

L E S S O N 2

Muhammad and Islam

THINKING FOCUS

Find details to support the statement, "Islam is not only a system of beliefs but also a way of life."

Key Terms

- Koran
- monotheism
- Islam
- Muslim
- mosque
- Sunna

➤ The words beneath this image say, "And among them [was] Gabriel." In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Gabriel was thought to be God's messenger to people on earth.

Each year, a Meccan trader named Muhammad would spend a month in quiet thought while inside a desert cave. In the year A.D. 610, something extraordinary occurred. The **Koran**, believed by Muhammad's followers to be the written record of God's words, retells that event.

Muhammad was awakened one night by a thunderous voice that seemed to come from everywhere, saying:

Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created, created Man of a blood-clot.
Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the Pen, taught man that he knew not.

Koran, 96:1

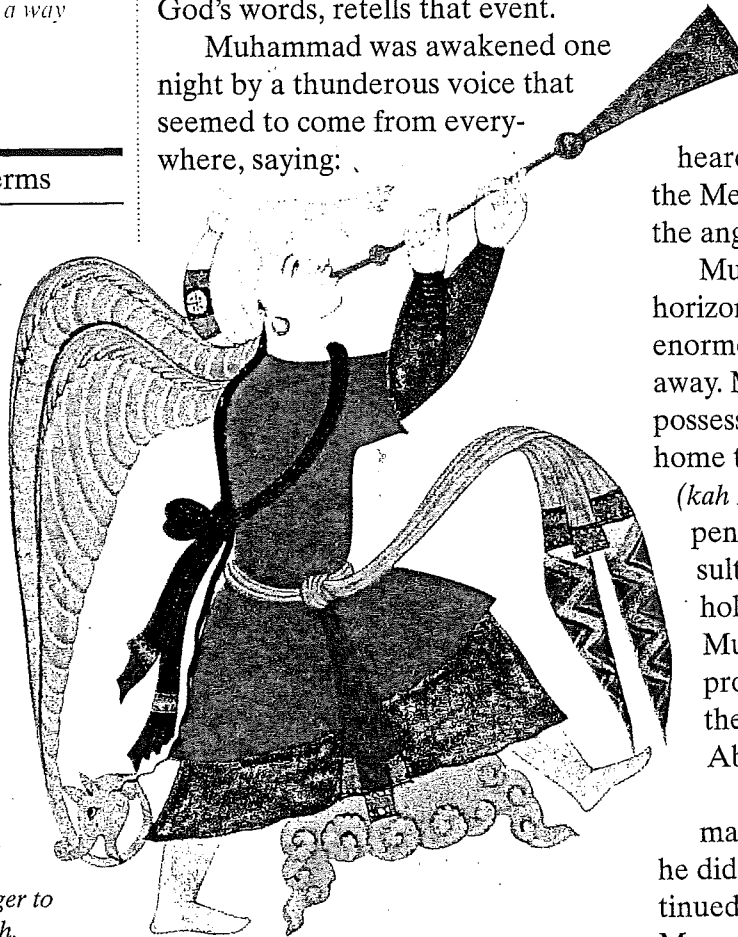
Dazed, Muhammad walked to the entrance of the cave.

Where was the voice coming from? Suddenly, he thought he

heard the voice again: "You are the Messenger of God, and I am the angel Gabriel."

Muhammad looked up. On the horizon he believed he saw an enormous ghostly figure fading away. Muhammad thought he was possessed by a demon. He rushed home to tell his wife Khadija (*kah DEE juh*) what had happened. Alarmed, Khadija consulted a neighbor known for his holiness. He concluded that Muhammad's being chosen as a prophet by Allah was similar to the experiences of the prophets Abraham and Moses.

This news filled Muhammad with awe and fear. At first he did not believe it. But he continued to have similar experiences. Many people would come to believe that Muhammad was a "Messenger of God."



وَمِنْهُمْ جِبْرِيلُ

The Life of the Prophet

Muhammad was born into the Quraysh tribe around A.D. 570. Orphaned at an early age, he found work in the caravan trade. At 25, he married a wealthy widow in the trading business. This wealth gave him the freedom to visit Mount Hira each year to think.

On one of these visits in 610, Muhammad is believed by his followers to have had a vision of Gabriel. The angel told him to recite in the name of God. Followers of Muhammad believe the angel then told Muhammad the first of many messages from God.

Muhammad's followers believe that in another vision, the angel Gabriel took Muhammad to meet Abraham, Moses, and Jesus in Jerusalem. From Jerusalem, both Muhammad and Gabriel ascended into heaven, where Muhammad spoke to God.

Inspired by these visions, Muhammad came to believe in **monotheism**, the belief in only one God. The God he believed

in—Allah—was the same God of other monotheistic religions of his time, Judaism and Christianity. *Allah*, the Arabic word for God, is the word used in the Koran.

