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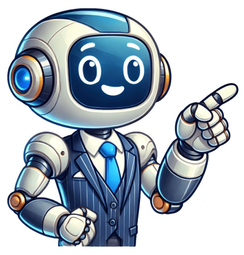

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Explore our latest gallery of Editors' Picks.Browse Editors' Favorites Islam encourages the seeking of knowledge at all times, regardless of ones age. The Quran pushed Muslims to seek knowledge. This Muslim started to travel the globe centuries ago seeking knowledge. Others came to cities like Baghdad to continue their research. It so happened that as a result of this "explosion in knowledge" Arabic became the language of international scholarship and the best scholars were graduated from Muslim Universities.The first University in the world, "University of Al Quaraouiyine" in Morroco which was established by a Muslim woman "Fatima al-Fihri", still exist as a major centre of learning. Muslims excelled in many fields of knowledge – art, architecture, astronomy, geography, oceanography, history, languages, literature, medicine, maths, physics, chemistry, philosophy and so on. Algebra, algorithm and Zero (0) are examples of common Muslim contributions to the world. The astrolabe and quadrant which enabled European discoveries are also Muslim contributions. Muslims also made detailed navigational and world maps. Some prominent Muslimc ontributor's are:Ibn Hayyan (Geber, 738-813) known as Father of ChemistryAl Khawarizmi (Algorithm, 750-850) Father of MathsAr Razi (Rhazez 864-930) identified and treated smallpox, also made several contributions in the medical fieldIbn Sina (Avicenna, 981-1037) his books were considered the authority of medicine for over 500 yearsAl Zahran (Albucasis, 936-1013) recognised as Father of modern surgeryAl Idrisi (Dreses 1099-1166) made the first world maps which even clearly showed North,Central and South America, andIbn Rushd (Averroes 1128-1198) philosopher,astronomer and physician. At LiveIslam.org, we understand that you may have questions about Islamic beliefs and practices. This section aims to provide clear, comprehensive answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about Islam. Whether you're new to learning about the faith, a non-Muslim seeking understanding, or a Muslim looking to deepen your knowledge, we hope these answers will be informative and helpful. Answer: Islam is a monotheistic religion founded in the 7th century CE based on the belief in one God (Allah in Arabic) and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The word "Islam" means "submission" or "surrender" to the will of God. Followers of Islam, known as Muslims, believe that Islam is the complete and universal version of a primordial faith revealed through prophets throughout history, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, with Muhammad being the final prophet. Answer: "Allah" is the Arabic word for God. It is used by Muslims worldwide, regardless of their native language, as well as by Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews. In Islam, Allah is the one, unique, incomparable God who is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Muslims believe that Allah has no partners or equals and is the only one worthy of worship. Answer: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the final prophet in Islam, born around 570 CE in Mecca, in present-day Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that he was chosen by Allah to receive and convey the final revelation, the Quran. He is considered a model of exemplary character and leadership, and his life and sayings (Sunnah and Hadith) serve as a guide for Muslims in all aspects of life. Answer: The Quran is the holy book of Islam, believed by Muslims to be the literal word of God as revealed to Prophet Muhammad over 23 years through the Angel Gabriel (Jibril). It consists of 114 chapters (surahs) and covers guidance on belief, worship, morality, law, and personal conduct. The Quran is written in Arabic and is considered inimitable in its language and style. Answer: The Five Pillars of Islam are the foundational acts of worship and practice that define a Muslim's faith and actions: Shahada (Declaration of Faith): Professing that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger. Salah (Prayer): Performing the five daily prayers facing the Kaaba in Mecca. Zakat (Almsgiving): Giving a fixed portion of one's wealth (usually 2.5%) to the needy. Sawm (Fasting during Ramadan): Abstaining from food, drink, and other physical needs from dawn until sunset during the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca): Undertaking the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime if physically and financially able. Answer: Mecca is the holiest city in Islam, as it is the birthplace of Prophet Muhammad and the site of the Kaaba, the sacred structure Muslims face during prayer. The Hajj pilgrimage centers around Mecca. Medina is the second holiest city, where Prophet Muhammad migrated (the Hijrah) and established the first Muslim community. It is also where he is buried. Both cities hold immense spiritual and historical significance for Muslims. Answer: "Jihad" literally means "struggle" or "striving" in Arabic. In Islam, it refers to the spiritual struggle against sin. This includes the internal, personal effort to live a moral and virtuous life, improve oneself, and uphold justice. While the term can also refer to defending the faith or community, Islam strictly prohibits aggression and the harming of innocent people. The greater jihad is considered the internal struggle against one's own shortcomings. Answer: Islam recognizes the prophets and scriptures of Judaism and Christianity, considering them part of a continuum of monotheistic faiths. The Quran refers to Jews and Christians as "People of the Book" and emphasizes respect for their prophets, including Moses and Jesus. Islam encourages dialogue and coexistence, promoting the idea that there should be no compulsion in religion (Quran 2:256). Muslims believe that Islam has been the religion that Allah revealed to all prophets starting from prophet Adam. Through politics and greed, humans in power would alter the scriptures to serve their motivations and Allah would send prophets to renew and purify the message over and over. Prophet Muhammad is the last of the messengers with the message that cannot be altered as Allah preserves it till the day of judgement. Answer: Islam grants women rights to education, inheritance, property ownership, and participation in social, political, and economic life. The Quran and Hadith emphasize the spiritual equality of men and women. Cultural practices and interpretations may vary, but the core teachings advocate for justice and dignity for women. Issues such as forced marriage, domestic abuse, and denial of education are cultural problems that Islam condemns. Answer: The hijab is a headscarf worn by Muslim women as a form of modesty, privacy, and morality. It is part of a broader Islamic principle encouraging both men and women to dress modestly and behave respectfully. Answer: "Halal" means permissible or lawful in Islam, while "haram" means forbidden. These terms apply to all aspects of life, including food, actions, and behaviors. For example, halal foods are those that are permissible to eat, such as properly slaughtered meat, while haram foods include pork and alcohol. The concepts encourage Muslims to live in a way that is ethical and pleasing to Allah. Answer: Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, considered the holiest month. Muslims fast from dawn until sunset, abstaining from food, drink, and other physical needs. Fasting during Ramadan is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. It is a time for spiritual reflection, self-discipline, increased devotion, and empathy for the less fortunate. The fast is broken each day with a meal called iftar. Answer: Islam is a religion that promotes peace, mercy, and compassion. The Quran emphasizes the sanctity of life, justice, and the importance of resolving conflicts peacefully. While self-defense is permitted, aggression and violence against innocent people are strictly prohibited. Misinterpretations and misuse of Islamic texts by extremists are condemned by the vast majority of Muslims. Answer: Sharia is the moral and legal framework derived from the Quran and the Sunnah (teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammad). It covers aspects of daily life, including worship, ethics, marriage, business, and criminal law. Sharia aims to promote justice, fairness, and the well-being of society. Answer: Yes, Muslims believe in Jesus (Isa), Moses (Musa), Abraham (Ibrahim), and other prophets as messengers of God. Jesus is highly respected as a prophet and the Messiah but not considered divine. Muslims believe that all prophets delivered the same fundamental message of monotheism and submission to God. The Quran includes narratives about these prophets and their teachings. Answer: Islam teaches that life on earth is temporary and a test, and there is an eternal afterlife. After death, individuals are accountable for their deeds and will be judged by Allah. Those who have lived righteously and believed in Allah may be granted entry into Paradise (Jannah), while those who have rejected faith and committed wrongdoing may face punishment in Hell (Jahannam). The concepts of mercy, forgiveness, and repentance are central to this belief. Answer: Salah is the obligatory prayer performed five times a day at specific times: dawn (Fajr), noon (Dhuhr), afternoon (Asr), sunset (Maghrib), and night (Isha). Prayers involve specific physical movements and recitations from the Quran, conducted while facing the Kaaba in Mecca. Salah serves as a constant reminder of faith, helps maintain spiritual discipline, and strengthens the connection with Allah. Answer: The Kaaba, located in Mecca, is considered the first house of worship dedicated to the one God, built by Prophet Adam then Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) and his son Ishmael (Ismail). Facing the Kaaba during prayer, known as the Qibla, symbolizes unity among Muslims worldwide, as they all face the same direction in worship, reinforcing the concept of monotheism and community. Answer: Hajj is the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, and it is mandatory for all physically and financially able Muslims to perform it at least once in their lifetime. The pilgrimage occurs during the Islamic month of Dhu al-Hijjah. Hajj commemorates the trials of Prophet Abraham and his family, emphasizing themes of humility, devotion, and equality before God. Pilgrims perform specific rituals, including circling the Kaaba and standing on the plains of Arafat in prayer. Answer: Islam teaches that Allah is all-knowing and has foreknowledge of all events (Al-Qadar). However, humans are granted free will to make choices and are responsible for their actions. The balance between divine predestination and human free will is acknowledged, emphasizing that while Allah's knowledge encompasses all, individuals must strive to make righteous choices and are accountable for them. Answer: Charity is a fundamental aspect of Islam, reflected in the obligation of Zakat, one of the Five Pillars. Zakat involves giving a fixed portion of one's wealth to those in need, promoting social justice and reducing inequality. Beyond Zakat, Muslims are encouraged to give voluntary charity (Sadaqah) regularly. Acts of kindness, generosity, and caring for others are highly valued and considered acts of worship. Answer: Family is the cornerstone of Islamic society. Marriage is considered a sacred contract and a means of companionship, love, and building a family. Islam provides guidelines for mutual rights and responsibilities between spouses, emphasizing kindness, respect, and cooperation. Parenting is seen as a significant responsibility, with an emphasis on raising children with strong moral and ethical values. Answer: Islamic perspectives on music and art vary among scholars and cultures. While some interpretations discourage certain forms of music and figurative art due to concerns about idolatry or distraction from spiritual matters, many Muslims embrace artistic expression. Islamic art often features calligraphy, geometric patterns, and floral designs. Poetry, and literature have rich traditions in the Muslim world, used to express spirituality and cultural identity. Answer: The Islamic calendar, or Hijri calendar, is a lunar calendar consisting of 12 months and approximately 354 days, making it about 11 days shorter than the solar-based Gregorian calendar. Islamic months begin with the sighting of the new moon. Significant Islamic events, such as Ramadan and Hajj, are based on this calendar, causing them to move backward each year in the Gregorian calendar. Answer: Islamic finance adheres to Sharia principles, prohibiting interest (usury or riba) and investing in unethical businesses (like alcohol, gambling). It promotes risk-sharing, asset-backed financing, and ethical investment. Financial instruments are structured to avoid interest, using concepts like profit-sharing (Mudarabah), leasing (Ijara), and joint ventures (Musharakah). The aim is to promote fairness, transparency, and social welfare. Answer: Islam teaches that humans are stewards (khalifah) of the Earth, responsible for its care and preservation. The Quran and Hadith emphasize respecting nature, avoiding wastefulness, and protecting the environment. Environmental conservation is considered a moral and spiritual duty, encouraging sustainable living and compassion towards all creatures. Answer: An Imam is a leader in the Muslim community, often serving as the prayer leader in a mosque. The Imam may also provide religious guidance, conduct sermons, teach classes, and offer counseling. An Imam is respected for their knowledge and piety but does not have the same hierarchical role as clergy in some other religions. Answer: Muslims commonly greet each other with "Assalamu Alaikum," meaning "Peace be upon you." The response is "Wa Alaikum Assalam," meaning "And upon you be peace." This greeting reflects the Islamic values of peace, goodwill, and brotherhood. It serves as a prayer and a warm welcome, reinforcing community bonds. Answer: Islam highly values the pursuit of knowledge, considering it a duty for every Muslim. The Quran encourages reflection, observation, and understanding of the natural world. Historically, Muslim scholars made significant contributions to fields like mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and philosophy during the Islamic Golden Age. Islam promotes harmony between faith and reason, viewing scientific exploration as a means to appreciate the wonders of Allah's creation. Answer: Beginning your journey to learn about Islam is a rewarding and enlightening experience. Here are some steps to guide you on this path: Explore Reliable Resources Visit LiveIslam.org: Our website is dedicated to providing authentic, comprehensive information about Islam. Recommended Reading: Start with foundational texts like reputable translations of the Quran and books on the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Our "Further Resources" section lists suggested books and articles. Engage with Interactive Learning Islam 101 Module: Enroll in our "Islam 101" interactive course on LiveIslam.org. It's designed to introduce you to the core beliefs, practices, and history of Islam in an engaging and accessible manner. Virtual Tours: Experience our Virtual Mosque Tours to get a feel for Islamic places of worship and community life. Connect with the Community Meet a Muslim Program: Participate in our "Meet a Muslim" initiative to have one-on-one conversations with knowledgeable volunteers who can answer your questions and share personal experiences. Attend Events and Webinars: Join online events, workshops, and webinars hosted on LiveIslam.org to engage with scholars and other learners. Common Questions Section: Visit our "Common Questions" section to find answers to frequently asked inquiries about Islam. Contact Us: If you have specific questions, feel free to reach out via email or our website's contact form. Personal Reflection: Take time to reflect on what you learn and how it resonates with you. Journaling your thoughts and questions can be helpful. Spiritual Practices: Try incorporating practices like mindfulness or meditation to deepen your understanding. Forums and Discussion Groups: Participate in online forums or local discussion groups to share insights and learn from others. Interfaith Dialogues: If interested, engage in interfaith events to understand how Islam relates to other faiths. In-Person Visits: When possible, consider visiting a local mosque to experience the community firsthand. Many mosques offer open houses or visitor programs. LiveIslam.org Guidance: Use resources on our website to prepare for your visit and know what to expect. Advanced Courses: As you progress, explore more in-depth courses and materials available on LiveIslam.org. Stay Updated: Subscribe to our newsletter for updates on new resources, events, and articles. We hope this FAQ section has provided valuable insights into Islamic beliefs and practices. Embarking on this journey is a personal and transformative experience. Remember that learning about Islam is not just about acquiring knowledge but also about understanding a way of life that emphasizes peace, compassion, and purpose. We encourage you to take advantage of the resources available at LiveIslam.org and reach out whenever you need support. 