparable to Him."** Surah 112:1-4

He is not made up of different aspects and therefore we talk of Allah as One. The **Shahadah** is the first pillar of Islam and is said several times a day—it reinforces the idea of Tawhid: 'There is no God but Allah and Prophet Muhammad is His messenger'.

What impact does Tawhid have on Muslim belief and understanding?

It reminds Muslims that it is a sin to compare anything to Allah, i.e. to attribute human characteristics to Allah or to attribute Godlike characteristics to anything other than God; (this sin is the most serious sin and is called shirk). Tawhid reminds Muslims that Allah cannot be limited by human understanding and human ideas and therefore there are no pictures that represent Him. There must also be no pictures of the prophets as this may lead to idol worshipping (i.e. worshipping the statue/ picture/ prophet and not Allah). Mosques and Muslims homes do not therefore contain pictures of Allah or the prophets. Tawhid is reinforced in the Shahadah and reminds Muslims constantly of the oneness of Allah. Belief in tawhid explains Allah as our creator, it gives humans purpose and supports a belief that science and religion can work together as science helps us to gain understanding about God's creation. Science also supports the idea that there is a begotten (not made), first cause of the universe. It also reminds Muslims that they should submit to Allah's will as He will judge us on Judgement Day and that we should follow His law as He knows best. Tawhid states that Allah is limitless and therefore if we look at the problem of evil and suffering, Tawhid reassures Muslims that there is a purpose for evil and suffering. The oneness of God is also reflected in the Ummah (human (Muslim) brotherhood) which promotes equality and justice for all.

The Nature of God

"This is God, your Lord, there is no God but Him, the Creator of all things, so worship Him; He is in charge of everything. No vision can take Him in, but He takes in all vision. He is the All Subtle, The All Aware". Surah 6:102-103

Although Allah is beyond full human understanding God does reveal some aspects of His nature (through the Qur'an). Muslims believe therefore that Allah is both immanent and transcendent, that He is omnipotent, beneficent, merciful, fair and just.

Immanent: **"And He is with you wherever you may be"**. Surah 57:4

Transcendent: **"No vision can grasp Him... He is above all comprehension"** Surah 63:103

How can God be both immanent and Transcendent? For Muslims, God can be both because He is the creator of the universe, he is not limited by the universe that He created because He is beyond the limits of the physical world. God is eternal and therefore exists forever and this is not possible in the physical (contingent) world which is in a constant state of change (flux); and Allah being perfect is not subject to change or decay. God is able to create and control the universe because He is outside of it. Yet Allah is within the world through His creation and within all things and through His compassion towards people. He sees everything we do and He knows us and what our choices in life will be before we make them so

He cannot be distant from us. Muslims believe Allah is in this world to guide us and gives people purpose and direction (predestination). This shows God is active (involved in the world). God has unlimited power and knowledge and therefore can be both as He is not constrained by anything.

God is **Beneficent** and the source of all goodness. We can see this through His gift of creation. God's beneficence is linked to His **Compassion** and **Mercy**. In the Qur'an, Allah is referred to 57 times as the Beneficent and over 160 times as the Merciful. In daily prayer the names are recited 17 times and each prayer starts with **'In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.'** (This is known as Bismillah).

Allah treats everyone with **Fairness** and **Justice**. He judges fairly and will give His judgement on Judgement Day but He also requires us to treat everyone with fairness and equally and act justly. Belief in God's judgement is part of the **five roots of Shia Islam** signifying its importance within their Islamic belief system.

