

Your Shortcut to ... Islam

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

It's the second biggest religion in the world, and the fastest growing...and for the next month, many believers won't be eating when the sun is up. This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to Islam—the podcast where we dive into the who, what, when, where, why and how of the big news stories. I'm Amanda Bower.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

Bryce, what you're hearing there is a Muslim call to prayer. There are five daily prayers that are a core part of the Islamic religion, but for the next month, there's another special prayer, called Tarawih, that is especially for the month of Ramadan, which in 2023 starts on March 22, and goes until April 20.

Today, we'll take you through WHAT Islam is... HOW Ramadan is celebrated ... and WHY Mecca is so important.

Listen carefully - there's a Squiz at the end!

WHAT

Bryce, the first thing we need to do is cover off the basics. The name of the religion we are talking about is Islam, and people who follow Islam are called Muslims. It's the second-biggest religion in the world, and the fastest growing... there are about 1.8 billion Muslims in the world. I've popped a link in your episode notes to a map that shows where the world's Muslim majority countries are. Take a look, Bryce...

Would you look at that... North Africa, the Middle East, Indonesia, Malaysia...

And then there's a second link to Muslim populations for the whole world... where you can see that we have 650,000 Aussie Muslims... that's a lot of people!

It sure is! Which means it's a good idea to learn more.

Let's do it! Islam is called a monotheistic religion. Any ideas what that might mean, Bryce? Mono-theistic?

Mono makes me think of Monopoly...

Great connection! Mono is Greek root word that means “one”. If you play Monopoly, you're trying to be the ONE person who controls all the money and property. And theism is a belief that a god or gods created the universe. "

Aha! So a monotheistic religion is one that believes that there is only ONE god.

Exactly! And that's one of the big things that Islam has in common with Christianity and Judaism - all three are monotheistic religions, and they all believe in the same God. They also have a lot of the same stories - Islam's holy book, the Qu'ran, also talks about Jesus, who is called Isa in Arabic. Muslims believe that Jesus, as well as Noah, Abraham, and Moses—all

names that Jews and Christians will be familiar with—were prophets of God. In Islam, God’s name is Allah, which is an Arabic word.

So I’m guessing that Islam started in an Arabic speaking country?

Nailed it! Islam started in the 7th century in the city of Mecca, which is in modern day Saudi Arabia. It was there, they say, that Allah’s word was revealed to the prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. Muslims believe that Muhammad was the last of God’s prophets, and for many Muslims, every time they say or write Muhammad’s name, they also say “Peace Be Upon Him,” as a sign of their respect and devotion.

I realise that you can’t summarise an entire religion in a few sentences, but what do Muslims mostly believe in and do?

Okay, so there are five main pillars of Islam.

1. **Shahada**: to declare one’s faith in God and belief in Muhammad. Observant Muslims will say this several times a day: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger.”
2. **Salat**: to pray five times a day (at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening). Muslims can go to pray at a mosque—which is the name given to their house of worship, like Christians go to church and Jewish people go to synagogue—
3. **Zakat**: to give to those in need
4. **Sawm**: to fast during Ramadan
5. **Hajj**: to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during a person’s lifetime, if the person is able

I’m glad you mentioned Ramadan, because some Muslim friends have invited me to a Ramadan dinner ... tell me more about HOW it's celebrated.

HOW

For the hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world who observe the month of Ramadan, it's a time to focus on their faith and also perform generous acts. Muslims believe that this is the month that the first verses of the Islamic holy book, the Qu'ran, were revealed to Muhammad. During Ramadan, people raise money and donate supplies to help others in need... and they fast to remind themselves about those in the world who don’t have enough to eat.

And by fast, you don't mean a synonym for quick or speedy... you mean "don't eat"?

That's right... we actually use that word every day when we talk about breakfast - it means "break fast", meaning that you're putting a stop to the fasting you did overnight when you were sleeping!

That's a pretty easy thing to do... fast while you're asleep. When are Muslims fasting during Ramadan?

Yeah, basically the opposite of what we do every night. The entire time the sun is in the sky, Muslims observing Ramadan are NOT allowed to eat. So they'll get up before sunrise and have breakfast, and then not eat or drink again until after the sun has set. During Ramadan, they'll often organise big evening meals with family and friends... and after the last day of

Ramadan, there's a three-day festival called Eid. People gather together to eat, sometimes they'll decorate their houses and exchange gifts.

Do kids have to fast too?

No ... young kids, pregnant women, people travelling long distances... they're all excused from fasting. It's the same as that last pillar of Islam, the hajj... Muslims are expected to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, if they're able.

Mecca is a really important place to the Islamic religion, isn't it? Tell me more about WHY it's important.

WHY

So Bryce, when I type "Mecca" into Google, the first result I get is the Mecca make up and beauty shop that's up the road from my house!

The real Mecca, as I said earlier, is in Saudi Arabia. It's where the prophet Muhammad was born and the holiest city in Islam. When Muslims pray, they always make sure they are facing the great mosque of Mecca, called the Masjid al-Haram... there are actually phone apps to show you where Mecca is!

And every year, about two million people make what's called a pilgrimage to Mecca.

That's right - it's a pretty incredible sight... I'll pop a link in your episode notes. Every Muslim adult who can afford it, and is physically able to make the journey, is expected to do so at least once in their lifetime. During the week of Hajj, each person must do a number of rituals, including walking seven times around a cube-shaped building called the Kaaba; throwing stones at three pillars that symbolise the devil; and either shaving their head, or having a haircut.

Why a haircut?

It symbolises a clean start, a rebirth. Over time, the word "mecca" has come to mean the centre, or most important place, for a certain group of people. So you might say that the MCG is mecca for cricket fans, or the Eiffel Tower is a mecca for tourists. That makeup shop I mentioned? It wants to be THE most important destination for makeup lovers.

I wonder what Muhammad would have thought of that...

The S'Quiz

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening...

1. What is the name of the month-long period when Muslims fast? "
2. Which direction must Muslims face when they pray?
3. Here's a tricky one... what's the word to describe a religion that believes in one God?