1-The ten days of Dhul-Hijjah are among the great seasons of worship which Allah has favoured over other days. 2-So, the Muslim should start these days with sincere repentance to Allah, then he should do a lot of righteous deeds in general, then he should pay attention to doing the following deeds: observing fasting, reciting tahmid, tahlil and takbir, offering Hajj, 'Umrah and Udhiyah. For more, see the detailed answer below. ING has been delivering educational presentations about Muslims and their faith for over two decades. The following are answers to some of the most common questions about Islam and Muslims that ING and its nationwide affiliates have encountered during that time. While many of the answers address issues relating to creed or issues that are well established because of a clear citation in the Qur'an or Hadith (prophetic sayings)—such as the six major beliefs or the Five Pillars—others focus on areas that are more open to interpretation. These answers reflect the fact that Islamic teachings are the product of a dynamic conversation among Muslim scholars and between the scholars and the laity who apply their best understanding of the primary sources of Islam rather than a fixed set of laws and regulations. This points to the fact that Islam, like all religions, does not live or speak apart from the people who practice it. There is, therefore, no monolithic Islam, since, like any other religion, Islam exists only as it is understood and practiced by its adherents. As in other faith traditions, Muslim scholars have developed varied positions and responses to the numerous questions and issues that have been raised and discussed over the past 1400 years in the various lands where Islam is practiced. These perspectives and resulting practices differ partly because of the diversity within the Muslim community in geography, ethnicity, culture, and age. There are about fifty countries in the world today with a majority Muslim population, each having its own distinct history and culture (or multiplicity of cultures). There are also sizeable Muslim minorities in many other countries, including the United States and virtually all the countries of Europe, that are living Islam in their own unique situations. These Muslim communities have a variety of cultures and histories and live in varied social, cultural, and political circumstances, all producing significant variety in the way that they understand and practice Islam. In addition, there are various sects among Muslims, most notably Sunni and Shi'a, as well as various groups within each major sect. These differences in varieties of Islamic understanding and practice also reflect Muslim scholars' long tradition of recognizing the diversity of peoples and circumstances and the opinions that should reflect that reality of diversity as well as of our shared humanity. Therefore, it is important to understand that the following questions and answers about Islam and Muslims reflect the views of the Muslim American scholars that ING has worked with. In other words, we do not speak for or on behalf of all Muslims. In most cases, however, the views of these scholars probably reflect the views of the majority of Sunni Muslims in the U.S. and worldwide. There are new realities and issues that are specific to the time and place experienced today by Muslim Americans, who are the main focus of ING's work. These issues cannot always be addressed by the laws of past eras or of different cultures in Asia or Africa. Here, we attempt to present these questions and answers about Islam and Muslims in a way that is traditional yet compatible with the realities of the American experience in the 21st century. In these matters, we strive to be descriptive, respecting the diversity of Islam as lived religion, but our reference point is the Islam we believe in and practice as Muslim Americans; in most cases, but not necessarily all, this is in accord with Islam as believed in, practiced, and lived by the majority of Muslims worldwide. We start from five basic principles that ING subscribes to as basic to our vision of Islam in America. These are fundamental values shared by most of the world's major religious traditions today: We affirm and uphold the sanctity of all human life, the taking of which is among the gravest of all sins. We affirm the right to freedom of thought, religion, conscience, and expression. We affirm the right to security in one's livelihood, profession, and residence. We believe that God created us all with the diversity of race, religion, language, and belief to get to know one another, respect one another, and uphold our collective human dignity. We believe that Islam is above all a religion of peace and mercy and that as Muslims we are obligated to model those traits in our lives and characters and to work for the good of our homeland and society, wherever that might be. Wherever possible, we indicate which of these principles is the basis for our responses to these questions. Finally, it is important to note that most of the following questions are actual questions that were asked of our speakers, including some of the most repeatedly asked questions in an educational setting where we supplement curriculum relating to Islam and Muslims in the context of world history, social studies, or cultural diversity programming. Categories of questions by subject matter are listed in alphabetical order. Angels Angels are mentioned many times in the Qur'an and Hadith (prophetic sayings). Unlike humans, angels are described as beings who obey God's commandments without fail, by nature, and are assigned to specific duties. Two of the most prominent angels mentioned by name in the Qur'an are Gabriel (Jibril) and Michael (Mikhail). Gabriel is the angel of revelation and Michael is the angel in charge of rain and earth's plant life. Crime And Punishment We believe that acts of worship should be done for the sake of God and that God alone will judge each person according to his or her intentions and actions. Mandatory criminal penalties are basic to any penal code. Like other criminal systems, Islamic jurisprudence does prescribe certain punishments in certain situations, but any criminal judgement must be carried out by a state authority, as Islam does not allow vigilantism. Furthermore, most of these punishments were meant to act as deterrents, and, in practice, the most severe punishments were rarely carried out. For instance, the punishment of stoning for adultery requires the testimony of four eyewitnesses—a virtually impossible condition. Capital punishment for manslaughter could be avoided if the victim's family agreed to monetary compensation for their loss—a normal practice in the society of the time. These punishments are very similar to those found in the Hebrew Bible, which, like the Qur'an, spoke to social conditions and attitudes vastly different from those of later times and different places. Jews today, even the most strictly Orthodox, do not practice these punishments, and Christians generally regard them as superseded by the ethic of Jesus. Today, most Muslim-majority countries do not practice these punishments, and where they are practiced, such as under the Taliban or ISIS, the required due process that makes many of these punishments nearly impossible to enforce is not followed, which is why many scholars have condemned their use. No, "honor killings"—which refer to violence, generally against girls or women, by one or more family members who believe the victim has brought dishonor upon the family—are prohibited by Islam on the basis of not just one but several principles. First, they violate the sanctity of life, which is considered sacrosanct; second, they fail to respect the right of due process for anyone accused of a crime; and, third, they contradict the principle that each individual is responsible for his or her own actions and that no individual or family member should be held responsible for the behavior of another. In fact, the Qur'an specifically prohibits even speaking ill of a woman without the testimony of four witnesses and calls for the punishment of one who does so without this virtually impossible requirement. Day of Judgment We believe that only God knows where a person will end up in the afterlife, since only God knows a person's intentions, deeds, circumstances, and limitations. We also believe that God will judge human beings according to His complete justice on the Day of Judgment based on both their beliefs and actions, taking into account the opportunities and abilities that He gave them. In the Qur'an, God's ninety-nine names include "the Judge" and "the Just." Though Muslims believe that belief in God is an essential aspect of humanity, they also believe that no one can be forced to believe and that belief remains an individual choice. How God will judge such people is entirely up to Him, but He will do so in a way that is absolutely just. Muslim scholars contend that people who live morally but do not believe in God for reasons beyond their control (for instance, because they have no access to the messages of the prophets) will not be held accountable for their lack of belief. Diet Because the Qur'an forbids the practice, a dietary restriction also followed by observant Jews. Because the Qur'an forbids the practice. The Qur'an states that while alcohol has some benefits, its harm outweighs its benefits. This prohibition is also based upon the religious imperative that one should not introduce anything in one's life that is harmful to one's health or which can impair one's judgement, to prevent harm to oneself as well as to others. This prohibition is similar to Buddhist teachings which discourage intoxicants. Halal is an Arabic word meaning lawful or permitted. The opposite of halal is haram, which means unlawful or prohibited. While the term is used in relation to many aspects of life, when specifically used in relationship to food, halal refers to any food product that is not prohibited. In reference to meat products, halal means that the animal was slaughtered according to Islamic guidelines, which include reciting God's name over the animal before slaughter and draining all the blood from the animal. This practice is similar to the guidelines set by Jewish law that classify meat prepared in this manner as kosher It is common to find halal butcher shops or restaurants in most major cities in the U.S. Divorce While divorce is allowed and the Qur'an describes the different steps to be taken in a divorce, there is a Hadith (prophetic saying) describing divorce as "the most hated lawful thing," because it breaks up the family. The Qur'an also urges couples considering divorce to first make use of counseling and mediation. However, if these attempts fail, divorce as a last option is allowed and may, in some situations, be the best outcome. While the Qur'an describes situations where women can initiate divorce, the ease with which she can do so is often informed by interpretations or practices of Islam that vary widely from country to country. In some Muslim-majority countries, a woman can get a divorce relatively easily while in other countries it is much more difficult. Economics Muslim economists view money as something to be earned, which is one of the many reasons that both gambling and most forms of loaning with interest are prohibited. While there are different types of interest and not all types are viewed as being the same, many Muslim scholars regard interest as generally prohibited because it penalizes the poor for their lack of money and rewards the rich for their abundance of money, making the rich richer and the poor poorer. On the other hand, investment in business is highly encouraged because it involves some risk to the investor, which makes profit from investment a fair return. Investment also promotes the circulation of wealth and the growth of new businesses. Applying this principle in the modern world is a major challenge, yet today there are over five hundred financial institutions offering Islamic finance in over eighty different countries. These institutions generate income through shareholding, leasing, lease purchasing, and rent sharing. Interest-free banking is an experiment in Islamic modernization. The fact that Islamic banks are now worth a trillion dollars attests to their modern viability. In fact, many western economists maintain that interest-free economies can be extremely beneficial. An example of this is the growing popularity of interest-free financing in auto sales in the U.S. today as a means of attracting less affluent customers. Additionally, many economists have noted that during the financial crisis a few years ago Islamic investments and banks were largely unaffected, since they did not deal with interest-based financing such as mortgages or risky speculation. Free Will This is a topic of debate in all religions. Muslims believe that humans have free will to commit good or evil, but that God's knowledge and power encompasses all that happens in this life. That means that we will be held accountable for our actions, since God, while knowing what the outcome will be, allows people to act on their own free will to choose good or evil. General Questions About Islam Islam is the name of a religion, as Christianity and Judaism are names of religions. The Arabic word "Islam" is based on the root "slm," which means peace or surrender to God. Combining both translations results in the combined meaning "the state of peace through following God's guidance." Islamic is an adjective that modifies a non-human noun, as for example, "Islamic art," "Islamic architecture," "Islamic beliefs," etc. This term should not be used to refer to a person. A follower of Islam is called a Muslim, or "one who is in a state of peace by following God's guidance." While the term Arab has been used in the past to refer to members of a Semitic ethnic group from the Arabian Peninsula, today the word "Arab" refers to people from Arabic-speaking countries, most of which are in the Middle East and North Africa. The term Arabian was historically used to describe an inhabitant of the Arabian Peninsula. Today "Arabian" is used as an adjective to describe a non-human noun (e.g., Arabian coffee); it should not be used to refer to people. The following questions about basic Muslim beliefs (15 through 18) are answered in accord with the scholars mentioned above, reflecting majority Sunni views. Islam's primary message, as understood by the overwhelming majority of Muslims, is the continuation of the Abrahamic monotheistic tradition's belief in one God. The three major dimensions