Muslims also find it useful to understand Allah's nature through the **99 names of Allah**. The purpose of the 99 names is to firstly help us to understand our relationship to Him but also to remind us that there is a limit to our knowledge and we must always be aware of this hence why there are 99 names and not 100 or a 1000 etc. Some of the 99 names include: **All-Compassionate, Forgiving, Pure One, Victorious, Shaper of Beauty, Guardian, Preventer of Harm, Hearer of All, Guide, Sustainer, Maker of Order, Source of Peace.**

The supremacy of God's will

Muslims put their life in God's hands. God is creator and nothing takes place without God allowing it to happen. God is **supreme** and his will is final. Muslims believe they should accept whatever happens in their life and trust that God knows best. Muslims use the term **'inshallah'** which means 'God willing' when they make plans. This idea of the supremacy of God's will can be interpreted in two ways by Muslims 1. That God controls everything human beings do and that humans do not have **free will**. 2. Others think that God does not force people to act and gives us freedom how to choose; this response fits better with the idea of judgement, how can God judge us if he is responsible for our actions—this would mean that God is not just.

Impact of God's will: God is all powerful and supreme and therefore should be worshipped. God's supremacy means that nothing must be put before God, this is a sin (shirk). Believing that everything happens for a reason can bring comfort to Muslims. **"Misfortunes can only happen with God's permission"** Surah 64:11.

Shi'a and Sunni Islam:

Key terms

- **Qur'an:** the holy book revealed to Muhammad by the angel Jibril; God's final revelation to humankind
- **Sunnah:** the teachings and deeds of Muhammad
- **Sunni:** Muslims who believe in the successorship to Muhammad of Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali
- **Shi'a (Shi'i):** Muslim who believe in the Imamate, the successorship of Ali
- **angels:** spiritual beings believed to act as messengers of God
- **Jibril:** the Arabic name for Gabriel, the archangel who brought God's message to the prophets, particularly to Muhammad
- **Mika'il:** the Arabic name for Michael, the archangel of mercy who rewards good deeds and provides nourishment to people

Shi'a Muslims make up 12% of Muslims. Though this sounds like a small percentage, there are still well over 130 million Shi'a Muslims in the world, making it the fifth largest religious group in the world.

Both **Sunni** and **Shi'a** Muslims hold many beliefs in common. They believe in God, prophethood of Muhammad and the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Sunni Muslims have six articles of faith that represent core what they hold to be core Islamic belief whilst Shia Muslims have the five roots of 'Usul-ad-Din'. Sunni Muslims believe that when Prophet Muhammad died only the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Muhammad's teachings and actions) had the authority to guide beliefs and behaviour. Religious scholars interpret the Qur'an and Sunnah and this guides Muslim life. Sunni Muslims get their name from following the Sunnah. Shi'a Muslims have their own interpretation of Islamic laws and only accept sayings of Muhammad that have been passed down through Ali (who they believe was Muhammad's rightful successor).

Risalah: means "messengers". God's message is carried, at different times, in one of three ways: via an angel, a prophet or a holy book. **Angels** bring the word of God to the prophets or messengers of God, they can do this because they are **pure and sinless**. For Sunni Muslims the belief in angels is one of the six articles of faith. Angels are created by God, **made from light**. Since Allah is so holy, and perfect, it is difficult for humans to communicate with Him. Angels, the first creation of Allah, are thought to be sinless and can therefore stand to be in the presence of God. They are not as holy as Allah, since though they can do nothing against God, they do not have free will. This means that they are able to communicate with humans on behalf of Allah. In the Qur'an it tells us that angels are made from light; jinn are made from smokeless fire and humans are made from clay. **"Indeed We created man from dried clay of black smooth mud. And We created the Jinn before that from the smokeless flame of fire"** (Surah 15:26-27).

Angels are usually described as male and given male names (Surah 53v27), are thought to be sexless, have wings, two, three or four (Surah 35v1) and must always do what Allah wants, (Surah 2v32). The Devil (Iblis or Shaytan for Muslims) was once an angel, who refused to bow down to Adam. For this, he was thrown out of heaven, and set up a new base in hell. Iblis tempts humans to go against Allah until the Last Day (Surah 7v11-18). Angels are in constant contact with the world but have no physical form; unless they need to adopt one in order to communicate with chosen individuals however these physical bodies 'dazzle' and are still set apart from humans. For Muslims, angels are involved in our lives from conception recording our deeds and guiding us. During prayer Muslims will acknowledge the angels on their right and left shoulders. **"Each person has angels before him and behind, watching over him by God's command"** Surah 13:11.