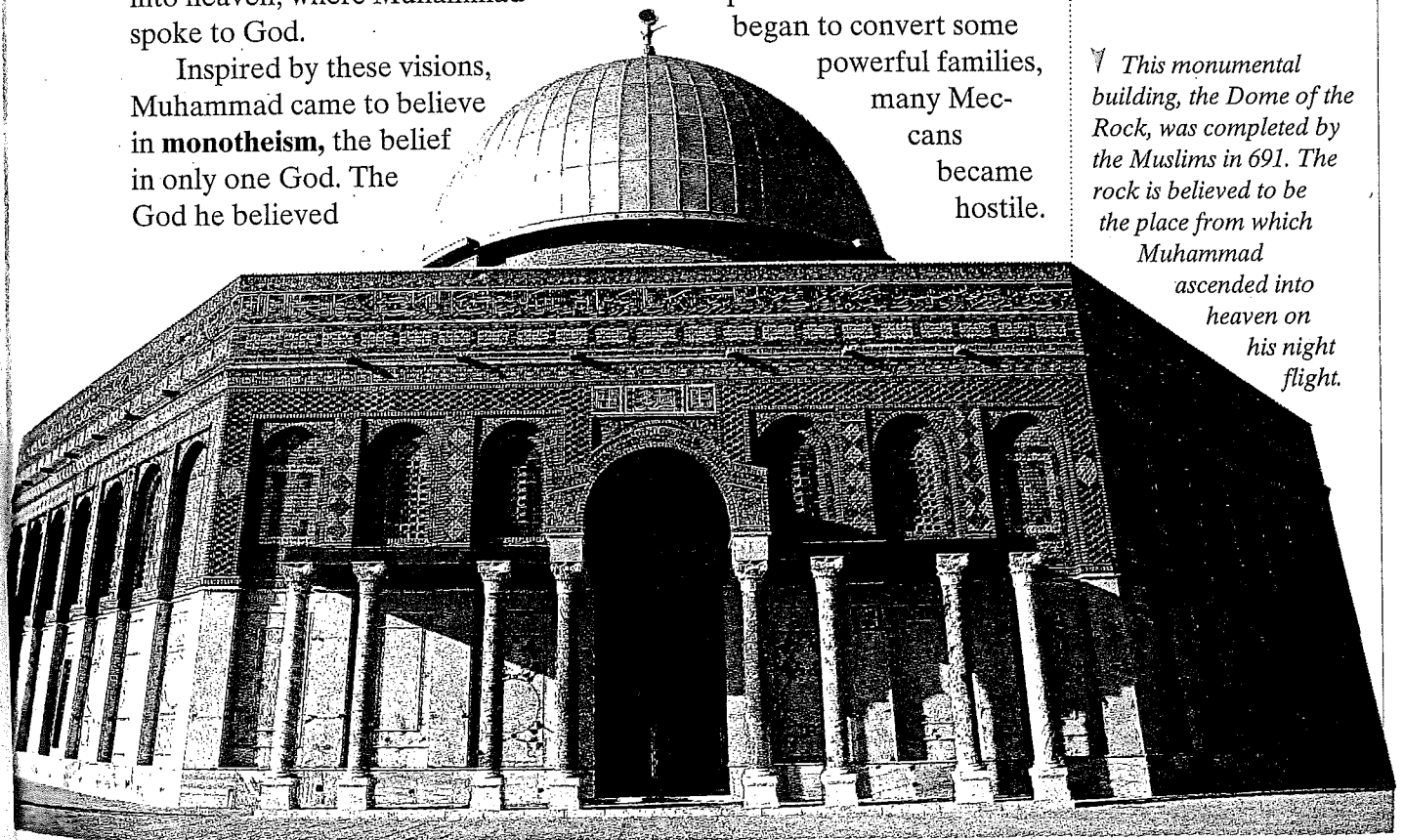
Spreading the Word

Muhammad, convinced that he was Allah's messenger, began to preach in Mecca. He told people there was only one God. He stressed that all believers were equal in the eyes of Allah. He urged the rich to share with the poor. By 620, Muhammad only had about 100 followers.