of Islam include beliefs, ritual practices, and the effort to improve one's character and actions. There are six major beliefs in Islam and five central practices that are referred to as the Five Pillars. The last dimension of Islam focuses on the cultivation of excellent moral character to better oneself and the world around oneself. It teaches a set of values that promote life, liberty, equality and justice. Some of these values include: Respect for the earth and all creatures Care and compassion for those less fortunate The importance of seeking knowledge Honesty and truthfulness in word and deed Striving continuously to improve oneself and the world The six major beliefs in Islam, as understood by the majority of Sunni Muslims, are: belief in God; belief in angels; belief in God's prophets/messengers; belief in God's revelations in the form of holy scriptures given to the messengers; belief in an afterlife that follows the Day of Judgment on which people will be held accountable for their actions and compensated accordingly in the afterlife; and belief in God's divine will and His knowledge of what happens in the world. Muslims practice their faith in many different ways, but the major practices for both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims are known as the Five Pillars, which include: the profession of faith, namely that there is only one God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God; the five daily prayers; required annual donation to charity in the amount of 2.5% of one's excess wealth; fasting during daylight hours in the month of Ramadan; and making a pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime, if one is mentally, physically, and financially able to do so. The primary sources of knowledge about Islam are the Qur'an, which adherent Muslims believe is the divinely revealed word of God, and the Sunnah, which refers to the example or precedent of the Prophet Muhammad (i.e., what he said, did, approved, disapproved, caused, ordered, or allowed to happen). Much of what is known about the Sunnah is from the collection of sayings or reports known as Hadith, or prophetic tradition. The Hadith describe actions of the Prophet Muhammad or actions that his companions attributed to his teachings. Hadith also elaborate on and provide context to the Qur'an. Though both Sunnis and Shi'as revere and respect the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, many Shi'a's consider the rulings of the twelve Imams a primary source having a status similar to that of the aforementioned sources. Other sources may exist for different Muslim sects. In addition to these primary sources, Muslims have also traditionally relied on the following additional sources: scholarly consensus: that is, the agreement of knowledgeable scholars upon a particular issue; and analogical reasoning: that is, the application of principles or laws derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah to similar situations not explicitly addressed by them. The lived experience of Islam, which naturally varies widely not only in different cultures but also between different individuals, also impacts and determines a Muslim's understanding and practice of Islam. God This is a challenging issue for all religions that proclaim a belief in a God who is at once omnipotent and beneficent. We believe that God tries people in different ways, through both hardship and ease. While the cause of suffering is not always evident, the way that people respond to difficulty is a test of their moral fiber. Responding to hardship with patience and fortitude is a virtue for which we believe a great reward is promised in this life and the afterlife. Additionally, there may be a silver lining behind every difficulty. For instance, major disasters often bring out the best in people, inspiring them to perform remarkable acts as they respond to their own or another's hardship with compassion and courage and come to the aid of those in need. Muslims also take comfort in their belief that life doesn't end after death. We believe that God's love for humanity is indeed central to our faith. The Qur'an mentions God's compassion and mercy 192 times, as opposed to God's wrath, which is mentioned only 17 times. Two of God's main attributes are the "Compassionate" and the "Merciful." Both of these names denote God's love and care for all creation. These are the two most often mentioned names of God, since all but one of the 114 chapters in the Qur'an begin with "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful." The Qur'an cites 99 different names or attributes of God, many of which also emphasize these characteristics, including "the Loving," "the Giving," "the Forgiving," and "the Kind." Hijab The Oxford Dictionary defines modesty as "behavior, manner, or appearance intended to avoid impropriety or indecency." What constitutes modesty is understood differently by Muslims in different cultures, as well as by individual Muslims, and can include the type of dress as well as the level of interaction with the opposite gender. For some Muslims, modesty also includes humility towards God and other people. Modesty is described by the Prophet Muhammad as an important virtue. The Arabic word hijab was originally used in the Qur'an to refer to a curtain or barrier that separated the family of the Prophet Muhammad from visitors. Today the term hijab is commonly used to refer either to the modest attire worn by Muslim women which includes a head scarf or specifically to the head scarf. The Qur'an instructs both men and women to be modest, but how this is practiced varies greatly. Many Muslim women follow the normative ruling that the dress code for women in public includes covering everything except their face and hands. Other Muslim women emphasize the principle of modesty, which takes on different forms as previously described. According to a 2013 Pew poll, majorities of Muslims in diverse countries believe that women should be free to choose whether or not to wear hijab. Women who cover their faces understand modesty to include covering not only their entire body and head but also their faces. Therefore, when in public, they wear a burqa (a loose garment which covers the body and face) or niqab (a covering for the face that leaves the eyes exposed). Both sexes are required to dress modestly. For men, modest dress has traditionally required that, as a minimum, the area between the navel and the knees must be covered. For women, modest dress has traditionally included covering everything except the face and hands. In practice, while many Muslim women choose to wear hijab, many others do not, as it remains an individual choice that should not be coerced by anyone. Nevertheless, it remains the normative understanding of Muslim scholarship that men and women should wear loose fitting, non-transparent clothing that covers most of the body. The traditional clothing worn by Muslim men in such places as South Asia, where they wear a loose shirt and pants (shalvar-khamees), or in some Arab countries, where men wear what looks like a long dress (jalaba) and a headscarf (kuffiyah), differs little in the extent of covering from the traditional dress of Muslim women. While it is not as common to see this type of male dress in America, many Muslim men grow a beard and wear a head covering that resembles a skull cap, as do adherents of some other religious traditions. Islam And Modernity The question of modernity and faith, including Islam, depends on what is meant by the term modernity. If by modernity one means the use of science, reasoning, and invention to improve our lives, all of these are in line with the Islamic philosophy that led to the flowering of scientific exploration and technological innovation at the height of Islamic civilization in the Middle Ages, commonly known as the Golden Age of Islam. The mere fact that Muslims are living and practicing Islam 1400 years after its founding in the modern, post-Enlightenment world in Western societies demonstrates that Islam is naturally compatible with the modern world. In fact, millions of Muslims are involved, often in leading positions, in the fields of science, mathematics, medicine, engineering and other scientific fields. However, if my modernity one means acceptance of the various values that underpin our modern lifestyles and worldview, the answer is more nuanced and complicated. Islam, like other religions, would not be compatible with a modernity which is opposed to the centrality of God, morality, and religion or which is based upon a worldview which regards material realities as the ultimate truth and goal. Modernity void of morality has brought us the two deadliest wars in history, the Holocaust, and the atomic bomb. Uncontrolled capitalism and globalization have not only stripped the earth of irreplaceable resources and species but have also created huge economic disparities between the masses and the ultra-rich both among and within nations. For these and other reasons, many Muslims, like members of other religious and other groups, are increasingly concerned about the devastating effects that modernity and its accompanying technological advances, when influenced only by factors relating to economic profit and short-term gain, have had upon our environment and the world, which is now facing a threat to our very existence due to climate change. The concept of democracy is not universally agreed upon by all political scientists. Many take it to include some form of elected political representation, the rule of law, and protection of human rights of all citizens. These concepts, and especially the latter two, are central to Islamic teachings. As for the method by which political leaders are chosen, Islam advocates a system of mutual consultation that can include popular elections as a means to choose both local and national leaders. Indeed, many Muslim-majority countries exercise this form of democracy, including Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, and Bangladesh, amongst others. In fact, Pew polls in 2011 and 2013 have shown that a substantial majority of Muslims worldwide favor democracy. As we witnessed during the 2011 Arab Spring and beyond, people throughout the Arab world in countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria have risked their lives, and in some places are still risking them, in their struggle for freedom and democratic change in their countries. The phrase "Islamic State" is a new concept created in the twentieth century by some modern Islamic thinkers. With the advent of the nation-state, these Muslim thinkers, highly influenced by the European separatist movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conceptualized an "Islamic" version of the nation-state, powered by an "Islamic" ideology in which the political leaders advocate for a central role for Islam in governance and rule. In some Muslim countries, these ideologues formed "Islamic" political parties that adopted "Islamic" positions and solutions to various problems as a platform. Though these Islamic political parties participated in some instances in the democratic political process of their respective countries, their overall outlook of governance is closer to a theocracy, where the political leaders also function as religious leaders. This is in stark contrast to the early caliphates of Islam where political leaders left religious proclamations and determination of doctrine to the scholarly class, although these scholars often functioned as court judges and advisors to the ruling elite. In any case, the concept of "Islamic State" or "Caliphate" as envisioned by terrorist groups such as ISIS and the Taliban has virtually nothing in common with the political structure of the early caliphates, as they ignore authentic Muslim scholarship and even anathematize many of its scholars and mark them for assassination. (Though not widely reported by the press, this happened routinely under ISIS leadership in Iraq.) Conversely, there are several Muslim-majority countries today that claim Islamic teachings or Sharia as the basis of their constitutions or laws. What this means in practice is usually more ceremonial than practical, as these same countries often have Western legal systems in most aspects of their national and state laws, except in family matters related to marriage, divorce, and child custody. These family laws apply only to Muslim citizens, whereas non-Muslim citizens would be subject to their own religion's laws, if any, or the civil code. Additionally, many of these countries that claim to be Islamic states have a governing system which is not aligned with Islamic principles and are often oppressive both to their citizens and to other nations. Islam guarantees the basic individual rights of freedom of thought, expression, right to own property, and general freedom to conduct oneself according to one's individual will. However, as in any other society or civilization, individual rights are not absolute but are understood in reference to other individuals' rights and the public interest in general. In a Muslim society founded upon Islamic principles, the relationship between individual and community rights is based upon an understanding of the greater objective of producing and maintaining flourishing societies on all levels, not just the material, but also the spiritual and emotional. This includes the preservation of the sacred, whether in the form of religious spaces, individual religious practice, or religious tenets. Islamic teachings aim to root individuals in communities that foster their ability to rise to their full human potential. While in practice most Muslim societies have not often reached this ideal, the attempt to do so is considered one of the core teachings and obligations of Islam, despite humanity's innate shortcomings. A 2013 Pew poll showed a substantial majority of Muslims worldwide in favor of democracy and freedom of religion. While the poll did not ask questions specifically about freedom of expression, it is likely, in view of their answers to the aforementioned questions, that a substantial majority would favor these rights as well. Islamic History This process varied depending on the location and historical period. Islam in its early years unified the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula, and this new unity led to conflict with the nearest major powers, the Byzantine and Persian empires. The result was a major spread of Muslim rule and the establishment of a Muslim empire; but Muslim rulers in this empire did not force, and often did not even encourage, conversion to Islam. Conversion to Islam, even in areas under the control of Muslims, was a gradual process that took place over many centuries and was fostered through interaction, intermarriage, trade, and efforts by Sufis (spiritual seekers). Professor Ira Lapidus in his book, A History of Islamic Societies writes: "The question of why people convert to Islam has always generated intense feeling. Earlier generations of European scholars believed that conversions to Islam were made at the point of the sword and that conquered peoples were given the choice of conversion or death. It is now apparent that conversion by force, while not unknown in Muslim countries, was, in fact, rare. Muslim conquerors ordinarily wished to dominate rather than convert, and most conversions to Islam were voluntary." (p. 198) In areas like Indonesia (now the largest Muslim-majority country) and other parts of Southeast Asia, Islam spread mostly through traveling merchants and Sufis. In sub-Saharan Africa (mostly West Africa, but also parts of Ethiopia), Islam spread mostly through trade and commercial relations. Rulers would sometimes adopt Islam while much of the population continued to practice their traditional religions. In many areas currently or formerly ruled by Muslims, large segments of the population have maintained their ancestral religions. For example, Christians are a significant minority in largely Muslim Lebanon, and Hinduism remained a majority