Jibril: Messenger: Delivers messages to the prophets; in particular delivered the Qur'an to Muhammad. He is the most famous angel (known to Jews and Christians). He is known as an archangel and therefore has special status. He was trusted to deliver Allah's message (The Qur'an) to Prophet Muhammad. He is responsible for spiritual nourishment. When Jibril was created he was sent to look at paradise. On seeing it, he claimed that no one would ever stray away from it for its beauty and wonder. He was sent a second time to look at it when it was surrounded by a barrier of difficulties and hardships. His reaction then was that no one would ever reach it. He was then sent to look at hell; he said that no one would want to go there. So Allah surrounded hell with desires and lusts, at which Jibril said that no one would ever be able to avoid it. Belief in the Angel Jibril gives Muslims confidence to follow the words of the Qur'an and the teachings of prophet Muhammad.

Mika'il: Angel of Mercy: He is the one who provides sustenance to humans e.g. the rain. He therefore provides physical nourishment to humans. He is also an archangel and therefore is important. Again he is recognised as an archangel in Judaism and Christianity. Most of what is known about Mika'il comes from Islamic tradition rather than the Qur'an. Belief in Angel Mika'il reminds Muslims that good things come to those who have faith and that their lives are owed to Allah (through the angels). This teaches Muslims to give thanks for what they have.

On Judgement day both Jibril and Mika'il will help with the weighing of a person's actions. Mika'il has seen hell and how easy it is to get there, as opposed to how hard it is to get to paradise, so it is believed that he does not smile. He is the friend of humankind as he knows what awaits; the path to paradise being thinner than a human hair.

Izraael/ Azrael: Angel of Death. Comes to take our souls at the point of death. (Note the Qur'an does not refer to this angel by name but by the job this angel does). The Angel of Death is not to be feared if you have faith as the angel carries your soul to heaven. However, many may fear the Angel of Death if they have led a sinful life as the angel will carry your soul to hell. This angel is a reminder that a) everyone will die (God's will) and b) our actions in this life will determine the next.

Israfil: Signifies the day of Judgement has come. This reminds Muslims about a belief about judgement day; when the end of time will come and our true fate will be decided and lived out for eternity. This encourages Muslims to reflect on their day to day choices as they will have eternal consequences. It also shows why Muslims believe in a physical resurrection of the body which in turn affects burial.

Munkar and Nakir: Questioners These two angels are responsible for asking 3 questions about your belief. These angels ask if you believe in Allah, are Muslim and know of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Belief in these angels reinforces the belief that Islam is the one true religion. They can have confidence that they are on the right path as long as they follow the Qur'an, believe the Shahadah and follow the practices of Muhammad.

Kiraman and Katibeen: These are the names given to the angels that are with each person from the moment of conception to the day of judgement and write down all deeds, good and bad that someone does. These angels are acknowledged every time a Muslim prays and are therefore a constant reminder that all their actions are recorded.

Ridwan: Controls the gates of paradise. This reminds Muslims that there is no entry into paradise without the will of God. It also gives them an understanding that they are safe in heaven, it is protected and Allah really is supreme.

Malik: Guards the door to hell and oversees the suffering of the faithless. This reminds Muslims that earthly pleasures are temporary and that the suffering caused by putting ourselves or money before God will have horrific eternal consequences.

Hafadha: Angel of protection: God is ever-present in our lives through Angels and that God protects us from harm. Gives Muslims confidence that whatever they do they are being looked over by a guardian angel working on behalf of God. This helps Muslims face grave danger e.g. war with confidence.



