

**WISEUP**  
Knowledge Ends Extremism

**READER'S GUIDE FOR  
INDIVIDUAL  
READERS**



Women's Islamic  
Initiative in  
Spirituality &  
Equality



# What is Islam?

IMAM JAMAL RAHMAN

## BEFORE YOU START

1. What do you think you already know about this topic? This includes your understanding of Islam as either a Muslim or a believer of another faith or tradition.
2. What sources of information have you already consulted on this topic? Some examples include but are not limited to: The Holy Qur'an and Sunnah, Family or community customs, public media, etc.
3. Have you had an opportunity to discuss Islam with Muslims?
4. What are your expectations going into this unit?

# What Is Islam?

IMAM JAMAL RAHMAN provides an overview of Islam, its three principles, five pillars, and five beliefs.

Islam was revealed 1,437 years ago, and is the second largest religion in the world, with 1.6 billion adherents. Unfortunately, the religion of Islam continues to be linked to terrorism, due to the politically motivated acts of violence committed in its name, leaving many to wonder, “What is Islam?”

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Ultimately, what we are able to glean from any religion depends on our state of consciousness and our intention.

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It is difficult to understand and appreciate the heart of any religion in times of prolonged conflict and senseless violence. The trauma caused by endless bloodshed, whether it be through “shock and awe” bombings or suicide attacks, distorts psyches and mangles souls. The Qur’an explains that when there is chronic anger, fear, suspicion, and hopelessness, “*Verily, it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts which are in the breasts that grow blind*” (22:46). In these blinded times, religion becomes politicized and many of us, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, lapse into serving truth based on convenience. We misuse religion, individually and collectively, to serve our agenda of self-interest. Ultimately, what we are able to glean from any religion depends on our state of

consciousness and our intention. The thirteenth-century sage Rumi illustrates this insight through a metaphor: a bee and wasp drink from the same flower; one produces nectar and the other, a sting.

Islam is a spiritual path that is defined by the root of its name, *Salaam*. Like its Hebrew cousin, Shalom, *Salaam* means “peace” in the sense of psychological and emotional wellbeing—the well-being that comes from surrendering the ego to a higher, divine power; following the precepts of the prophets and the Qur’an; and doing our best to be God’s agents for good upon the earth.

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According to a celebrated prophetic saying (Hadith), a stranger dressed in white appeared to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and posed this exact question. After an intense conversation, the visitor disappeared as mysteriously as he had arrived. To his astonished companions who witnessed the event, the Prophet confided that the visitor was the angel Gabriel in the shape of a human. The angel validated the Prophet’s understanding of the core teachings of Islam contained in three principles and five pillars.

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IMAM JAMAL RAHMAN is a popular speaker on Islam, Sufi spirituality, and interfaith relations. He has been featured in the *New York Times*, and on CBS News, BBC, and various NPR programs. Imam Rahman is co-founder and Muslim Sufi minister at Interfaith Community Sanctuary and adjunct faculty at Seattle University. He is a former co-host of Interfaith Talk Radio and travels nationally and internationally, presenting at retreats and workshops. He is the author of numerous books, including *Spiritual Gems of Islam: Insights and Practices from the Qur’an, Hadith, Rumi and Muslim Teaching Stories to Enlighten the Heart and Mind* and *The Fragrance of Faith: The Enlightened Heart of Islam*.

# The Three Principles



## ISLAM

Surrender  
in Peace

**Islam** means “**surrender in peace.**” Surrender is the inner journey of releasing attachment to the ego and making space for God at the center of one’s being in order to become a more complete and authentic human being. If we do not do this work of self-surrender (Islam), explains the Qur’an, “*we shall be in the ranks of those who have lost*” (3:85). Sadly, this verse is often misinterpreted to mean that Islam is the only valid religion. But religion per se doesn’t matter to God; it is the whole hearted attempt to live in a state of surrender to Divine Will that is paramount.

In the verse above, the Qur’an clearly embraces the critical concept of surrender as it has been revealed in other religions:

**“We believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in (the Books) given to Moses, Jesus, and the Prophets, from their Lord: we make no distinction between one and another among them, and to God do we bow our will” (3:84).**

**Iman** means **faith**—primarily belief in the oneness of God; the existence of angels; the revelations of the prophets and messengers who came before Muhammad (including Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus); the scriptures of the three Abrahamic traditions (Torah, Psalms, Gospels, and Qur’an); and the Day of Judgment. The Qur’an makes it amply clear that faith must be informed, not merely blind. Certainty borrowed from our scriptures and teachers is not enough (102:5); from that base we must progress to personal witnessing (102:7) and from there, to a deep inner conviction (69:51).