faith through centuries of Muslim rule in South Asia. This is not to say that Muslims have never violated the principle stated in the Qur'an that "there is no compulsion in religion." Some forced conversions occurred, for example, in the Horn of Africa during the 17th-century wars between Christian Ethiopians and Muslim Somalis, as they did in other times and places. Today we believe that forced conversions or denying the religious rights of people of other faiths are as much a violation of Islamic principles as the forced conversion of the Germanic tribes under Charlemagne or the forced conversions of Native Americans or enslaved Africans are seen as violations of Christian principles in the eyes of most modern Christians. Jesus and Mary Muslims overwhelmingly revere Jesus and believe that he was born to the Virgin Mary through an act of God, without a father, just as Adam is believed to have been created by God without a father or mother. The Qur'an describes his conception and birth and his many miracles such as healings of the sick. The Qur'an also emphasizes that Jesus was a great prophet of God and a messenger who received revelation from God, but that he was, like all other prophets, only a human being. For Muslims, God, in his divine transcendence, is incomparable to His creation in every aspect, and therefore He does not procreate, even metaphorically. Muslims also believe that Jesus was not crucified but instead was taken to heaven and will return to earth to live out the rest of his life, a belief commonly known as the second coming of Jesus. Most of the Qur'an depicts itself as a text addressed to Muhammad; it therefore talks less about Muhammad than it does to Muhammad about other subjects, including previous prophets such as Jesus. Muslims generally believe that she is the Virgin Mother of the Prophet Jesus who conceived him miraculously without a father. A chapter in the Qur'an named after her (Maryam in Arabic) emphasizes her piety and righteousness and her status as an exemplar for all people. The Qur'an also describes her as the greatest of all women: "God chose and preferred her above all the women of the worlds." (Qur'an, 3:42) While Muslims greatly revere Jesus, Christmas is generally considered a Christian holiday and not a part of Muslim cultures except where there are Christian minorities. There is even debate among Muslims over the celebration of Muhammad's birthday. However, some Muslims celebrate Christmas as part of an American cultural observance similar to Thanksgiving or Independence Day. Ka'bah The Ka'bah is the cube-shaped building covered with a black cloth in Mecca that is believed by Muslims to have been the first house of worship to God. Muslims throughout the world face towards the Ka'bah when they perform each of their daily prayers. Muslims believe that Adam built the original Ka'bah and that the prophets Abraham and his son Ishmael rebuilt and consecrated it as the first house of worship to God. Marriage/Dating Our understanding from the Qur'an and Hadith (prophetic sayings) is that people should avoid situations, relationships, or actions that might lead to a violation of the principle that couples should abstain from physical or sexual intimacy until after marriage. Traditionally, Muslim men are allowed to marry women who are from the "People of the Book," generally defined as Christians and Jews. In this case, a Muslim husband must guarantee the right of his Christian or Jewish wife to worship God according to her religious beliefs. The reverse, i.e., a Muslim woman marrying a man outside her religion, has traditionally not been allowed on the grounds that her husband might not guarantee her the right to practice her religion, since he may not to have the same obligation to respect her religion that a Muslim has towards his Christian or Jewish wife. Therefore, for the protection of her freedom of religion, a Muslim woman has traditionally been required to marry a man who will give her the right to practice her faith—that is, a Muslim. Today, especially in areas where Muslims live as minorities, there is growing diversity in both theory and practice on this issue. Marriage ceremonies among Muslims, like marriage ceremonies everywhere, vary widely in different locales and cultures. However, the actual Islamic marriage ceremony generally includes the bride and groom, the bride's father or guardian, an officiator, and two witnesses. The religious ceremony includes the marriage proposal and acceptance and the presenting of a gift called mahr by the groom to the bride. Wedding celebrations after the religious ceremony vary widely from culture to culture, but generally involve food, special clothing, and some type of celebration. In some societies, there may be several days of celebration before or after the wedding. This depends on what one means by "arranged marriage" and on the culture one is describing. If by "arranged marriage" one means simply that a couple first meets through referrals by family or friends ("matchmaking") and then is free to choose to marry or not, this is still a common practice among Muslims, although increasingly young Muslims, like young people of any other religion, are meeting in school, at work, or online. If, however, "arranged marriage" refers to a situation in which a person (this impacts both men and women, but is generally associated only with women) is forced into a marriage against his or her will, then many contemporary Muslims cite prophetic sayings that uphold a woman's right to accept or reject a marriage proposal. Monogamy is the ideal in marriage, as reflected in God's creation of life in pairs of male and female, according to the account given in various Qur'anic verses. The vast majority of Muslims today are monogamous. While it is permitted for Muslim men to marry more than one wife, it is with the condition that he treat his wives equally, a standard that even the Qur'an warns is difficult to achieve, clearly implying a preference for monogamy. The Qur'an modified but allowed the continuation of the existing practice of polygamy 1400 years ago in the context of war, when caring for orphans was a major concern. Polygamy was not peculiar to the Arabian Peninsula; it was widespread in many cultures, including that of ancient Israel as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, where many of the Patriarchs are described as having multiple wives and Israelite kings had harems numbering in the hundreds. Today polygamy is mainly practiced in the Gulf States and Africa where it is more culturally acceptable than in other Muslim societies. Women are not permitted to marry more than one man (polyandry). Since polygamy was permitted in the context of war, when caring for orphans was a major concern, this purpose would not be served by polyandry. Muhammad Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet on the basis of statements in Islamic scripture, including the following Qur'anic verse: "Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of God, and the Seal of the Prophets and God has full knowledge of all things." (Qur'an, 33:40) There are also various Hadith (prophetic sayings) which designate Muhammad as "the Seal of the Prophets." Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad was preceded by a long succession of prophets before him that include Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, and Jesus. Muslims believe that all the prophets were sent by God and that some of them foretold the coming of the Prophet Muhammad. The general consensus among scholars is that physical representations of the Prophet Muhammad are discouraged on the grounds that, since the prophets are exemplars, they should not be presented in a manner that either is disrespectful or might lead to idolatry. However, one can find representations of Muhammad and other prophets in different periods of Islamic history, mainly in the form of manuscript illustrations known as Persian miniatures, in which Muhammad's face is often obscured by light. This question refers to protests, sometimes erupting into lethal violence, as in the 2015 Paris attacks in response to cartoons published in a French satirical weekly and in the 2012 Benghazi attack against two American government facilities in Benghazi, Libya, purportedly in response to the film The Innocence of Muslims which was derogatory to the Prophet Muhammad. Muslim leaders and organizations worldwide, even in countries that restrict the publication of such offensive material, vigorously condemned these instances of violence. The great majority of Muslim Americans and many Muslims elsewhere affirm the right to freedom of expression. In addition, it is important to stress that these violent reactions have generally been fueled by political issues that compounded anger at the offensive images. Investigations into the Benghazi attack found that it was in fact long planned by militants, while the Paris attacks were the work of militants who may have been trying to recruit French Muslims to al-Qaeda by creating an incident that would isolate them from other French people. In both cases, the offensive representations served as a pretext. At the same time, many Muslims find the lack of respect in many secular societies for sacred symbols, regardless of the religion involved, to be offensive. The Prophet Muhammad respected other religions and their sacred symbols, and the Qur'an prohibits reviling the followers of other religions and that which they hold sacred. Muhammad's outlook and actions were initially similar to those of Jesus if one compares Muhammad's strategy during the first part of his mission in Mecca when he, like Jesus, sought change as a non-violent reformer. However, their tactics diverged due to a change in circumstances once Muhammad and his followers were expelled from Mecca and migrated to Medina. While Jesus and his community of believers remained politically powerless throughout his mission, Muhammad in Medina, as the head of a new political community, was required to serve as a political and even military leader as he finally fought back against the Meccans after years of persecution. As the head of the new community in Medina, he also had to deal with internal conspiracies and rebellions in addition to external threats. This question, as posed, also assumes that there is only one way of looking at these figures, which is misleading. For instance, while Jesus is commonly viewed today as a "non-violent reformer," this has not always been the case. In his book Jesus through the Centuries, church historian Jaroslav Pelikan depicts and analyzes the varied views of Jesus at different times and in different cultures and devotes a whole chapter to Jesus as both "Prince of Peace" and instigator of divine warfare—sometimes at one and the same time. The representations of Muhammad are likewise varied. In her book The Lives of Muhammad, Kecia Ali writes, "Far from being uniform or non-changing, both non-Muslim and Muslim views of Muhammad have been diverse, multifaceted, and subject to dramatic changes over the centuries." However, Muslims uniformly love and respect both men not only as prophets and messengers, descended from noble families, but also as exemplars of the most perfect character. Prophet Jesus is described in the Qur'an as one who is "held in honor in this world and the Hereafter and of those nearest to God." Prophet Muhammad was known even before his prophethood as "al-Ameen," "the Trustworthy," and his praiseworthy characteristics and actions are the topic of books (known as Shamail), poems, and songs through the centuries. Polygamy was common in seventh-century Arabia, as it has been in many other cultures, especially for a political leader; for instance, the patriarchs in the Hebrew Bible are described as having multiple wives, and the kings of Israel are depicted as having harems numbering in some cases into the hundreds. According to Muslim historians, the Prophet Muhammad's marriages were contracted to assist needy widows and divorcees and to solidify the nascent community of Muslims by forging alliances among the tribes in and around Medina. In light of the time and place, there was nothing unique or unusual about Muhammad marrying several women. It is also noteworthy that he married a woman fifteen years his senior during his young adulthood and remained in a monogamous relationship with her for twenty-five years until her death when he was nearly fifty years old. The actual age of Aisha at the time of her marriage to Muhammad is disputed, but the marriage could not have been consummated until she reached puberty. In many cultures, women are or were married years before a marriage is consummated. The custom of early betrothal and marriage continued until the late 19th and early 20th century in much of the world, including Europe and North America, where there are still many states that allow for underage marriage. Muslim Americans Neither "Muslims" nor "America" are monolithic entities, nor is there is any conflict in being both. This question is like asking whether there is a conflict between being a Christian and an American. One is a religious identity, while the other is a national identity. Both impact one's life, but they play different roles in shaping one's identity. America has traditionally been a land of immigrants from diverse cultures, religions, and backgrounds. The challenge for new immigrants has been to maintain their identity and culture while living in a multicultural, multi-religious society, a challenge that various groups have struggled with, including some Muslim immigrants, particularly post-9/11. For African Americans, many of whom became Muslim because of the presence of Muslims among their ancestors who had been enslaved and shipped to America, the challenge remains one of finding both a religious and national identity in a land that their ancestors came to involuntarily under inhumane circumstances. Muslim Americans share many of the core values of other Americans, such as respect for education, hard work, family, democracy, individual rights, and liberty. Which Muslims and what aspects of America are we talking about? Neither Muslims nor the United States are monolithic entities. "Hate" is also a very strong word. According to polls, Muslims around the world generally admire America for its technology, liberty, education, and accomplishments. During the Arab Spring, protesters in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya used American social media to advocate many American ideals, such as democracy. If some Muslims disagree with specific aspects of foreign or domestic policies, this cannot reasonably be described as "hatred" of America as a whole. There is no more reason to mistrust or fear a Muslim or a person from the Middle East than a person of any other religion or background. One should not relate to any group of people on the basis of stereotypes. To dispel fear based on stereotypes or misperceptions, we recommend the Know Your Neighbor: Multifaith Encounters program which provides resources and ideas for getting to know people from diverse backgrounds. While there are no exact figures on the total number of Muslims in the U.S. in general, since the U.S. Census cannot ask about religious affiliation, various polls over the last decade estimate the number to be between 3.5 and 6 million Muslims in America. Of these, around 20% are converts, the majority of whom are African-Americans. Since most Americans do not know many Muslims personally, the media is often the main source of people's information about them. This can be problematic, since in general the media tends to focus on negative events and issues and does not consider good news to be newsworthy. The media also has a fixation on sensationalism and hype since it attracts an audience. That is why the majority of news stories about Muslims are related to violence and terrorism. It is rare to see stories about the everyday lives of Muslims who are ordinary people, at work or in school, let alone positive stories about the contributions of Muslim Americans. Media Tenor, a research organization that analyzes mass media, reported that between 2007 and 2013, 80% of news coverage of Muslims on ABC and CBS and 60% of coverage on Fox News was negative, usually focusing on terrorism and violence. Additionally, when a Muslim commits an act of violence the media tends to focus on the act more than when it is committed by a non-Muslim. A study by researchers from Georgia State University and the University of Alabama found that an attack perpetrated by a person who identifies as a Muslim receives on average four-and-a-half times more media coverage than an attack perpetrated by a non-Muslim. This means that a small fringe (ISIS or other extremist groups or individuals) is seen as representing the entire Muslim community, painting all Muslims in a negative light. Media reports often mirror the government's attitude towards a particular nation or group, and at present we are a country at war with certain Arab or Muslim groups or nations. In addition, the media often misinterprets any action committed by a Muslim as a reflection of his or her religion, when the person's motivation may have more to do with politics, economics, personal background, culture, or any number of other factors that are considered when discussing negative actions by people from other groups. While it is unreasonable to expect that Muslim Americans should bear the double burden of both dealing with the prejudice against them and working to prevent it, today Muslim Americans have been engaged in various campaigns and projects to counter hate and bigotry. As was the case with previous ethnic and religious groups such as Jews, Catholics, Germans, Irish, and Japanese, this may turn out to be a prolonged struggle for civil rights; for African Americans or Latino Americans, this struggle is ongoing, and Muslim Americans join other groups in calling for an end to bigotry of any sort. The following are some of the ways that Muslim Americans and their allies are working to combat Islamophobia: Since Islamophobia is based on ignorance, education about Islam and Muslims is one of the most potent weapons against it. ING,