Risalah Continued:

Key terms

- **prophet:** a person who proclaims the message of God
- **Risalah:** the belief that prophets are an important channel of communication between God and humans
- **prophethood:** when God makes someone a prophet to communicate his message to people
- **Iblis (Satan):** a spiritual being, created from fire, who was thrown out of paradise for refusing to bow to Adam
- **Id-ul-Adha:** a Muslim festival that celebrates the prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son for God
- **Haji:** the annual pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca) that every Muslim should try to make at least once in their life

Prophets are chosen by Allah to deliver His message. Prophets are essential in communicating God's message on how humanity should live their life and the consequences of our life choices in the life hereafter. Prophets are good people who are able to lead by example. ***"Every community is sent a messenger, and when their messenger comes, they will be judged justly; they will not be wronged."*** Surah 10:47.

There are two types of messengers/ prophets: **'rasul'**: this is a messenger that passes on divine revelation to everyone/ everywhere. **'nabi'**: this is a messenger that has been given revelation or news of an important nature to specific communities or is specific to that prophet.

Muslims do not allow any pictures of the prophets because it encourages idol worshipping. This means that people will focus on the images of the prophet and worship them rather than God and to put anything before God is a sin (shirk).

The first Prophet was **Adam**; he was the first man on Earth. He was created by God from dust. Adam however disobeyed Allah and distanced himself from God. ***Why was Adam important? What can we learn from him?*** 1. He is father of all mankind. 2. He was a prophet until death. 3. He taught the revelations to his sons. 4. He taught about the work of Iblis and how to protect themselves against Jinn. 5. He taught that life on earth was temporary, eternal life could be had in the next life. 6. He built the Ka'bah as the first place of worship. 7. Adam disobeyed Allah but immediately repented and always regretted his sin. He found salvation through God's forgiveness. (Iblis never showed repentance and so lost hope and is forever tormented. Each year on Hajj Muslims follow in Adam's footprints and ask Allah for forgiveness of their sins on the mount of mercy (just as Adam did).

Ibrahim was a good man, he was obedient to good and was kind and compassionate. He refused to worship idols and was almost killed for this. ***"Who could be better in religion than those who direct themselves wholly to God, do good, and follow the religion of Abraham, who was true in faith? God took***

Abraham as a friend." Surah 4:125. Ibrahim is the Arabic for Abraham; Abraham is seen as a significant prophet in Judaism and Christianity hence why they are called Abrahamic religions. Ibrahim is important in Islam because he is a role model to follow. He is also remembered on Hajj; at the end of Hajj Eid ul Adha (celebration of the sacrifice) commemorators the story of Ibrahim and his faithfulness and obedience to God. Ibrahim was ordered by Allah to sacrifice his son which he was prepared to do; God did not allow Ibrahim to sacrifice his son and replaced him with a lamb.