**“The Desert-Arabs say, “We have believed.” Say, “You have not [yet] believed; but say [instead], ‘We have submitted,’ for faith has not yet entered your hearts. And if you obey God and His Messenger, He will not deprive you from your deeds of anything. Indeed, God is Forgiving and Merciful” (49:14).**



## IMAN

Faith



## IHSAN

Righteousness

**Ihsan** means **to be righteous or beautiful.** “*Render your innermost heart pure of all dross,*” says the Qur’an (3:154), and “*Bring to God a sound heart*” (26:89). The Prophet cautions Muslims to especially guard against three negative traits that are at the root of all wrongdoing: pride, greed, and envy. Self-purification is not an end in itself. We work at it so that we may develop our capacity to do God’s work in the world: practicing the Golden Rule, pursuing social justice, and caring for the earth. The Qur’an emphasizes repeatedly the importance of “righteous deeds.” Whether you are male or female, says the Holy Book, whether you are Jew, Christian, Sabian, or Muslim, what assures heavenly rewards is having faith in God and engaging in righteous deeds (2:62).

**“And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer—those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed” (4:124).**

# Five Beliefs of Muslims



1

## BELIEF IN ONE GOD

Islam is a monotheistic religion, meaning that Muslims believe that God is one, the sole creator of life on earth, who has neither gender nor human form and is beyond likeness to anything in creation. God is called Allah in Arabic and is also described by ninety-nine "Beautiful Names of God," which are descriptive attributes of God, such as the Merciful, the Compassionate, the King, the Holy, and the Almighty. These divine names describe how God relates to humankind and to the rest of creation.

*"Before thy time We never sent any apostle without having revealed to him that there is no deity save Me, therefore, you shall worship Me!" (Qur'an 21:25).*

2

## BELIEF THAT GOD HAS COMMUNICATED WITH MANKIND THROUGH SCRIPTURES

Muslims believe in four scriptures sent from God as revealed through the prophets: the Torah of Moses; the Psalms of David; the Gospels (Evangel) of Jesus (Isa); and the Qur'an of Muhammad, as well as the scrolls of Abraham and Moses. All these books were authored by the one God and were sent to particular prophets with one overarching theme: right belief regarding God and right ethics for the benefit of humankind.

*"Oh people of the Book! You do not stand on anything until you observe the Torah and the Evangel and what was sent down to you from your Lord" (Qur'an 5:68).*

4

## BELIEF IN THE EXISTENCE OF ANGELS

Angels are radiant, genderless beings of light acting as intermediaries between God and the visible world. The primary ones are the four archangels also known in the Jewish and Christian traditions: Jibra'il (Gabriel), Mika'il (Michael), Izra'il (Azrael), and Israfil (Raphael). Angels are assigned to individuals to record their good and bad deeds and Angels will interrogate people after their death and accompany them to their afterlife. There are Angels in heaven, overseen by Ridwan, and in hell, overseen by Malik.

*"The angels celebrate the praises of their Lord, and pray for forgiveness for all beings on earth" (Qur'an 42:5).*

5

## BELIEF IN THE HEREAFTER, SOMETIMES CALLED BY MUSLIMS THE LAST DAY

The Last Day means that creation will come to an end, followed by a Day of Resurrection when all souls will be resurrected, followed by a Day of Judgment when souls will be judged. On this day, souls will be judged on all their deeds, both good and bad. The philosophical underpinning of the idea of the Last Day is human accountability for our ethical actions. Those who lived a righteous life will gain divine approval and enter the bliss of Paradise, while those who lived unethically will gain divine disapproval, taste the burn of their evil actions in Hell, and undergo a period of purification in Hell.

*"On that day all human beings will come forward separately to be shown their deeds. Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good see it! And anyone who has done an atom's weight of harm shall see that" (Qur'an 99:6-8).*

3

## BELIEFS IN THE PROPHETS-MESSENGERS

The Qur'an names twenty-five prophets, beginning with Adam and including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon, Moses, Aaron, Job, Jonah, John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ, and ending with Muhammad. Muslims are instructed to revere them all and to make no distinction between them. The Quran says that in addition to the named prophets there are many others who are unnamed and every community has been sent a prophet. Muslims make a distinction between a messenger—one to whom God sent a revelation; and a prophet—who received a revelation and was instructed to preach.

*"But as for those who believe in God and His apostles and make no distinction between any of them—unto them, in time, will He grant their rewards. And God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace" (Qur'an 4:152).*

# The Five Pillars



1

## PROFESSION OF FAITH

*Shahada*

**Shahada**, where you state: “**There is no God but God and Muhammad is a messenger of God.**”

The first part testifies to the omnipresence and eternity of God: “*Everywhere you turn is the Face of God*” (2:115); “*All that is on Earth will perish but forever will abide the Face of your Sustainer, full of Majesty and Abundant Honor*” (55:26–27). God is utterly beyond space, time, gender, and form. Toward the end of his life, the Prophet humbly lamented, “O God, we have not known You as we should have.” Sadly, humans fight and kill over definitions of Divinity, forgetting that in essence God is One for all of humanity. In a telling verse, God instructs us not to argue with Jews and Christians “*otherwise than in a most kindly manner . . . and say . . . our God and your God is one and the same, and it is unto Him that we all surrender ourselves*” (29:46).