founded in 1993, has delivered thousands of presentations about Islam and Muslims in the San Francisco Bay area and, through its network of affiliates, nationwide. These presentations not only provide authentic and accurate information about Muslims and their faith but also give audiences an opportunity to interact with a Muslim face-to-face, often for the first time. ING’s impact studies demonstrate the effectiveness of ING’s work in dispelling stereotyping of and prejudice against Muslims. Islamophobia often leads to violations of Muslims’ civil rights. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and Muslim Advocates are the leading organizations in the country addressing this issue. Interfaith allies are key to improving Muslims’ standing in the U.S. Many people of various faiths have come out in support of Muslims, particularly when Muslims are under attack. The steps they have taken include: Organizing multi-faith vigils around mosques Publishing articles and letters in support of Muslims Holding counter-protests against Islamophobic demonstrations Encouraging congregants to visit mosques and build relationships with Muslims Welcoming Muslims into interfaith organizations and events A number of national organizations exist specifically to build solidarity between Muslims and people of other faith traditions, including Shoulder to Shoulder, Peace Catalyst, and Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom. The national Know Your Neighbor Coalition, founded at the White House in December, 2015, and Multifaith Encounters, its grassroots outreach, which is led by ING, bring Muslims and people of other faiths together to build interreligious understanding and respect. Many mosques also engage in interfaith outreach. Open houses and interfaith dinners have become popular ways of reaching out to neighbors of different faiths and have met with great response. Much is being done by both Muslims and their allies to combat Islamophobia, but more needs to be done, and help is always welcome. Muslim Extremists The Oxford dictionary defines an “extremist” as “a person who holds extreme political or religious views, especially one who advocates illegal, violent, or other extreme action.” An extremist group is defined as “a group of individuals whose values, ideals, and beliefs fall far outside of what society considers normal.” While there have been extremist groups in all religions and societies throughout history, including Islamic history, most historians trace the roots of Islamic extremism to the seventh-century group known as the Kharijites that developed around the same time as Shi’a Islam as a response to what they perceived as unjust rule. Muslim extremist groups have historically been marginalized by the mainstream and have eventually disappeared over time. Islamic extremism today is in many ways a reaction to various developments in the last two centuries. One of these was the decline and subsequent colonization of many Muslim-populated areas by European powers, which resulted in modernization and Westernization policies in many Muslim-populated countries in the 19th and early 20th centuries that viewed Islam as backwards, outdated, and a barrier to progress. In response to this new and humiliating circumstance, some Muslim groups espoused a return to the original practices of Islam as they understood them to have been practiced during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad and his immediate successors. Commonly known as revivalist or fundamentalist movements, they sought solutions to the many problems facing Muslim societies through a literal and sometimes puritanical vision of Islam. These movements have sometimes taken on political overtones or issued calls for an “Islamic state”, and in some cases have resorted to violence. This has occurred in situations where, in addition to the previously mentioned factors, various extremist groups formed in response to specific issues or causes, many of which stem from conflicts over land and independence, such as the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and Chechnya, the Indian occupation of Kashmir, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and the American occupation of Iraq. Additionally, some extremist groups formed in opposition to their own despotic governments; for example, in Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood was initially formed to resist British occupation, but then turned against Egyptian rulers when they also failed to live up to their expectations, and eventually gave rise to more extremist groups such as Islamic Jihad. What is clear from many of these groups is that their extremist version of Islam is often a motivating factor, just as the power of religiously driven zeal has been used throughout history to fuel and galvanize popular movements that arise in response to perceived ills. This is not unique to Islam or Muslims but rather spans the gamut of the human condition. Wahhabism began as an 18th-century reform movement in the Arabian Peninsula and focused on what its founder Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab perceived as the deviation of Muslims from what he considered to be “pure Islam.” Wahhabism then evolved into an extremist and reductionist interpretation of Islam that is practiced mainly in Saudi Arabia but has spread to other Muslim-populated countries through well-funded literature and educational campaigns. This ideology has not, however, won over most mainstream traditional Muslims in those countries, and today the majority of Muslims worldwide, including Muslim Americans, reject this strict and intolerant version of Islam and those who attempt to impose it upon other Muslims. Neither. Islam is a way of life, and in many ways more than the popular notion of ”religion” that is reduced to ritual practice and ceremony. Muslims contend that Islam informs all aspects of their lives, including the imperative to treat all people justly and compassionately, whether they share one’s beliefs or not, and to actively work for the betterment of individual lives and of society. Other Religions We believe that respect for freedom of religion and conscience is a basic Islamic principle, and we believe that diversity, including religious diversity, is part of God’s divine plan. Moreover, we believe that the salvation of all people, Muslims included, lies with God alone. The Qur’an refers to the followers of the previous Abrahamic holy books as “Ahl al-Kitab,” translated as “People of the Book” and generally interpreted to mean Jews and Christians. The term reflects their shared belief in revealed scriptures sent to the four previous prophets who appear in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament: Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. As it does with Muslims, the Qur’an describes some of the People of the Book as pious and righteous adherents of their religions, while criticizing others for failing to follow the commandments that were sent to them. The Qur’an also takes issue with some of the beliefs of Judaism and Christianity, such as the Christian belief in the Trinity. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the English word “infidel” means “a person who does not believe in religion or who adheres to a religion other than one’s own.” The Arabic word kafir (plural kuffar) is sometimes translated as “infidel”. A more common translation of the word is “disbeliever” or “unbeliever”. In the Qur’an, kafir usually refers to a person who not only rejects the beliefs of Islam but also takes a hostile stance toward Muslims and their religion; it is used primarily to refer to the Meccans who did not accept the adoption of a new religion by their kinsmen and persecuted and fought against the growing Muslim community. In modern Arabic, kafir is often used to mean simply “non-Muslim,” without any negative connotation. We strongly believe that people of other faiths should be treated with love and respect, affirming the Islamic principle respect for freedom of religion and conscience. According to global Pew polls, strong majorities of Muslims in nearly every country surveyed support the right of non-Muslims to practice their religion freely, a right that was historically upheld by most Muslim societies. The Qur’an contains passages critical of those who fought against the early Muslims, including some pagans, Christians, Jews, and even hypocrites within the Muslim community. These passages speak to the specific historical circumstances in which they were revealed. They are not condemnations of Jews and Christians in general, but of the behaviors of specific people—including, as noted, some Muslims. We hold that respect for freedom of religion and conscience is basic to our vision of Islam. We understand the Qur’an to explicitly forbid hatred towards, subjugation of, or forcible imposition of religion on any person or people when it states “there is no compulsion in religion” (Qur’an, 2:256) and describes religious pluralism as part of God’s plan. The existence of old churches, temples, and synagogues throughout the Muslim world in places like Egypt, Turkey, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, India, and Bosnia and the presence of minority religious populations in those areas demonstrates that this command was historically followed by most Muslim societies. While the majority of Muslims believe in the four previous holy books or scriptures mentioned in the Qur’an as original revelations to the prophets (the Scrolls as revealed to Abraham; the Torah as revealed to Moses; the Psalms as revealed to David; the Gospel as revealed to Jesus), they do not believe that they have been preserved in the original form or language in which they were first revealed. However, Muslims believe that the Qur’an affirms many of the same teachings of these previous scriptures. Muslim historians and scholars describe the history of the Qur’an and the efforts of Muslims since the early days of Islam to preserve the Qur’an in its original form. During the Prophet Muhammad’s life, scores of people memorized, recited, and wrote down the Qur’an. Shortly after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur’an was compiled and transcribed by experts who carefully verified every verse by matching it against both the written word and memorized verses. The completed transcript was then copied and distributed across the growing Islamic empire. These copies served as the basis for all copies of the Qur’an written or printed since. Today these earliest written versions of the Qur’an are identical to contemporary copies of the Qur’an. While translations of the Qur’an may vary, all copies of the Qur’an in Arabic contain nearly identical language. This standardization, coupled with the millions of people who continue to memorize the entire Qur’an, ensures the text’s authenticity. Although Buddha was not mentioned among the twenty-five prophets named in the Qur’an, some Muslim scholars suggest that, because of the high moral standards he advocated, Buddha may have been among the “unrevealed prophets” who, the Qur’an proclaims, were assigned to every nation. The same may have been true of founders or major figures in other religious traditions. Founded in 1930 by W.D. Fard, and later led by Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam is an African American socio-religious movement that combined elements of traditional Islam and other Abrahamic traditions with Black Nationalist ideas, whereas Islam is a religion that was revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century. The Nation of Islam was fundamentally concerned with empowering African Americans psychologically, politically, economically, and socially. When Elijah Muhammad died in 1975, his son W.D. Muhammad disbanded the organization and gradually moved his followers towards normative Islam. The Nation of Islam was revived within a few years by various individuals, with the organization headed by Louis Farrakhan which preserved the original teachings of Elijah Muhammad being the most prominent of these. Today, followers of his organization number in the tens of thousands, far fewer than the number of African-Americans who follow Islam. Despite his illness, Farrakhan is still leader of the organization as well as a well-known public figure with an often controversial style. In ideology the Nation of Islam differs from the beliefs of the majority of Muslims in a few ways, including its basic creed, which is at odds with normative Islam’s central creed. While there are other differences between the two, the Nation adopted many Islamic traditions, such as women’s dress, holidays, and some Islamic terms. Today the Nation of Islam is in transition with some moving towards normative Islam while others still adhere to the movement’s original teachings. Prayer Prayer among Muslims can take many forms. Three very common forms are Salat (canonical prayer), Dhikr (remembrance of God, which usually involves the repetition of God’s names or a litany), and Du’a (supplication, or asking God for a need or desire or for forgiveness). Each canonical prayer (Salat) lasts five to ten minutes, depending on the prescribed number of cycles of each of the five required daily prayers, and the number and length of Qur’anic verses recited. Other factors may also influence the length of time a Muslim prays, including the number of additional (non-obligatory) prayers one chooses to perform, and the pace at which one recites the Qur’an. Men and women in congregational canonical prayers line up in separate rows as a general matter of practice. Although the women’s rows are generally behind the men’s rows, this is not always the case. In the mosque built around the Ka’bah, men and women pray in rows in circular formation around the shrine that may be side by side or may even place women in front of men. In some mosques, women pray in balconies