Muhammad received the final revelation from Allah. He is known as the 'seal' of the prophets. ***"Muhammad is not the father of any one of you men; he is God's Messenger and the seal of the prophets: God knows everything."*** Surah 33:40. Muhammad used to meditate away from the city of Makkah because he was troubled by all the sin there. When he was meditating in a cave on Mount Hira outside Mecca in 610 CE he had an experience that changed his life. Carrying a book, Gabriel commanded him to "read." Muhammad refused the order twice before finally asking about what he was supposed to read. Gabriel replied with following verses of the Qur'an: ***"Read [O Muhammad!] in the name of your Lord who created. He created man from a clot. Read, and your Lord is the Most Honorable who taught with the pen."*** Surah 96:1-4. Believing that God had chosen him as his messenger Muhammad began to preach what God had revealed to him. The simple and clear-cut message of Islam, that there is no God but Allah, and that life should be lived in complete submission to the will of Allah, was attractive to many people, and they flocked to hear it. Shahadah: "There is no God except Allah and Prophet Muhammad is His messenger". The leaders of Makkah did not like Muhammad's messages as it challenged their authority, power and wealth. They made money from idol worship, exploiting the poor and desperate, gambling, alcohol and slaves and because Muhammad's popularity was seen as threatening by the people in power in Makkah. Muhammad's followers were tortured and treated badly and so Muhammad took his followers on a journey from Makkah to Medina in 622. This journey is called the **Hijrah** (migration) and the event was seen as so important for Islam that 622 is the year in which the Islamic calendar begins. Within ten years Muhammad had gained so many followers that he was able to return and conquer Mecca. Muhammad continued to lead his community both spiritually and in earthly matters until his death in 632. ***Why was it important for Muhammad's prophethood to happen when it did?*** People were becoming more distant from the ways of Allah, earlier revelations had been lost, corrupted or ignored and Makkah had become a centre for idol worshipping as the city grew in trade. ***Why is prophet Muhammad so important?*** Allah chose him above all others to reveal the Qur'an. He was an honest and righteous man who people could trust in and follow. He was compassionate and merciful and put Allah's words into action; he was just, loyal and was concerned about the welfare of others including animals. **Muhammad the individual:** Perfect example to others. He was an ordinary man and therefore his example is attainable; we can all be like Muhammad. Being a prophet is not easy, it comes with hardships (i.e. persecution, doubt and ridicule) but Muhammad through, patience, conviction and true belief in God and submission to God's will, Muhammad overcame these hardships and we can do the same in our lives. Muhammad strove to make his community a better place and put his beliefs of equality and justice into action e.g. appointing the first prayer caller who was a black man named Bilal. **Muhammad the leader:** Muslims claim that Prophet Muhammad was the greatest political and religious leader of all time managing to combined both roles perfectly. He allowed religious freedom, gave women rights and cared for the sick and elderly. **Muhammad the family man:** Muhammad was the ultimate family man. There is a theme in the Qur'an about good fathers e.g. Adam, Noah, Lut, Jacob, Ibrahim and then Muhammad. Islam sees the family as the basis for a successful society. If a family works well they contribute to society; society is a family and it reflects the families within in. If parents take care of their children and bring them up to be fair, compassionate and hardworking, society will reflect this. **Muhammad the teacher:** He not only taught how a Muslim should live their life, but led by example. He spoke with authority but made it easy for others to learn. He taught Muslims how to pray and this can be seen in Mosques everyday.

There are no more prophets, so anyone claiming to have heard independently from Allah is not a Muslim – this can be difficult for Shi'a Muslims who believe that Allah still speaks to and through Imams who can even add to the Qur'an. As there are no more prophets, Muhammad must be the final example for Muslims. Muslims are encouraged to follow his example and find out all they can about how he lived. For example, Muhammad did not shave his beard off, so Muslim men are encouraged to grow a beard. The Qur'an contains all the beliefs a Muslim needs. This can be difficult in the modern era – for example, reinterpreting how women should be treated 1500 years after the Qur'an was written. If Muhammad is the perfect example, Muslims may fall into the dangerous trap of following Muhammad rather than following the Qur'an. The danger of **shirk** is difficult to avoid, but the Qur'an says that all prophets should be treated with equal respect.

Sunnah and Hadith:

Key terms

- **Caliph:** a person considered to be a political and religious successor to the prophet Muhammad, and the leader of the Sunni Muslim community
- **imam:** 1. a person who leads communal prayer; 2. (Imam) in Shi'a Islam, the title given to Ali and his successors
- **Imamate:** the divine appointment of the Imams
- **Torah:** the five books revealed by God to Moses
- **Psalms:** a holy book revealed by God to David
- **Gospel:** a holy book revealed by God to Jesus
- **Scrolls of Abraham:** a holy book revealed by God to Abraham
- **Akhirah:** everlasting life after death
- **resurrection:** rising from the dead or returning to life
- **heaven:** the state of eternal happiness in the presence of God; also called paradise
- **hell:** the state of total separation from God

The **Sunnah** are the practices, customs and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. These give the perfect example for Muslims to follow. They are found in the **Hadith** (sayings of the prophet) and other texts. Different Muslims accept different collections of the Hadith as reliable sources of authority. Reading the hadith helps understand the Qur'an. Muhammad was a great teacher and made the Qur'an accessible to all as the Qur'an itself is not always easily interpreted. Sunni Muslims believe that the Hadith are important because the Qur'an says: *'A Similar (favour you have already received) in that We have sent among you in Scripture and Wisdom, and in new knowledge'*. Surah 2:151.