2

## PRAYER

*Salat*

**Salat**, or **prayer**, in which Muslims are required to pray five times daily. “*Bow in adoration and draw closer,*” says the Qur’an (96:19), and Muslims respond by bowing and prostrating to God five times a day in obligatory prayer. This prayer is derived, some scholars opine, from the Prophet’s mystical night journey, during which he ascended seven levels of heaven and was dazzled by the sight of angels bowing and prostrating to God while uttering words of praise and thanksgiving. The Prophet saw this as a sign that prayer must consist of praising and thanking God, and using the gift of the body to express adoration. Spiritual teachers explain that one prostration of prayer to God frees us from a thousand prostrations to our ego. The required number of prayers is attributed to a legend that when the Prophet was descending the seven levels, he met Moses, who asked him how often God wanted his community to pray. “Fifty times a day,” the Prophet said. “They’ll never pray that much!” Moses exclaimed. “Go back and plead for a lesser number.” With Moses’ encouragement, the Prophet finally got the number down to a more manageable five prayers daily.



3

### CHARITY

*Zakat*

**Zakat** means **purification through almsgiving**. Muslims sanctify our wealth and our being by giving for the sake of God. Muslims must tithe at least 2.5 percent of their net worth every year to those in need and are encouraged to offer nonobligatory donations and service for worthy causes. The Qur'an stipulates some guidelines: "give freely of what you love" (3:92), "to those who ask" (2:177), "and to those who can't ask" (70:25), and give quietly, for "it will atone for some of your wrongdoings" (2:271).



4

### FASTING

*Sawm*

**Sawm** in Arabic literally means "fasting," but is more commonly known as Ramadan, which is the name of the month when Muslims abstain from food, drink, and sexual activity from dawn to dusk. It was during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, that Muhammad began receiving the revelations that were later codified in the Qur'an. The Ramadan fast is an expression of gratitude for the gift of the Qur'an as well as a time of self-purification so that we might remain conscious of God (2:183).

5

### PILGRIMAGE

*Hajj*

**Hajj** is the **pilgrimage** to Mecca in the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar. Able-bodied Muslims who can afford it are expected to go on *hajj* at least once in their lives "in the service of Allah" (2:196). Joining fellow Muslims from all over the world in the rituals of the *hajj* is a glorious reminder of the importance and sacredness of a community of faith as we live out our lifelong pilgrimage from this world to the next.

### AFTER YOU FINISH

1. What were your initial reactions? Did it surprise you? Did it confirm your initial thoughts? What, if anything, surprised you? Did it clear up/answer questions that you had?
2. What were areas that confused you? Do you still have unanswered questions that weren't covered? Was there something that wasn't covered that you would have liked to learn about?
3. Did the article pique your interest in pursuing more information? What sources would you consult to pursue such information?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What resonated with you?
2. How would you use the information you learned in this unit?
3. Have you encountered or witnessed a situation in the past that would have benefited from the knowledge gained in this article? If so, how would you address such a situation now?

### ACTION STEPS

1. Are there elements in this reading which could be demonstrated in current day living?
2. How would you share this information in a one-on-one or group discussion?
3. How can this information be shared via the arts?

# The Prophet Muhammad's Role in Warfare

IBRAHIM MALABARI

## BEFORE YOU START

1. What do you think you already know about this topic?
2. What sources of information have contributed to your prior knowledge?
3. What do you expect to gain from reading this unit?

# The Prophet Muhammad's Role in Warfare

**IBRAHIM MALABARI** explains how the Prophet created rules of warfare to make it as humane as possible, so as to discredit the image of the Prophet Muhammad as a "bloodthirsty warmonger."

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Out of the ten years of his life in Medina, the Prophet spent 795 days in battles and expeditions. The rest of his time the Prophet spent reforming society for the better.
- The Prophet brought sweeping changes to the conduct of war, limiting the use of violence against others and the means by which war is fought to make it more humane.
- Objectively, the Prophet's wars were some of the least bloody in history.

What Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, leader of Daesh, is doing is a complete violation of the teaching of the Prophet of Mercy, Muhammad (pbuh), and the dictates of the Qur'an. It is surprising the self-proclaimed Khalifah "studied" Islam for many years, since he interprets it to suit his whims and personal impulses. Al-Baghdadi is doing more harm to Islam, and by extension to humanity, than al-Qaeda and other terrorists organizations ever did. Islam, the Qur'an, and the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) have nothing to do with Daesh's criminal agenda. He is using the Qur'an and Islam to exploit the naivete and ignorance of the Muslim masses, and his claims are unanimously rejected by Muslim scholars of the world.

The Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Mercy, did not prescribe war as a natural state of affairs; at the same time, war cannot simply be abolished. What any reformer or spiritual leader can do is minimize its brutality. The Messenger of Mercy, at God's direction, attempted to establish rules of warfare that would make war as humane as possible, to encourage peace, and to minimize the toll in human lives.

Many portray the Messenger of Mercy bloodthirsty and as a warmonger as if fighting battles was his main occupation. But in reality, out of the ten years of his life in Medina, only 795 days were spent on battles and expeditions. The rest of the ten years

(approximately 2,865 days) he spent on bringing revolutionary changes to people's lives and totally reforming a pagan society. This historical fact is overlooked by most of his biographers and almost all Western writers who depict him as a warmonger.

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The Prophetic approach to war can be better appreciated by looking at some figures. The Messenger of Mercy was forced to defend himself militarily on many occasions, yet the amount of human loss that resulted is surprisingly low given similar battles and wars in human history. From a total of 28 battles and 38 campaigns, the total casualties from those wars, including both sides, amounted to 1,284 lives.