above the prayer hall for men, and in some American mosques women pray in a space alongside that of men. The reason usually adduced for this practice involves notions of modesty. The Muslim ritual prayer is very physical in nature, involving standing, bowing, and prostrating oneself. During congregational prayers, Muslims are supposed to stand side by side and shoulder to shoulder with those next to them. Many Muslim cultures consider it distracting or immodest to have men and women praying side by side or to have women prostrate themselves in front of men. Additionally, unlike the arrangement in a church where congregants face a sanctuary space with an altar or pulpit at the front, “the sacred space” in the mosque is the area immediately before each congregant. In this scheme, therefore, all congregants regardless of gender and physical positioning within the mosque maintain equal access to sacred space. Depending on their schedules, Muslims probably will not need to perform all five prayers while on the job since the prayers are spread throughout the day. In addition, each of the five prayers has a window of time during which each prayer can be performed. This time frame extends from about one hour to as long as four hours depending on the specific prayer and the time of year, since the times shift depending on the season and length of the day. Throughout most of the year, the prayer time for the noon prayer does not end while students are at school, so they can perform it when they return home. During the time of year when the prayer time ends while students are still in school, they can take a few minutes during recess or lunch to pray. Students can ask their teachers if they can pray in the classroom or library. In the case of Muslim firefighters, if they are in the midst of fighting a fire and are unable to take a break to pray, they will perform the missed prayer as soon as they are able to, along with the next prayer. Prophets That depends on which prophet we are talking about. In many cases, the stories of the prophets in the Qur’an are similar to the stories in the Bible. Some examples include: the story of Noah and his ark; the story of Abraham and Sarah and the birth of their son Isaac, who is also considered a prophet in the Qur’an; the story of Jacob and his twelve sons, including Joseph, who is also considered a prophet in the Qur’an; and the most oft-mentioned prophet in the Qur’an, Moses, and the story of his mission in Egypt to rescue his people. Some of the major differences between the biblical account of some of these prophets and the Qur’an stem from the fact that the Qur’an holds that all prophets were immune from major sins. The stories of the Prophet Jesus are close to the Bible in their descriptions of his virginal birth and miracles but differ sharply in their account of the divinity of Jesus and his crucifixion; the Qur’an states that Jesus was only a man, not divine, and that before the crucifixion Jesus was taken up to heaven and replaced by a person who looked like him. While most Muslim theologians historically consider all the prophets to have been men, some hold the view that there were female prophets, especially in view of the fact that only two dozen of the 124,000* prophets are identified in the Qur’an. Four of the women regarded by these scholars as prophets are Eve, the first female created by God; the mother of Moses, who is not named in the Qur’an; Asiyah, the wife of Pharaoh who in the Qur’an is the one who adopts Moses as her son, as opposed to the daughter of Pharaoh who does so in the Bible; and Mary, the mother of Jesus, because they all received direct divine revelation. In either case, Muslims revere them as among the many righteous and saintly women mentioned in the Qur’an. *According to one hadith, there were 124,000 prophets; in other hadith, there were 224,000 prophets. Muslims believe every group of people was sent a prophet to convey the message of God. Qur’an Since only 15% of all Muslims are Arabs, the Qur’an has been translated into and is read in many other languages, with multiple English translations. However, because Muslims consider the original Arabic text to be the literal word of God, during ritual prayers, the Qur’an is recited in its original Arabic language (just as some Catholic churches still perform mass in Latin or synagogues perform part of their prayer in Hebrew). In order to fully comprehend the Qur’an for instruction and spiritual enrichment, non-Arab Muslims also read the translation in their native language. Satan Satan (Shaytan in Arabic) is believed to be a third type of creation, in addition to humans and angels, known as a “jinn.” Humans are said to have been made from clay, angels from light, and jinn from fire. While the Qur’an teaches that some jinn are good and submit to God, it states that others, such as Iblis or Shaytan (Satan), try to tempt people to do evil, similar to the belief about Satan in traditional Christian theology. Science And Nature There are numerous verses in the Qur’an that reference scientific phenomena, including discussions of astronomy, geography, biology, and other aspects of nature and the universe. The Qur’an includes, for instance, a detailed description of the different stages that the embryo goes through in the womb, as well as descriptions of the creation of the earth and of the interaction between fresh and salt water. These repeated Qur’anic references to nature and injunctions to seek knowledge helped create a fertile environment for science during the “Golden Age of Islam” in the Middle Ages, when Muslims were at the forefront of such fields as mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, botany, zoology, and medicine. Unfortunately, the economic and political decline of the Muslim world in later centuries brought about a decline in scientific and technological endeavor until recent decades. Today, many Muslim Americans and Muslims worldwide work in science-based professions such as medicine, dentistry, and various fields of engineering, and many are leaders in their fields. In the United States, two of the most popular professions of Muslims are medicine and engineering. The claim of the theory of evolution that human beings and other animals share a common ancestor is incompatible with normative Islam. While the existence of a fossil record is not disputed, the conclusions made by proponents of the theory of evolution cannot be conclusively proven. For Muslims, similarity in the genetic code among creatures is a testament to God’s grace and omnipotence, rather than a means by which to render the uniqueness of human creation meaningless. There are hundreds of verses throughout the Qur’an that describe the wonders of creation and nature and call upon humankind to reflect on them as signs of God. Humans are described as stewards over this earth (as is the case in Jewish and Christian scripture), entrusted with its oversight. There are also numerous Qur’anic and prophetic injunctions to avoid waste, excess, and harm to other forms of creation. A prophetic saying forbids wasting water, even when washing in a river. Living a balanced, moderate lifestyle is an important Islamic principle advocated by most Muslim scholars which applies to all aspects of life, including care of the earth and all of creation. Sharia Please visit this page for a comprehensive list of answers on Sharia. Sunni And Shi‘i Division The majority of both Sunnis and Shi‘ah share the core beliefs of Islam—the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad—and adhere to the Five Pillars. Historically, the difference originated from the question of succession after the death of the Prophet Muhammad and is related to differing views about appropriate leadership for the Muslim community. While both the majority of Sunnis and Shi‘ah assign special status to and revere the descendants and family of the Prophet Muhammad, Shi‘ah believe that succession to the spiritual and political rule of the Muslim community lies only with the family and certain descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Specifically, Shi‘ah believe that God chose Muhammad’s cousin Ali, who was married to his daughter Fatima, to be the Prophet Muhammad’s successor, and that Muhammad indicated this before his death. In support of their position Shi‘ah reference a sermon by the Prophet Muhammad shortly before his death at a place called Ghadir Khumm, in which he stated “to whomsoever I am mawla, Ali is also their mawla.” The point of contention is the meaning of the word mawla; the Sunni interpretation of mawla here is “friend,” whereas the Shi‘i interpretation is “master,” which includes political leadership. Shi‘ah also view Ali as the first in a line of Imams, or preeminent religious leaders, whom they regard as the spiritual and political successors to Muhammad. In contrast, Sunnis believe that that the Muslim community was free to choose the most qualified person as ruler and that Muhammad did not appoint any particular person as his political successor, although he lauded his kinsmen, descendants, and companions as the spiritual heirs of his teachings. This difference in interpretation affected not only political leadership but also the development of Islamic theology, as each group had different methods of exegetical approach to the Qur’an and different criteria for authenticating Hadith. The main differences between them today are their sources of knowledge and religious leadership. In addition to the Qur’an and Hadith, the Shi‘ah rely on the rulings of their Imams, resulting in variations in beliefs and practices. The Sunni and Shi‘i schism began as a dispute over political succession and eventually evolved into a theological one as well, not unlike the schism of 1054 between the Eastern and Western Churches. Shi‘ah maintain that the right of succession for the leadership of the nascent Muslim community after the death of the Prophet Muhammad went to Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, while Sunnis believed that the choice of Abu Bakr, father-in-law and close confidant of Muhammad, and of the subsequent three caliphs or rulers was valid. When Ali was finally chosen as the fourth caliph or ruler, his rule was short-lived, and after his death his rival Mu‘awiyyah quickly asserted his power and established Umayyad rule. Many practices of the Umayyad dynasty, which had adopted a pattern of rule and succession that was starkly at odds with that of the Prophet Muhammad and the early caliphs, disturbed many Muslims, which led to a number of revolts by various groups. One of these revolts was led by Husayn, Ali’s son and the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. When Husayn, who is revered by both Shi‘ah and Sunnis alike, was brutally killed along with many of his family members by the Umayyads at Karbala in Iraq, this crystallized the belief among supporters of Ali (Alids) that governance should have remained with the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Subsequent attempts to overthrow the Umayyads by another son of Ali and by others such as Abd ‘Allah ibn al-Zubayr, a grandson of the first caliph Abu Bakr, were unsuccessful until the Abbasid revolution in 750. While the Alids had supported the Abbasids, another branch of the Prophet’s family, believing that they would turn over rule to the Alid line, they were soon disappointed when the Abbasids claimed rule for themselves. In response, the Alids fomented a number of small and unsuccessful rebellions. Under increasing repression by the Abbasids, their political movement took on a more theological character. The term Shi‘at Ali or “the faction of Ali” at some point became merely Shi‘ah, while the term Sunni came to include those who agreed upon the validity of the rule of all of the first four caliphs. While today there are theological differences between these two major Islamic sects, they are in agreement on the cardinal points of faith and practice. Much of the conflict between Sunnis and Shi‘ah is more political than religious. For instance, in Iraq before the Second Gulf War, Sunnis dominated the government. After the war, rule was shifted to Shi‘ah, and this has produced tensions that have often been exploited by extremists on both sides. In three Arab Spring countries (Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain), the sectarian divide has also been among the many factors playing a role in the conflicts, but the conflicts began for the same political and social reasons that they erupted in other Arab Spring nations. In Syria, the current ruler Bashar Assad and his father Hafez Assad belong to a minority Shi‘i sect that has ruled for decades over a majority Sunni population. Assad’s allies are Shi‘ah—Iran and Hizbollah—who want to keep the status quo, while Saudi Arabia and Turkey—Sunnis—have supported the opposition. So while the two sides appear to be divided along sectarian lines, the conflict there is more a fight between an oppressive dictator and his political opponents than a specifically religious conflict. In Yemen, the Shi‘i-Sunni divide has also played a role, with Saudi Arabia and Iran also supporting opposing sides in the ongoing war there. In Bahrain, the Shi‘i minority has protested the Sunni government, often suffering repression as a result. Shi‘i-Sunni conflict in Pakistan has its roots in the ruling party’s political exploitation of sectarianism to win the favor of Sunni religious authorities at the expense of the Shi‘i minority who continue to suffer from persecution. While these conflicts are of concern to Muslim Americans who have family in the countries involved, the sectarian conflict has rarely impacted the larger Muslim American community, in part because Sunni and Shi‘i leaders in this country have made concerted efforts to prevent discord and demonstrate unity. Taliban The backdrop for the rise of the Taliban is multifaceted, and includes decades of war with the Soviet Union, Afghan governments, and the United States, as well as interventions by other regional and global powers. The Taliban arose in the 1990’s following the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989. Their withdrawal came after a decade of war following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 in support of the Afghan communist government. The anti-communist Muslim resistance groups who first opposed the communist government, and then the Soviets who were propping it up, became known during the Afghan War as mujahideen, a derivative of the term jihad, which means a struggle against oppression or injustice. Following the Soviet withdrawal, the various factions of the mujahidden began to fight amongst themselves. One of the groups to emerge during the Afghan Civil War was the Taliban, most of whom are members of the Pathan ethnic group, who reside in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere. The Taliban, which means “students” in Pashto, derives its name from the fact that many of its members had been students in conservative religious schools and refugee camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan. After coming to power in Afghanistan as a militia in the mid-90s, they were able to take control of much of the country from 1996 to 2001. Following the September 11th, 2001 attacks, the United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in October of 2001 and ousted the Taliban. Almost twenty years later, following the withdrawal of the last American troops in August of 2021, the Taliban ousted the American-backed Afghan government and once again took control of the country. As is evident from actions of the Taliban, particularly when they governed Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001, their interpretation of Sharia is far more rigid and narrow than that of most Muslims. Their understanding of Sharia has been informed by external and internal influences that have come into play during decades of war, including an inherited culture that is extremely patriarchal. This cultural context impacts their interpretation of Sharia in many