Shi'a Islam and the Imamate:

Shi'a Muslims believe in the **imamate**. This means that they believe that there was a divinely picked succession of imams to carry on the work of the Prophet Muhammad after his death. They believe that revelation stopped with Muhammad but that twelve Imams were chosen by Allah to guide and preserve God's message. The role of the Imams is to avoid the corruption of the Qur'an and to preserve its revelation.

Holy Books:

Muslims believe that God has spoken to all of humanity, and his words – dictated *exactly* as God wants them to be read – are in the **Qur'an**. This kind of dictation is known as **revelation**. The word comes from the word "revealed", and means that Allah has revealed his words to a man in order that they can be shared by all humanity. Muhammad was a very intelligent man, but he could not read or write. This is important because it means that he had to **memorise** the words God said to him and could not change them – he would *recite*, that means, retell or read, rather than changing those words depending on who he was speaking to. The name Qur'an means 'the Recital'. The Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad in Arabic and so it was recorded in Arabic and it is still read to this day in Arabic so that God's message cannot be mistranslated. *"This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, containing guidance for those who are mindful of God."* Surah 2:2.

The Qur'an influences a person throughout their life; birth, marriage, death, daily prayers etc. Contains basic worship that Muhammad developed. Contains legal and social systems (Shari'ah Law). It explains ultimate questions about why we are here and what happens when we die. Some Muslims argue that it contains scientific explanations that have only recently been verified by science e.g. the big bang. It provides personal and spiritual guidance for all life's situations and challenges.

For Muslims Allah has revealed His message at various points through History. However previous to the Qur'an books that contain this revelation such as the **scrolls of Ibrahim** have been lost or have become altered, as in the case of the

Tawrat, Zabur and Injil.

The Scrolls of Ibrahim: Very little is actually known about these scrolls (often called 'Suhuf'). These were individual revelation to Ibrahim 'the upright one' who was always faithful to Allah. The revelations were believed to contain parable like stories about worship, reflection and building a livelihood. The scrolls were written on parchment but perished over time.

Tawrat is Arabic for Torah which are revelations given to Musa by Allah on Mount Sinai. Some Muslims equate this to the first 5 books in the Bible (the Pentateuch), others equate the Tawrat to the whole of the Old Testament.

The Qur'an confirms that Allah had revealed earlier books.

The Tawrat does not exist in its original language as it was written down by the followers of Musa (Moses) a long time after his death. Those that put Musa's words together changes the text, some of it is the word of God and other parts are human addition. This being said, others argue that the Qur'an actually supports the idea that the books have not been lost or added to: 'None can change His words for He is the one who hears and knows all', Surah 6:115 (Omnipotence, Omnipresence and omniscience). In Deuteronomy (4:2) (part of the Pentateuch) it says 'Do not add to what I command and do not subtract from it...' Also, Muhammad was told to search out meaning and understanding from previously received scripture suggesting that these were in fact reliable. Whatever the case, the Qur'an refers to the Tawrat as 'guidance and light', revealed by Allah is clearly very important. Muhammad's nightly prayers reinforce the importance of the early scripture: In the prayer he puts his life in Allah's hands (the creator and lord of everything, the source of the Tawrat, the Gospels and the Qur'an) and asked for protection from Shaytan.

The **Zabur of Dawud** are a collection of prayers to Allah (often referred to as poems). Dawud was a great King, whose people were God-fearing and righteous. In Surah 4:163 it says *'we gave Dawud the Zabur'*. They contain lessons of guidance for the people and he recited them in song version. One important message in the Zabur is the idea of Masih (Messiah). The Masih was to be a symbol of hope for the future in a world where many had failed to obey Allah's command. For Muslims Jesus is the Messiah and will return at judgement.