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**IBRAHIM MALABARI** is an Islamic scholar, activist, and author of the book *Mercy: Prophet Muhammad's Legacy to All Creation*. He has been involved in several Islamic organizations, including the Islamic Society of North America, and was a member of the Fiqh Council of North America.

Someone can argue that the reason for the decreased numbers of casualties is the smaller numbers of combatants who participated in the various campaigns. But a careful examination shows that the percentage of people killed in these wars relative to the number of the people who participated in them amounted to about 1.5 percent. Since the Messenger of Mercy was victorious in most of these battles, the numbers of casualties indicate that he is not to be counted among the ruthless and barbaric warlords, conquerors, and military generals of human history—in fact, he was far from it.

Compare the above numbers to other wars in human history. For example, in the Second World War alone, the ratio between the number of people killed (including civilians) to the number of combatants who were involved in that war was 351%. That is, 10,600,000 participated in that war, yet the dead numbered as high as 54,800,000.

The Messenger of Mercy brought sweeping changes to the conduct of war, radically limiting the means and use of violence against others. Much like today, the Messenger of Mercy lived in a world in which brutal warfare was rampant. Like the Roman and Persian empires of that time, the Arab tribes primarily engaged in battle for material gains rather than for any higher, moral purpose. The Messenger of Mercy, however, would change that radically.

The Messenger of Mercy stressed the observance of several important moral principles even during the tumult of warfare. First, he fundamentally redefined the basic understanding and concept of war. By introducing an entirely new term—*jihad fi sabilillah*—he purified warfare from its material or vested interests and self-serving motives. *Jihad* means “struggle” and for one to carry a concerted effort to remove the injustices and oppression imposed by others. By adding “in the way of God” (*fi sabilillah*), he taught that war must not be waged for the sake of the self, of spoils, pride, prestige, subjugation, or oppressing other people. This belief served as the glue holding the principles of warfare together and reining in all potential injustices inherent within it.

Under this new conception of war, the Messenger of Mercy introduced a comprehensive set of laws that encompassed the conduct of war: its moral boundaries, components, rights, and obligations; the difference between combatants and noncombatants

and their rights; and the rights of envoys, prisoners of war, and conquered people. All of these principles were expressed clearly and unequivocally by the Messenger of Mercy.

The Messenger of Mercy also underscored the sanctity and inviolability of human life, be it Muslim or non-Muslim. He embodied the Qur’anic verse: “*If anyone slays a human being—unless it be [in punishment] for murder or for spreading corruption on earth—it shall be as though he had slain all humanity*” (5:32). His followers, although they certainly were—and still are—prone to great errors, were remarkable exemplars of these principles in general.

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The Messenger of Mercy prohibited the robbery, banditry, and vandalism that had been commonplace in wars before his time. For example, after the Khaybar peace treaty had been signed, some of the young new Muslims started looting Jewish property. The Jewish leader came to the Messenger of Mercy and asked: “Is it appropriate for your people to slaughter our donkeys, devour our crops, and beat our women?” Suddenly, the Messenger of Mercy ordered the entire army into the mosque for prayer and told them: “God did not permit you to enter the People of the Book’s houses without permission and to beat their women and eat their crops.” If a milking animal is found on the way and soldiers want to take its milk, they cannot do so unless permission is granted. Therefore, even in warfare, the Messenger of Mercy stressed the importance of the rule of law and respect for the property and rights of others, which is far more than what we see in modern wars.

In the past, armies destroyed crops, farmland and property, and even entire villages. But the Messenger of Mercy prohibited killing all non-combatants, such as women, children, the old, the sick, the wounded, the blind, the disabled, the mentally unwell, travelers,

monks, and worshippers. In fact, he only permitted killing those in the front lines; everyone behind them was protected from attack. Remarkably, the Messenger of Mercy here grants far more than what is stated in theories of just war today. Once the Messenger of Mercy saw a woman's corpse on the battlefield and became very upset. He ordered his commander, Khalid ibn al-Walid: "Do not kill women or laborers." Moreover, the Messenger of Mercy specifically commanded Muslims not to kill monks or worshippers, and not to destroy places of worship.

Before Islam, both Arabs and non-Arabs, in the heat of vengeance, habitually burned their enemies alive. The Messenger of Mercy categorically prohibited this: "Nobody should punish with fire except the Lord of Fire [God]." He also forbade desecrating and mutilating the enemies' corpses by cutting off their limbs.

The Messenger of Mercy prohibited the killing of prisoners of war, declaring: "No wounded person will be killed, no one who flees will be followed."

The Messenger of Mercy also stated that one cannot breach one's trust and kill those with whom peace has been made. No peace treaty should be violated: "If you have made a treaty with a people, you cannot make any changes or alterations until it expires."

The Messenger of Mercy tried his utmost to reduce human casualties. Anyone who studies the Messenger of Mercy's wars objectively and compares these with other wars in human history, including the wars of our modern times (such as the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the war on terror) can conclude that his wars were the least bloody—and most humane. Today, in a time of constant war under pretexts of preemptive strikes, these teachings demonstrate his just personality—a Messenger for our time.