areas, in particular their views on women’s roles and rights. They have been widely criticized by other Muslims for their treatment of women, specifically for their ban on women’s education and work, as well as their strict dress requirements for both genders and their harsh punishments for violations of their laws. They have also interpreted Sharia to prohibit a wide variety of activities, including sports for women, kite flying, beard trimming, recreation, entertainment, and other matters where they have a much more rigid and extreme interpretation than most Muslims. Additionally, some members of the Taliban have engaged in actions viewed by the great majority of Muslims as prohibited by Islamic teachings, such as committing acts of violence against civilians. In contrast, most observant Muslims understand the Sharia as a moral guide in their daily lives, which helps them to be better human beings in their interactions with others, including as neighbors, spouses, parents, and children. They view Sharia as informing personal actions such as praying, fasting, and marriage, but not the draconian system enforced by the Taliban. Additionally, there is great diversity of interpretation and practice among Muslims globally and there is not one unified understanding or practice of Sharia or of Islam. For example, while some Muslim women wear the hijab or headscarf, others chose not to; it is a personal religious choice, not a government mandate for most Muslim women. Lastly, only a few Muslim-majority countries have a strict understanding and application of punishments, which the Taliban has centered in their government. In contrast, most Muslims emphasize the qualities of compassion and justice. During the period when the Taliban governed Afghanistan in the 1990s, they imposed extreme and harsh restrictions on women that contrast with the way that Muslim women are treated in most Muslim-majority countries. These included the mandatory wearing of burqas, which cover women entirely including their face and hands, and limiting their access to health care, education, and holding jobs, including in government positions. They also enforced harsh punishments against women, including whipping, stoning, and other punishments for not adhering to their strict code of behavior. In contrast, in most Muslim-majority countries women dress in a variety of ways, and there is no mandated religious dress. Girls are increasingly accessing both primary and secondary education, and women are gaining ground in percentages of college graduates. Even in conservative countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran, female education is encouraged and widespread. Women are also entering the workforce in growing numbers in professional fields, such as medicine, engineering, and law. Women are also participating in governance in many Muslim-majority countries, and Muslim women have been elected to serve as heads of state in a dozen nations. While many Muslim-majority countries have some version of Sharia, it is generally applied to family issues and, with the exception of a few countries like Saudia Arabia, does not include either the harsh interpretations or applications of corporal punishments. The Taliban’s treatment of women is harsh, extreme, and at odds with the normative treatment of Muslim women. While they have made statements about their commitment to female education and other women’s rights since they took power in August of 2021, Afghan women are wary of such claims, which is why so many Afghan women are fleeing the country. It is critical to center the voices of Afghan women and Muslim women in general and to avoid “savior complex,” which has long characterized narratives about Muslim women. These narratives can be harmful to women’s agency and contribute to Islamophobia. Additionally, it is important for non-Muslims to differentiate between the extremist practices of the Taliban and the normative practices of most Muslims, similar to how one would view the actions of the KKK in relation to those of mainstream Christian groups. Lastly, aid to refugees and countries is helpful, but when accompanied by a commitment to diplomacy and enabling citizens of nations to progress. Terrorism/Warfare The vast majority of Muslims unequivocally condemn terrorism. Terrorism, defined as the use of violence and threats to intimidate, coerce, or exact retribution, especially for political purposes, flagrantly violates at least three interrelated Islamic principles: respect for life, right to due process, and individual responsibility. The principle of respect for life prohibits the targeting of innocent civilians even during a state of war. Suicide bombings violate the prohibition against suicide, and terrorism violates the prohibition against murder, one of the gravest sins prohibited by the Qur’an. While one cannot speak for their motivations or methodology, Muslim terrorists use the Qur’an the same way that Christian extremists such as the Ku Klux Klan and Aryan Nations or Jewish extremists such as Meir Kahane and Baruch Goldstein in Israel use the Bible: by taking phrases out of context and developing interpretations that serve their agenda. They also ignore principles of the interpretation of texts followed by legitimate scholars of religion, above all the principle that a text must be understood with reference to the time, place, and situation in which it was given. The Qur’an, like other seminal religious texts, has a dual nature: one that is specific (particular or transitional) to the occasion, time, and place, and another that is universal and permanent, dealing with principles that apply for all times and places. The specific cannot be made to apply universally, while the universal always informs the specific. Ignoring this principle leads to arbitrary interpretations tailored to fit political agendas. Most of the terrorism committed by people claiming Islam as their motivation is justified by a methodology that bypasses the bulk of classical scholarship. Various legal issues that pertained to the majority of the Muslim community were often left to the discretion and judgement of qualified scholars. ISIS and other similar groups, however, discount the role filled by traditional scholars. They promote themselves as “scholars” and then produce rulings far removed from what Muslims traditionally would find normative, acceptable, or humane. We believe that Islamic teachings clearly prohibit killing innocent civilians. While there are obviously extremist Muslims who disagree with this stance, the position of the Muslim majority is clear, as demonstrated by repeated condemnations by Muslim scholars and leaders across the world. According to a Pew survey taken in Middle Eastern countries and Indonesia (the world’s most populous Muslim-majority country) in 2011, only 15% of Muslims expressed favorable views of al- Qaeda, and only 16% had any confidence in bin Laden “to do the right thing in world affairs.” Among U.S. Muslims, terrorism has even less support; in the same year, 86% of Muslim Americans said that suicide bombing and other violence against civilians in defense of Islam are never (81%) or only rarely (5%) justified. This question rests on a misconception, as Muslims have consistently and repeatedly denounced terrorism since September 11, 2001. For a large sampling of such condemnations, see this list. Another sampling is on our website. Unfortunately, these statements are rarely noted in the mass media in the US, leading many people to think erroneously that Muslims have not denounced terrorism. This question, however, could also be answered with another question: why should Muslims be expected to repeatedly condemn terrorism? Are Christians or Jews expected to denounce violence or every irresponsible or destructive statement or action made in the name of their religions? The question seems to assume that Muslims support or condone every act committed in the name of Islam unless they specifically state otherwise. This assumption is clearly unjust and unreasonable. Out of a total world population of around 1.8 billion Muslims, terrorists make up a tiny minority. A CNN article estimates the total number of members of Muslim terrorist groups as around .00625% of the world’s total Muslim population. Even if one assumes that there is a total number of Muslim terrorists several times that figure to account for “lone wolf” extremists and currently unknown groups, one still finds only a very tiny percentage of Muslims involved in terrorism or extremist violence. What is true is that Muslim terrorists are very much in the public eye, especially in the U.S. and Europe, to the extent that some people erroneously believe that extremist violence is unique to Muslims. There are several reasons for this: Many actions of Muslim (and other) terrorists are deliberately designed to draw attention. The perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks knew and intended that images of these atrocities would dominate news around the world. Indeed, terrorism, which on the scale practiced today is something new in history, is intended precisely to draw public attention to the terrorists and their grievances. Closely related to the foregoing fact is the reality that terrorist violence can and does strike Western countries and hence poses a real danger to their citizens; it is, therefore, inevitably a matter of legitimate concern to Western publics (although the chance of one’s being killed in a terrorist attack is about the same as being crushed by falling furniture). There appears to be a clear media bias which highlights terrorism committed by Muslims over that from other groups—even when terrorism from other sources poses a clear danger to people in the U.S. A database compiled by the Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute examines a nine-year period, from 2008 through 2016 and finds that far-right plots and attacks outnumber Islamist incidents by almost 2 to 1. Yet, according to a 2017 University of Alabama study of news coverage of all terrorist attacks in the United States between 2006 and 2015, attacks by Muslim perpetrators received, on average, 357% more coverage than other attacks. The study states: “The disparities in news coverage of attacks based on the perpetrator’s religion may explain why members of the public tend to fear the ‘Muslim terrorist’ while ignoring other threats.” In other words, while Muslim terrorists make up a tiny percentage of the world’s total Muslim population, they loom very large in the public mind—for reasons both legitimate and not. There is no reason to assign a special role to Muslim Americans, who are overwhelmingly opposed to terrorism. Muslim Americans do, however, have a responsibility to educate Americans of other faiths about Islam, increase Islamic literacy in the Muslim American community, and clarify that terrorism is prohibited in Islamic teachings. Like other sacred scriptures, including the Bible, there are a number of verses about warfare in the Qur’an; they address the struggle of the early Muslims against the Meccans who fought and persecuted them first in Mecca and then after they established a state in Medina, where Muslims fought back for the first time. However, they make up a small percentage of the 6,000 verses of the Qur’an. In addition, it is important to keep in mind the following: A reading of the “warlike” verses in their context in the Qur’an invariably shows that they refer to situations in which the Muslim community was under attack, either through direct military aggression or forcible denial of legitimate rights of freedom of religion and expression; they refer to, and permit, only strictly defensive warfare. Aggression is clearly prohibited (Qur’an, 2:190). The earliest verse related to fighting (22:39) states that “permission [to fight back] is given to those who have been wronged,” clearly indicating that such permission is an exceptional allowance responding to a specific situation, and that peaceful conduct is assumed to be the norm for Muslims. There are strict rules of warfare outlined by the Prophet Muhammad and his successors that prohibit targeting civilians, specifically women and children, or even harming infrastructure or crops used by civilians. While there are differing views among Muslims on their interpretation of Qur’anic verses about war, as about other subjects, the majority of Muslim scholars today interpret the Qur’an to allow war only for self-defense, as delineated in the following verse: “Fight in the cause of God against those who fight you, but do not transgress limits by aggressing; surely God does not love transgressors” (Qur’an, 2:190). The other justification for war in the Qur’an is to protect others from harm, but this is permissible only if the harm prevented is greater than the harm caused by the acts of war. This is the same as the principle of proportionality in the Christian doctrine of just war, which bears other similarities to the concept of war in the Qur’an. According to the following Qur’anic verses, protecting others from harm includes defending people of other faiths: “To those against whom war is made, permission is given to fight, because they are oppressed. Verily, God is capable of aiding them. They are those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of what is just, for no other reason than that they say, ‘Our Lord is God.’ Had God not restrained one set of people by means of another, monasteries, churches, synagogues, temples and mosques wherein God’s name is oft-mentioned would have been destroyed. God will certainly aid those who aid His cause” (Qur’an, 22:39-40). The Arabic term jihad literally means striving or exertion of effort and encompasses both the internal struggle against harmful impulses and desires and the external struggle against injustice and oppression. Thus, the word can refer to military action against an aggressor, but this is by no means the only meaning of the term. Traditionally, Muslim sources distinguish between the “greater” and the “lesser” jihad. The “greater jihad” is described by Muslim scholars as an internal struggle to avoid negative actions and cultivate good character. The “lesser jihad” is the external striving for justice, in self-defense or against oppression. One can do this in one’s heart, with one’s tongue or pen, and, if these are ineffective, by forcibly trying to change an oppressive situation, similarly, for example, to the Allies in World War II who went to war against the aggression of Hitler. It should be noted, however, that violent revolution was often seen by classical scholars as the absolute last resort. The social chaos and mayhem that often ensue from overthrowing an oppressive leader were commonly viewed as much worse than the reign of an oppressor. The Qur’an describes the desirability of peace and the means of attaining it in various passages, including the verse, “If they incline toward peace, then seek you peace also,” which clearly demonstrates that peace is a desired state to strive for. Another verse describes the blessings of peace: “‘Peace,’ a word from a Merciful Lord” (Qur’an, 36: 58). Furthermore, Salaam alaikum— “peace be upon you”—is the universal Islamic greeting; and as-Salaam is one of the 99 names of God, meaning “The Giver of Peace.” One of the best-known prophetic supplications is: “O God, You are peace, peace comes from You. Blessed are You O Possessor of Glory and Honor.” Furthermore, one of the various names for heaven is Dar al-Salam, “Abode of Peace.” Muslim peacemakers are working throughout the world, building bridges between people of different faiths. We believe that the work we are doing at ING to increase religious and cultural literacy and promote engagement and understanding among Americans of diverse backgrounds is the best antidote for conflict. Contemporary Muslim advocates of nonviolence include Sari Nusseibeh in Palestine, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan in India, Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh, and women leaders such as Rebiya Kadeer in