Injil: This is the good news about ISA (Jesus) written by his disciples. Muslims highly respect Isa because there are revelations in the Qur'an about him. Muslims believe: He was born of a virgin mother. He was the Masih. He was not the son of Allah. He followed Allah. He was not crucified (he did not die on the cross but he did ascend to Heaven). He did not die to save sins. One man cannot take the sins of others. Allah is compassionate and He will forgive sins. The Gospels that are found in the Bible contain mistakes because they were written a long time after death.

All 4 books are referred to in the Qur'an so they are important. Muhammad learned from them and referred to them giving them authority. They were associated with key prophets and their revelations which gives them importance. However Some are lost and no one knows what they said. Do they have the same authority if they have been changed? Why were they not preserved if they were so important? Having been changed Muslims cannot use them so what is their impact today?

Akhirah (Life after death):

Akhirah is the belief in a life after this one. Key ideas: If the Qur'an says Akhirah exists—then it exists. Akhirah provides an answer to the ultimate question—why are we here. Humans are judged on the deeds they do in this life. The prophets talk about the after life. Death is the start of an eternal life and the end of our temporary life. God judges fairly and is merciful. It is our own actions that determine how we spend eternity.

Barzakh: When a person dies Azra'il (the Angel of Death) takes their soul. The person is visited by two angels Munkar and Nakir who ask three questions: 1. Who is your Lord? 2. What was your life like? 3. Who is your prophet. If these questions are answered correctly then the soul rests comfortably until judgement day. If they are answered incorrectly the soul is tormented (this is known as the punishment of the grave).

Heaven: A place of eternal happiness with Allah. **Hell:** A place of separation from Allah and eternal punishment.

The impact of a belief in Akhirah: Muslims should not be concerned with material possessions; they distract us from God's path. Instead a Muslim should be concerned with developing their soul; they should concern themselves with spiritual matters. It is not necessarily what actually happens at judgement that is important but how a belief in the afterlife affects a Muslim living today. It is important for Muslims to recognise that this life is a test in preparation for an eternal life with Allah and that it is important in this life to do God's will (follow the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h)).

The answer to the ultimate question 'why are we here?' is easily answered by a Muslim. We are here to prepare our souls for paradise. Muslims must focus on the 5 pillars of Islam. These are a good basis to lead a good life. The five pillars require Muslims to give Zakat, this puts their focus on the poor and needy; it enriches their soul as they develop empathy and passion and it encourages them to not be concerned with material wealth. It makes them appreciate all the blessings that Allah has given them and give thanks. Muslims also go on Hajj, this is important in relation to the afterlife as during Hajj a Muslim has their sins forgiven on the Mount of Mercy and the act of Hajj itself strengthens faith and helps them cast out their sin, bringing them closer to God. Muslims pray five times a day to centre themselves and remind them that they are in service to Allah. Completing Sawm also prepares for the afterlife in that fasting during the month of Ramadan stops Muslims focussing on earthly needs and allows them time to focus on spiritual needs; this is a time where Muslims read the Qur'an and focus on God. It teaches them empathy with the poor and to be thankful to Allah for his blessings

Al Qad'r (Predestination):

"In all things, the master planning is God's." Surah 13:42. *"Only what God has decreed will happen to us. He is our Master: let the believers put their trust in God."* Surah 9:51.

Al-Qad'r means that everything happens as a result of Allah's will and nothing is random or without reason. This means that everything that happens is a part of Allah's plan and that it is **predestined**.

Some Sunni Muslims believe that God has already determined everything that will happen in the universe.

There is not much emphasis placed on human freedom here. A problem with this is that if God predestined all our actions then how can we every be judged? How can a just God judge us on actions He made us take?

Shi'a Muslims however believe that God knows everything that is going to happen through His omnipotence

but this does not mean that he decides it to happen. People have the freewill to choose their actions but Allah already knows our choices. If Allah is not bound by time then He can be aware of all past, present and future. So, even though free will exists, Allah has the quality of knowledge (*sifat*) to be able to know exactly what every choice will be.

Key term

- **predestination:** the idea that God knows or determines everything that will happen in the universe