### AFTER YOU FINISH

1. What did you learn? What is your understanding of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a Messenger of Mercy as opposed to war monger after having read this unit?
2. What were areas that confused you? Do you still have unanswered questions that weren't covered? Was there something that wasn't covered that you would have liked to learn about?
3. Did the article pique your interest in pursuing more information? What sources would you consult to pursue such information?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does this information challenge any perceptions you have held/been exposed to?
2. What questions, if any, do you feel still linger after having finished the article?
3. Can you think of any other instances of historical misinterpretation?

### ACTION STEPS

1. Are there elements in this reading which could be demonstrated in current day living?
2. How would you share this information in a one-on-one or group discussion?
3. What ways can youth respond to the unit and collectively develop broader awareness?

# What is ISIS/ISIL/Daesh?

DR. ROHAN GUNARATNA

## BEFORE YOU START

1. What do you think you already know about this topic?
2. What sources of information have contributed to your prior knowledge on this subject?
3. What do you expect to gain from reading this unit?

# What is ISIS/ISIL/Daesh?

DR. ROHAN GUNARATNA explains the political and ideological origins of and expansion of Daesh.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Daesh emerged by harnessing the sectarian conflict in Iraq and the instability in Syria following the Arab Spring.
- Daesh's goals are to expel US forces from Iraq, establish an Islamic authority in Iraq and surrounding nations, and fight Israel.
- Daesh hates the use of the word "Daesh," as it means "one who sows discord."

Daesh, the Arabic acronym for "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" or ISIS, is a politically motivated group seeking to change the international system through violence. Located in Syria and Iraq, Daesh emerged by harnessing the sectarian conflict in Iraq and the instability in Syria following the Arab Spring. Although Daesh changed its name to "Islamic State" (IS), governments and their partners confronting the group refer to it as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) or by its Arabic acronym "Daesh" (al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham).

To reach out to and recruit Muslims, especially youth, Daesh selectively exploits Islamic terms, attire, and symbols. Although it calls itself an Islamic State, Daesh is neither Islamic nor a state. The Daesh military core consists of Iraqi Islamists and Ba'athists whose messaging and propaganda is influenced by Western popular culture. Daesh's killings, including beheadings and mass executions, and brutal practices such as slavery, destruction of heritage sites, and persecuting Shi'a and Christians, have earned it notoriety.

With its core in Iraq and Syria, Daesh declared an "Islamic caliphate" in June 2014. Referring to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the "caliph," Daesh said: "It is incumbent upon all Muslims to pledge allegiance to (him) and support him. . . . The legality of all emirates, groups, states, and organizations, becomes null by the expansion of the khalifah's authority and arrival of its troops to their areas." Although Muslim scholars

worldwide have denounced Daesh's proclamation, the group has resonance among like-minded followers fighting governments for decades. By inviting local threat groups to pledge their allegiance to leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Daesh has expanded and claimed territory in parts of the Middle East, Africa, the Caucasus, and Asia.

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The acronym for ISIS in Arabic is Daesh (al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham). Daesh hates the use of the Arabic word "Daesh," as it means "one who crushes something underfoot" and is translated as "one who sows discord."

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THE GENESIS OF THE SO-CALLED ISLAMIC STATE Daesh can be traced back to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian criminal. Radicalized by a Jordanian Palestinian ideologue, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, in prison, he joined Bay'at al-Imam and subsequently created his own group, Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, in 1999. With support from Osama bin Laden's al-

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Qaeda, Abu Musab created and operated Jund al-Sham at the Al-Matar Camp in Afghanistan, where he trained recruits from the Levant. After the U.S.-led coalition intervention in Afghanistan, Abu Musab relocated to northern Iraq in 2002 where he worked with Ansar al-Islam to expand his network.

After the U.S.-led coalition intervention in Iraq in 2003, Abu Musab changed the name of his group from Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad to Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (TQJBR) after pledging allegiance to Osama bin Laden in 2004. Abu Musab's group, commonly known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), followed the advice of al-Qaeda's then deputy leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, given in a letter in July

2005 to 1) expel U.S. forces from Iraq, 2) establish an Islamic authority in Iraq, 3) expand the fight to secular countries neighboring Iraq (notably Jordan and Syria), and 4) fight Israel. Abu Musab worked with his successor, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, to invite Iraqi groups to create a Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC) in 2006, which eventually evolved into the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). After ISI expanded into parts of Syria in 2013, the group named itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The acronym for ISIS in Arabic is Daesh (al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham). Daesh hates the use of the Arabic word "Daesh," as it means "one who crushes something underfoot" and is translated as "one who sows discord."

### AFTER YOU FINISH

1. What did you learn?
2. What were areas of deep concern? Were any personal fears or other triggers sparked by this reading?
3. Do you know about the Arab Spring? How do you think it may have contributed to the formation of Daesh?
4. Are there other historical events in the United States which mirrored the Arab Spring which could then contributed to the youth thinking the Daesh methodology to be appropriate? If so, how would you want to respond?
5. What new sources of information would you now consider?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is this information relevant to you ethnicity and culture?
2. How was ISIS/Daesh first presented to you?
3. Take one of the elements in Push -- 'the discontent' and examine within yourself, then consider what could be a possible solution.