the Uighur region of China and Iltezam Morrar in Palestine, who led a successful nonviolent effort to keep Israel from building its “separation wall” through the middle of a Palestinian village. In recent history, examples of Muslim peacemakers include Abdul Ghaffar Khan, a close associate of Gandhi in India, who called nonviolence “the weapon of the Prophet” and organized the world’s first nonviolent army, the Khudai Khidmatgar or “Servants of God”; and, in Iran, the late Grand Ayatollah Muhammad ibn Mahdi al-Shirazi, a major leader among Shi‘a Muslims, who upheld the tradition of Muslim nonviolence. Which Arabs and Muslims and which Jews are you referring to? Throughout the world where Arabs, Muslims and Jews are living as minorities in Christian-populated countries, they tend to be allies with shared interests and concerns, such as the promotion of religious literacy and the fight against anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Muslim Americans and Jewish Americans are also often allied on domestic issues of social justice. Where Jews live today as minorities in Muslim majority countries, such as Iran, the views are mixed. Some say they live in harmony with their Muslim compatriots, and others say that Jews are discriminated against. Historically, Jews and Muslims generally lived in harmony in many Muslim-populated countries, such as Morocco, Iraq, and Egypt (and, at least until the mass migration of Jews to Palestine in the early 1900s, in Palestine itself). Jews refer to Muslim rule in Spain in their history books as a period of renaissance for Jewish life. During the Spanish Inquisition, when both Muslims and Jews in Spain were forced to convert or leave, many Jews fled to Muslim countries where they lived for centuries in security and prosperity. These Muslim countries, with rare and short-lived exceptions, never propagated the anti-Jewish sentiment that resulted in pogroms and other forms of persecution that occurred in Europe. If the question is about the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, then this is a recent conflict which began with the twentieth-century mass settlement of Jews in Palestine, and the subsequent creation of the state of Israel. In the eyes of most Muslims, this is less about religion than about the displacement and dispossession of many Palestinians—both Muslim and Christian—as the state of Israel was formed, which is why Christian Palestinians such as Edward Said and Hanan Ashrawi have been outspoken about this issue. Today, the evils of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia have brought Jewish and Muslim communities in America together in a mutual effort to denounce bigotry and prejudice against religious minorities, as exemplified by the fundraising efforts of Muslim Americans following the attack on a Pittsburgh synagogue. In this way, Jews and Muslims are increasingly uniting in response to a common threat that targets both communities. This question makes two assumptions: first, that there is more conflict among Muslims than among followers of other religions, and, second, that conflicts involving Muslims result primarily from their religion. The first assumption is a false perception. Of the fifty Muslim-majority countries, the vast majority are at peace. Furthermore, many countries with non-Muslim majorities are involved in conflict. The United States, for instance, a Christian-majority country, is the world’s largest arms exporter and is involved currently in several armed conflicts and was previously involved in a number of conflicts, most famous among them the Vietnam War. The two largest world wars in history were fought mostly between Christian-majority countries (i.e., World Wars I and II). The second assumption is likewise misleading. While religion is sometimes invoked by parties to support a war, religion is at most one factor among many in producing conflict, and usually not the most important one. Economic and political issues are generally the underlying causes behind most conflicts, including those involving Muslims. Additionally, in many of these conflicts Muslims are the victims rather than the perpetrators of violence and conflict. Some current examples include: Myanmar, where close to a million Rohingya Muslims have been persecuted and driven from their homes by the Burmese army and militants in what has been called a genocide; in China, where one million Uighur Muslims have been detained in concentration camps; in Kashmir where a brutal crack-down has resulted in the oppression of all its Muslim residents following decades of repression; and ongoing conflicts over land and rights in Palestine. This has also been the case in previous conflicts in Iraq, Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Bosnia, where others instigated conflict to the great detriment, loss of lives, destruction, and suffering of the Muslims living in those countries. Women Normative Islamic teachings view women and men as equal on the grounds that all human beings are equal before God because they share the same God-given nature or fitra, dignity, and innate humanity. Both are servants of God, worthy of respect, endowed with a soul and intellect. The Prophet Muhammad taught his followers to treat their sons and daughters the same, and, if anything, to show extra kindness and love to daughters. Qur’anic teachings emphasize that men and women share similar religious obligations such as prayer, fasting, and giving charity, and are equally accountable before and deserving of recompense from God. They are both called upon to seek knowledge, develop their potential, and work together to create a just and righteous society. On an individual level, they enjoy the same rights, including the right to choose their spouse and to own and keep their property and income. While through much of history and still today Muslim women have been viewed and treated as lesser beings in various cultures and societies, this is due to patriarchal interpretations and cultural influences rather than specific scriptural teachings. What the Qur’an is understood to say about women’s rights depends on who is doing the interpreting and their location and circumstances. Yes, there are many verses and sayings that speak about women’s rights. They include the following: Equal responsibilities and reward: “For the men who acquiesce to the will of God, and the women who acquiesce, the men who believe and the women who believe, the men who are devout and the women who are devout, the men who are truthful and the women who are truthful, the men who are constant and the women who are constant, the men who are humble and the women who are humble, the men who give charity and the women who give charity, the men who fast and the women who fast, the men who are chaste and the women who are chaste, and the men and women who remember God a lot, God has arranged forgiveness for them, and a magnificent reward.” (Qur’an, 33:35) “And their Lord answered them, ‘I am never unmindful of the work of a worker among you, male or female. You are from each other.’” (Qur’an, 3:195) “Whoever does right, male or female, and is a believer, We will revivify with a good life; and We will pay them their due according to the best of what they have done.” (Qur’an, 16:97) Right to earn money: “. . . to men is allotted what they earn and to women what they earn.” (Qur’an, 4:32) Right to inherit: “For men is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, and for women is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, be it little or much—an obligatory share.” (Qur’an, 4:7) Rights of a daughter: “Whosoever has a daughter and does . . . not insult her, and does not favor his son over her, God will make him enter into paradise.” (Hadith/prophetic saying) “Whoever has three daughters and treats them kindly, they will be a protection for him against the Fire.” (Hadith/ prophetic saying) “Parents cannot force daughters into a marriage.” (Hadith/prophetic saying) Rights of a wife: “The best of you is the best to his family, and I am the best among you to my family.” (Hadith/prophetic saying) There are over fifty Muslim-majority countries in the world. They differ widely on women’s rights, depending on a variety of factors, including political development, social and economic circumstances, and cultural views and practices; even within a single country, there may be considerable differences based on their location (urban or rural), education, and family background and circumstances. Religion may or may not play a significant role in the rights women have, and there are great differences concerning the religious interpretation of women’s rights in different communities and cultures. So, while some Muslim women are mistreated due to the factors mentioned above, in many Muslim-majority countries women are involved at the highest levels of education, employment, and politics, with growing numbers of physicians, engineers, lawyers, and other educated professionals. Muslim women have even served as heads of state in a number of countries, including Bangladesh, Indonesia, Turkey, Kosovo, Mauritius, and Pakistan. Many Muslim women also elect to nurture their children and families with dignity, which remains a respected choice in these countries. However, in some countries and societies Muslim women’s freedoms are seriously inhibited by oppressive patriarchal attitudes and practices as well as by the same economic, political, cultural, or other challenges which impact women across the world. This depends on the family’s culture and circumstances; it is not necessarily based on religion. According to the scholars we rely on, nothing in the Qur’an or Hadith (prophetic sayings) prohibits women from working, and Muslims often cite the example of the Prophet Muhammad’s first wife Khadijah, who was a successful businesswoman. According to the 2008 Gallup World Poll, majorities of Muslim respondents surveyed believe that women should have the right to hold any job for which they are qualified outside the home. Increasing numbers of Muslim women throughout the world are employed in diverse professions, including those that are male dominated, such as medicine and engineering. However, many women of young children, like women everywhere, choose to be full-time mothers, which remains a respected choice in these countries. Domestic violence and spousal abuse violate Islamic principles of security, safety, and respect for human dignity; if severe enough, they may even violate the principle of respect for life. According to classical Islamic law, spousal abuse, even if non-physical, is grounds for a Muslim woman to initiate divorce. The extant biographies of Muhammad record him as never having hit a woman or even a child and as condemning those who did. In recent decades women have served as heads of state in several Muslim-majority nations, including some with the largest populations: Sheikh Hasina, prime minister of Bangladesh, 1996-2001 and 2009-present Khaleda Zia, prime minister of Bangladesh, 1991-1996 and 2001-2006 Benazir Bhutto, prime minister of Pakistan, 1998-1990 and 1993-1996 Tansu Çiller, prime minister of Turkey, 1993-1996 Megawati Sukarnoputri, president of Indonesia, 2001-2004 Mame Madior Boye, prime minister of Senegal, 2001-2002 Roza Otunbayeva, president of Kyrgyzstan, 2010-2011 Cissé Mariam Kaïdama Sidibé, prime minister of Mali, 2011-2012 Atifete Jahjaga, president of Kosovo, 2011-2016 Aminata Touré, prime minister of Senegal, 2013-2014 Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, president of Mauritius, 2015-2018 Halimah Yacob, president of Singapore, 2017-present Muslim women have also exercised leadership in many other areas: Linda Sarsour, activist and co-founder of the Women’s March Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, the first Muslim American congresswomen Tawakul Karman, a leader of the Arab Spring in Yemen, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan, famous for her defense of women’s right to education, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 Ingrid Mattson, who served two terms as the president of the largest American Muslim membership organization in the country, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) Maha Elgenaidi, founder and CEO of Islamic Networks Group (ING) Azizah al-Hibri, founder and president of KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights Tayyibah Taylor, late founder, publisher, and editor-in-chief of Azizah magazine While most rulers in Muslim history have been male, as in most societies, there have been a few female Muslim rulers in past centuries and in modern times. They include Al-Audr al-Kareema of Yemen, Shajarat Ad-Durr of Egypt, and several female rulers in India. Muslims who support women’s authority and leadership often appeal to the Qur’an’s depiction of the Queen of Sheba as a righteous, just, and powerful ruler, citing her example as evidence of women’s right to rule. According to historians, there have been thousands of female Muslim scholars throughout Islamic history, many of whom were teachers of renowned male scholars. Some notable examples include: Rabi’ah Bint Mu’awwad, a great scholar of fiqh (jurisprudence), who taught scholars of Medina A’isha bint Sa’d bint ibn Abi Waqqas, whose pupils included Imam Malik Sayyida Nafisa, the granddaughter of Hasan, whose pupils included Imam Shafi’i A’isha bint Abu Bakr, wife of the Prophet and narrator of over 2,000 Hadith (prophetic sayings) There are also many female Muslim scholars of Islam as well as renowned academics in related fields at leading universities today, including these examples: Zainab Alwani, professor of Islamic studies at Howard University, Vice President of the Fiqh Council of North America Intisar Rabb, professor of law at Harvard Law School and a director of its Islamic Legal Studies Program Hafez Barazangi, research fellow at the Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program at Cornell University Laleh Bakhtiar, noted author and translator, famous for her translation of the Qur’an into English Aminah McCloud, professor of religious studies and director of the Islamic World Studies Program at DePaul University Ingrid Mattson, professor of Islamic studies and holder of the London and Windsor Community Chair in Islamic Studies at Huron University College at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario Zareena Grewal, professor of American studies and religious studies at Yale University Kecia Ali, professor of religious studies at Boston University Asifa Quraishi, professor of law at the University of Wisconsin Law School, who in 2010 was part of a public delegation accompanying Hillary Clinton to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women Amina Wadud, author of the books Qur’an and Woman and Inside the Gender Jihad and co-founder of the organization Sisters in Islam Asma Barlas, professor of politics at Ithaca College and author of Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an Sylvia Chan-Malik, professor and scholar of American Studies, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, and Women’s and Gender Studies and author of Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color and American Islam On the contrary, there are many Hadith (prophetic sayings) encouraging the seeking of knowledge that have led numerous Muslim women in history to become scholars, writers, and teachers of both men and women, as noted in the previous question. These include sayings such as “Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim.” In fact, the first word revealed in the Qur’an was “read,” an injunction directed at both men and women. We affirm as a fundamental Islamic principle that to seek education and knowledge is not only a right but an obligation that is incumbent on both men and women, and we find nothing in Islamic texts or teachings, that limits a girl’s right to seek education and knowledge. Those who limit women’s rights to education are doing so based on patriarchal culture.

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