

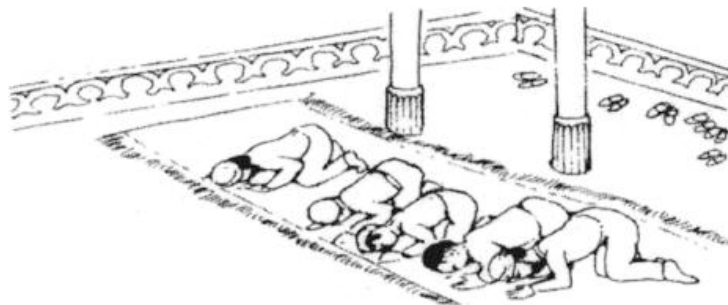
## Islam

A follower of Islam is called a *MUSLIM*.

Muslims come together to worship God ( *ALLAH* ) in a mosque ( *Masjid* ) which literally means a place of prostration. The act of prostration is the sign of total submission to God. As the word Islam means submission to one God and this is the essence of Islam. Faith is very important in Islam, the first pillar being *Shahadah* ‘ There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah ‘ Muslims believe in one God, and *Mohammad* is the final prophet whose teaching they should follow. They must also believe in all prophets sent before like Moses, Jesus, Abraham. The other four pillars of the Muslim faith are *Salah* prayer , *Zakah* alms tax , *Sawn* – fasting and *Hajj*-pilgrimage to *Makkah*.

Mosques ( *Masjids* ) can vary greatly in shape and size, from magnificent structures on a grand scale to the plainest, most basic of buildings. However, they share a number of fundamental features. An opening or niche ( *Mihrab* ) in an interior wall that indicates the direction of *Kaabah* ( a building which Muslims believe was first built by the prophets Abraham and his son prophet Ishmael, millions of Muslims gather there every year to perform *Hajj* “pilgrimage”) which worshippers must face when praying; a pulpit ( *Minbar* ), from which the sermon is spoken; and, in most countries, a minaret or tower (with fixed sound speakers), situated adjacent to the Mosque, from which a person known as the *Muezzin* calls Muslims to prayer five times a day.

Some Mosques also have a courtyard with a pool of clear water in the centre for worshippers to wash themselves symbolically ( *Wo’du* ) before they enter the sacred place and start prayer. But in most Mosques the place of ablutions is found nearby.



## **Dress**

Both males and females should be modestly dressed and women should ensure they cover their heads, arms and legs. Trousers or ankle length skirts may be worn but they must not be tight-fitting. There are also similar modest dress rules that apply to men. Both sexes remove their shoes before entry into the prayer room to keep the place clean and it is not part of the religion.

## **Visiting a Masjid**

Shoes must be removed before entering the prayer-hall and stored on the racks provided. After entering quietly visitors sit on the carpeted floor.

While Muslims are required to pray five times a day - daybreak, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and night - this can be done either in a Mosque or wherever individual Muslims may be. Prayer, which is in Arabic, is preceded with *Wadu*, washing with water that cleanses the body (hands, mouth, face and feet) and spirit. Worshippers then face *Kaabah* (by facing in a direction roughly South-East in Great Britain) and, depending on the time of day, do two to four prostrations (*units*). Each unit begins with the declaration "God is most great" and consists of bows, prostrations and the recitation of fixed prayers. At the end of prayer, the *Taslim* or peace greeting, "Peace be upon all of you and the mercy and the blessing of God," is repeated twice.

Prayer which occurs in a regular and disciplined manner, reminds Muslims of their status before God as 'True servants of God'. There are no priests in Islam and in the *Masjid* prayers are conducted by the *Imam*. The *Imam* is a person chosen by the other members of the congregation to conduct prayers.

On Friday, *Jumma*, the noon prayer, is a congregational prayer. Men and women form separate lines for prayer, extending from one side of the Mosque's main sanctuary to the other. The tight ranks symbolise unity and equality within the Muslim community. The sexes are separated for worship to maintain modesty and concentration during the physical movements of standing, bowing and prostration. Their separation does not indicate relative superiority or inferiority. This *Jumma* lasts between thirty and sixty minutes.

If visitors are present at the time of one of the five daily prayers, they will normally be welcome to observe. They will probably be asked to sit quietly at the back of the *Masjid*. No participation will be expected, but it is very important to observe the dress code.

## **Books used**

The *Qu'ran* is used, although generally prayers are memorised. This means that individuals often learn the proper rituals in advance and newcomers pray in groups following the lead of the *Imam*. Books and other materials are available in the English language in wide range of subjects, from simply

understanding Islam to Islamic Economics.