### ACTION STEPS

1. Are there elements in this reading which could be demonstrated in current day living?
2. How would you share this information in a one-on-one or groups discussion?
3. There are injustices in the world. How would to act to constructively and practically address these injustices without violence? What are some examples in current society which reflect a more humane response?
4. How could you explain the mechanisms developed by Daesh [E.g. language of mass mobilization, justification for acts of violence, etc.] in such a way that demonstrates the fallacy and re-frames them in a positive and non-dogmatic fashion?

# Excommunication

IMAM MOHAMED MAGID

## BEFORE YOU START

1. What do you think you already know about this topic?
2. What sources of information have contributed to your prior knowledge?
3. What do you expect to gain from reading this unit?

# Excommunication

## Takfir

Claiming to possess the authority to determine who is a “real” Muslim and who is not, Daesh uses the practice of takfir (declaring someone an apostate) to justify the killing of Muslims who do not subscribe to its distorted ideology, but as **IMAM MOHAMED MAGID** points out, this directly violates the Qur’an.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The act of takfir has been declared forbidden in Islam as it is a source of social unrest, doubt among believers, and danger to the global Muslim community.
- Extremist groups aggressively practice takfir as a political weapon to denounce any Muslim head of state or religious leader who challenges the group’s authority.
- Extremist groups also use takfir as a psychological tool to manipulate people and promote an “us versus them” mentality, where one is either with them or against them.

The world has become all too familiar with Daesh’s brutal ways. The most shocking, however, is their senseless violence toward their fellow Muslims. Using a distorted understanding of the Islamic concept known as *takfir*, they have declared that any fellow Muslim who rejects their twisted ideology is a *kafir* (unbeliever). In doing so, they have illegitimately justified the slaughter of countless innocent, peaceful Muslims around the world. However, the inherent violence and danger *takfir* poses to the worldwide Muslim community have made it a forbidden act in Islam and it has received widespread condemnations from Muslim states and leaders. In 2011, Tunisia even went so far as to place a constitutional ban on *fatwas* (Islamic legal rulings) that call for *takfir* against fellow Muslims.

The act of *takfir*, or accusing a fellow Muslim of apostasy (*riddah*) and unbelief (*kufir*), has been almost universally rejected throughout Islamic history. For one, claiming to possess the authority to judge an individual’s faith and submission to God is to essentially undermine the ultimate authority and knowledge of God. This is because the Qur’an teaches that only God has the knowledge and authority to judge on the basis of one’s faith: “Say,

*‘Indeed I stand on a manifest proof from my Lord and you have denied it. What you hasten is not up to me. Judgment belongs only to God; He expounds the truth and He is the best of judges’*” (6:57), and “*Indeed your Lord knows best those who stray from His way; and He knows best those who are guided*” (6:117). Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad condemned those who accused their fellow Muslims of apostasy, saying, “*Whoever says to his brother ‘disbeliever’ then it will have settled upon one of them*” (at-Tirmidhi).

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Claiming to possess the authority to judge an individual’s faith and submission to God is to essentially undermine the ultimate authority and knowledge of God.

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In addition to *takfir* being a forbidden practice in Islam, it has been the source of great social unrest (*fitnah* or “sedition”) throughout Islamic history, as it casts

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doubt among believers and leads one to question his/her own faith. This is best seen with the group the Khawarij, who are often regarded as the first violent extremist group. In an attempt to delegitimize the authority of Caliph Ali and secure their own leader, the Khawarij claimed that they were the “true Muslims” and treated all others with violence and hostility. To them, any Muslim who “sinned” could no longer be considered a pure Muslim—“sin” as defined by them, of course. Similarly, the Khawarij used *takfir* as a political weapon—a method employed by Daesh to justify slaughter.

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Daesh and similar extremist groups aggressively practice *takfir* as a political weapon to denounce any Muslim head of state or religious leader who poses a threat to the group’s authority by labeling them *murtadd* (apostate). This was first seen in Ibn Taymiyyah’s *fatwa* against the Mongol convert invaders due to the fact that they enforced their own laws in place of Shari’ah. Similarly, Daesh has made it clear that Muslim rulers who do not fully implement Shari’ah as understood by Daesh are apostate sinners who place the laws of man above the laws of God, thus breaking their *shahadah*. They cherry-pick and distort the Qur’anic verse that says:

*We sent down the Torah containing guidance and light. The prophets, who had submitted, judged by it for the Jews, and so did the rabbis and the scribes, as they were charged to preserve the Book of Allah and were witnesses to it. So do not fear the people, but fear Me, and do not sell My signs for a paltry gain. Those who do not judge by what Allah has sent down—it is they who are faithless (5:44).*

More specifically, Daesh sees Muslim leaders in the West as actively siding with the disbelievers and “enemies of Islam” in a battle against the “true believers.” Thus, using the practice of *takfir*, Daesh falsely justifies and encourages the violent overthrow and assassination of these leaders in order to further protect their authority.

*Takfir* is just another deadly extension of the extremists’ distorted ideology and understanding of the doctrine of *Al-Wala’ wal Bara’*. It is being used as a psychological tool to manipulate disenfranchised individuals and fuel their violent “us versus them” mind-set, where one is either “with them” or “against them.” And, according to their distorted doctrine of *Al-Wala’ wal Bara’*, if one is against them, then he/she is a non-believer who should be killed according to the violent rules of *takfir*.

Yet, the world’s 1.6 billion peaceful Muslims know that this is not a sanctioned practice in Islam, as one of the most important tenets in Islam is, “*There is no compulsion in religion*” (2:256). The truth remains that Daesh will never possess the authority to declare *takfir* and accuse a fellow Muslim of non-belief—nor will they ever be justified in practicing *takfir* that results in such a devastating loss of life.

### AFTER YOU FINISH

1. What did you learn? Did you know that the “very act of declaring takfir goes against the teachings contained in the Qur’an”?
2. What were areas that confused you? Do you still have unanswered questions regarding the information presented in the article? Was there something that wasn’t covered that you would have liked to learn about?
3. What new sources of information would you now consider?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is this information relevant to you ethnicity and culture? Do you understand the concept of the “disenfranchised”?
2. Now that you have an understanding of the concept of “takfir”, have you seen or experienced any different types of “takfir”?

### ACTION STEPS

1. Are there elements in this reading which could be demonstrated in everyday life?
2. How would you share this information in a one-on-one or group discussion?

# Pledge of Allegiance

IMAM SOULEIMANE KONATÉ

## BEFORE YOU START

1. What do you think you already know about this topic?
2. What sources of information have contributed to you prior knowledge?
3. What do you expect to gain from reading this unit?

# Pledge of Allegiance

## *Bay'ah*

**IMAM SOULEIMANE KONATÉ** describes the three historical categories of *bay'ah* within Islam and shows that Daesh's use of the practice is doctrinally inaccurate and merely another tool the group uses to advance its political goals.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Bay'ah* was seen as a symbol of one's dedication and faithfulness to the principles of Islam and observance of correct moral behavior.
- The Prophet Muhammad set the precedent that the *bay'ah* given to a leader under duress is null and void, so *bay'ah* must be a mutual agreement conditioned on being given freely.
- Daesh has admitted to using *bay'ah* as propaganda and has distorted and abused the practice of *bay'ah* into a political weapon to instigate violence.

One of the greatest challenges in the fight against Daesh has been providing attractive counter-narratives to their twisted ideology. Between their mastering of social media and sophisticated recruitment network, Daesh has been able to use this ideology to infiltrate our communities and prey on the most vulnerable among us. They manipulate these individuals into declaring their allegiance with false promises of greatness and belonging. We have seen this most recently in Orlando, where an angry, unstable individual gave his allegiance to the group in the course of committing a horrific crime against humanity. The "*bay'ah*," or so-called pledge of allegiance, that this mass murderer allegedly gave to Daesh before slaughtering dozens and killing himself, has been one of the most powerful tools used to influence the disenfranchised in our communities, and to make Daesh's influence seem more widespread.

Daesh's conception of *bay'ah*, however, is yet another example of the extremist group's distortion of Islamic teachings. Classical Muslim scholars and jurists have established that there are three categories of *bay'ah* that have existed throughout history. The first originated with the Prophet Muhammad and has been classified as *bay'ah* on the tenets of faith.

This was a ritual one took with the Prophet upon accepting Islam and declaring the *shahadah*, or when reaffirming one's faith in *tawhid* (monotheism) and devotion to God and His Messenger. This *bay'ah* also symbolized the acceptance of the Prophet as one's spiritual mentor, a practice that still exists today within Sufism, where one gives his/her allegiance to his/her Sheikh.

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The Prophet established the *bay'ah* as a conditional mutual agreement that is only valid as long as both parties uphold the moral and spiritual principles stipulated in the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

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Giving *bay'ah* to the Prophet Muhammad played a key role in the establishment of the first Muslim community in Medina. It was seen as a symbol of one's allegiance, dedication, and faithfulness to the principles of Islam and observance of correct moral

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behavior. Furthermore, it served as a symbolic act in which those in the early Muslim community acknowledged their obligation to obey the Prophet Muhammad as their leader and spiritual mentor. However, this *bay'ah* was contractual in the sense that it existed so long as the Prophet acted in accordance to the Word and Laws of God and exhibited correct moral behavior in all aspects of life and leadership without compromise. In doing so, this *bay'ah* laid the foundations for the ideal Islamic society where Islam became the guiding force of daily life.

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Their viral campaign shows images of people “pledging their allegiance” in different parts of the world, reducing the sacred pledge of *bay'ah* to nothing more than a tool of intimidation to make Daesh seem more powerful, threatening, and widespread than they actually are.

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The most famous example of *bay'ah* during the time of the Prophet is known as the “Pledge of the Tree,” which the Prophet asked the early Muslim community in Medina to take before embarking on the pilgrimage back to Mecca. This *bay'ah* served as a mutual agreement between the Prophet and the Muslim community to support and protect each other against the Meccans should a battle ensue. This *bay'ah* was significant in that it represented the precursor to the Treaty of Hudaibiyah and the ten-year peace between the Meccans and the Muslim community, which is reflected in the Qur'anic verse stating: “Allah was well pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance unto thee beneath the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, and He sent down peace of reassurance onto them, and hath rewarded them with a near victory” (48:18).

A crucial aspect of *bay'ah* under the Prophet is the fact that it was willingly and freely taken by his followers. As such, the *bay'ah* of the Prophet Muhammad set the precedent that any oath of allegiance given to

a leader under duress is immediately null and void. Furthermore, the Prophet established the *bay'ah* as a conditional mutual agreement that is only valid as long as both parties uphold the moral and spiritual principles stipulated in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Clearly, Daesh can never claim to be upholding these moral and spiritual principles, as their use of violence goes against the examples set by the Prophet and the early Muslim community.

After the death of the Prophet, the ritual of *bay'ah* became a symbol of the masses' approval of their chosen leader. This is regarded as the third category of *bay'ah* and was practiced under the first caliphs so as to establish a new institution of authority and ensure the continuity of leadership. This political form of *bay'ah* was almost democratic in nature as it was established that the *bay'ah* could only be given to a leader who was chosen by the consensus of the influential members of society who represented the voice of the Muslim masses.

For example, after being chosen as successor to the Prophet Muhammad by his closest companions, Abu Bakr humbly asked the general public to give their *bay'ah* to him with the promise that he would establish justice and follow the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad or else they were no longer obligated to follow him. Thus, from the very beginning, the concept of giving and receiving *bay'ah* put a limitation on human authority by stipulating that obedience to God and His Prophet is obligatory for both the ruler and the people. This is clearly stipulated in the following verse of the Qur'an, in which God says: “It is not (possible) for any human being unto whom Allah had given the Scripture and wisdom and the prophethood that he should afterwards have said unto mankind: Be slaves of me instead of Allah; but (what he said was): Be ye faithful servants of the Lord by virtue of your constant teachings of the Scripture and of your constant study thereof” (3:79).

This is the core fault in Daesh's call for Muslims around the world to declare their allegiance to the group's violent cause. For one, Daesh's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is far from the embodiment of the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad. He calls for the killing of innocent individuals, encourages the oppression, rape, and enslavement of women and girls, and can never claim to represent the consensus of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims. Furthermore, al-Baghdadi has attempted to legitimize his rule on the

basis of being a descendant of the Prophet—a claim that has yet to be verified, as his background is still unknown to most.

Daesh has distorted and abused the practice of *bay'ah*, turning it into a political weapon to instigate violence and terror. Their misuse brainwashes individuals into sacrificing their lives and the lives of innocent civilians in the belief that it is the only way to reach Paradise. They propagate a distorted interpretation of the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad that states, “One who dies without having bound himself by an oath of allegiance will die the death of one belonging to the days of Jahiliyyah” (Sahih Muslim), in order to bait individuals into carrying out violent acts on their behalf. Thus, they have concocted a narrative surrounding their distorted understanding of *bay'ah* in which vulnerable individuals believe the only way to Paradise is to give their allegiance—and life—to the so-called Caliphate.

Moreover, Daesh have admitted to using *bay'ah* as

recruitment propaganda in order to engender fear and intimidation, stating, “*We call every Muslim [to pledge allegiance] towards this good, for indeed, it is even more infuriating for the enemies of Allah. By Allah, our rallying under one leader is harder on the enemies of Allah than a thousand victories on the battlefield.*”<sup>1</sup> Their viral campaign shows images of people “pledging their allegiance” in different parts of the world, reducing the sacred pledge of *bay'ah* to nothing more than a tool of intimidation to make Daesh seem more powerful, threatening, and widespread than they actually are. But Muslims worldwide know that they are not obligated to give *bay'ah* to Daesh, and they know that a criminal such as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi will never receive the full support of the world’s peaceful Muslims. As the Qur’an says, “*Believers, obey God and the Messenger and those among you who have been entrusted with authority. If you have a dispute about anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day. This is best to do and in turn gives the best results*” (4:59).

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<sup>1</sup> “Remaining and Expanding,” *Dabiq*, Muharram 1436, Issue 5, 23, <<http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-issue-5-remaining-and-expanding.pdf>>.

### AFTER YOU FINISH

1. What did you learn?
2. What were areas of deep concern? Were there any personal fears or other triggers sparked by this reading?
3. How do you understand this pledge of allegiance? Having understood Daesh's manipulation of such a pledge, how can we counter it?
4. Are there any gaps in your knowledge?
5. What new sources of information would you now consider?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is this information relevant to your ethnicity and culture?
2. What other pledges of allegiance come to mind when reading about bay'ah? How can we use these other examples to make sense of its use within Daesh propaganda and recruitment?
3. How does bay'ah fit into your definition of democracy?

### ACTION STEPS

1. Are there elements in this reading which could be demonstrated in everyday life?
2. How would you share this information in a one-on-one or group discussion?
3. How can you develop a consciousness of mutual agreement for the community within a social justice context?
4. How can you translate an understanding of Bay'ah to an understanding of your participation in other processes of declaring allegiance within a non-violent context? E.g. within the U.S. Electoral process or in the operation structure of a local mosque.