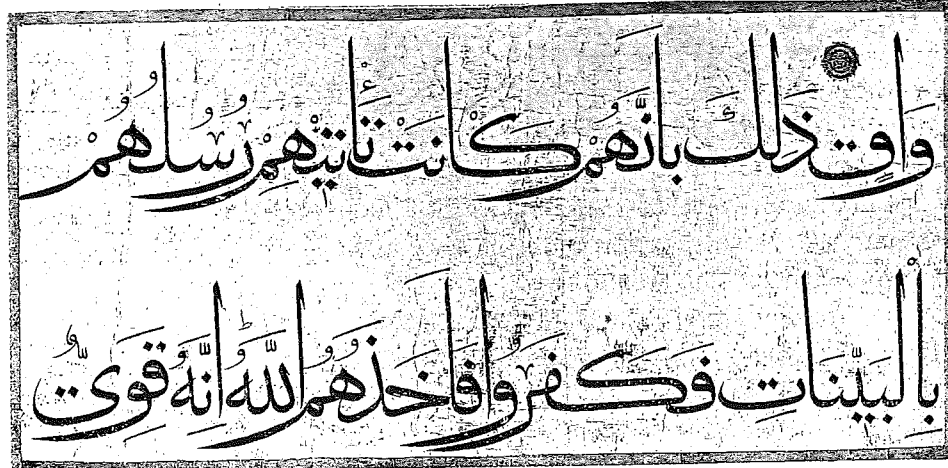
Other Meccans resented Muhammad's message. They did not like the way he spoke against the local gods and idols. Muhammad criticized the way the wealthy merchants took advantage of the poor. When Muhammad began to convert some

powerful families, many Meccans became hostile.

¶ *This monumental building, the Dome of the Rock, was completed by the Muslims in 691. The rock is believed to be the place from which Muhammad ascended into heaven on his night flight.*



➤ As you can see from the script on the right, Arabic is written with a different alphabet than English. The calligraphy below spells out Allah in Arabic.

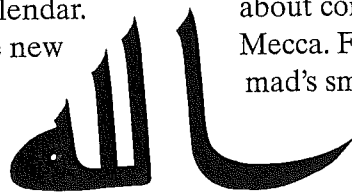


Across Time & Space

Arabic terms can be transliterated, or written in the alphabet of English, in a variety of ways. For example, the name of the Islamic scriptures which is often spelled Koran may also be transliterated as Qur'an, a spelling preferred by many Muslims and scholars.

Family leaders refused to trade with Muhammad's followers. Some Meccans even plotted to kill them.

In 622, fearing for their lives, Muhammad and his followers fled to Medina, an oasis city about 200 miles north of Mecca. This flight to Medina, known as the Hegira (*hih JY ruh*), marks the beginning of the Islamic lunar calendar. Muhammad called the new faith **Islam**, which means "submission" to Allah. Believers in Islam are called **Muslims**—"those who submit to Allah's will."



Returning to Mecca

The Jews and Arabs of Medina welcomed Muhammad and his followers. Their city was on the verge of civil war, and they hoped that Muhammad could unite them. Muhammad hoped that Islam would be accepted by all the people of Medina. Muhammad tried to appeal to the Jews. He first chose their holy city of Jerusalem as the direction that all Muslims should face when praying. Muhammad accepted Abraham, Moses, and Jesus as prophets of God. However, some Jewish leaders would not accept Muhammad as God's latest

prophet. Unable to unite the people of Medina, Muhammad expelled from the city the Jews who opposed him. From that day on, Muhammad commanded Muslims to face the Kaaba in Mecca rather than Jerusalem when praying.

With Medina now under Muslim control, Muhammad set about conquering his enemies at Mecca. For eight years, Muhammad's small forces fought the larger Meccan forces. Eventually, many Arab nomadic tribes and leading Meccans joined the Muslim cause. With their support, Muhammad was able to put together an army of more than 10,000. In 630, Muhammad and this army took over Mecca.

One of the first things Muhammad did after his conquest of Mecca was to destroy the tribal idols inside the Kaaba. From that time on, the Kaaba would be empty of all idols. Instead, the Kaaba was dedicated to the one God and became the central shrine of Islam. The black stone, believed to be a gift from God to Abraham, remained embedded in the corner of the Kaaba. The area around the Kaaba became the first **mosque**, or Muslim house of worship.

After destroying the idols, Muhammad ordered one of his men to climb to the top of the Kaaba. He called all of the faithful to come pray to the one true God.

Muhammad appointed a Muslim governor in Mecca, and then

returned to his stronghold in Medina to plan his next battle against tribal groups elsewhere in Arabia. By the time of his death in 632, Muhammad's powerful armies had conquered the central and west coastal regions of Arabia. ■

■ How was the religion of Islam founded, and how did it spread?

The Teachings of Islam

Muslims believe that the Koran is the word of Allah. After Muhammad took over the city of Medina, he began to establish an Islamic community with unique customs. When he died, his companions compiled his words and deeds, called the **Sunna**.

The Koran

Muhammad's revelations occurred from 610 until his death in 632. Although he left no written record of his experiences, his followers remembered his words. In 633, Muhammad's chief clerk began to gather the revelations into one collection, the Koran.

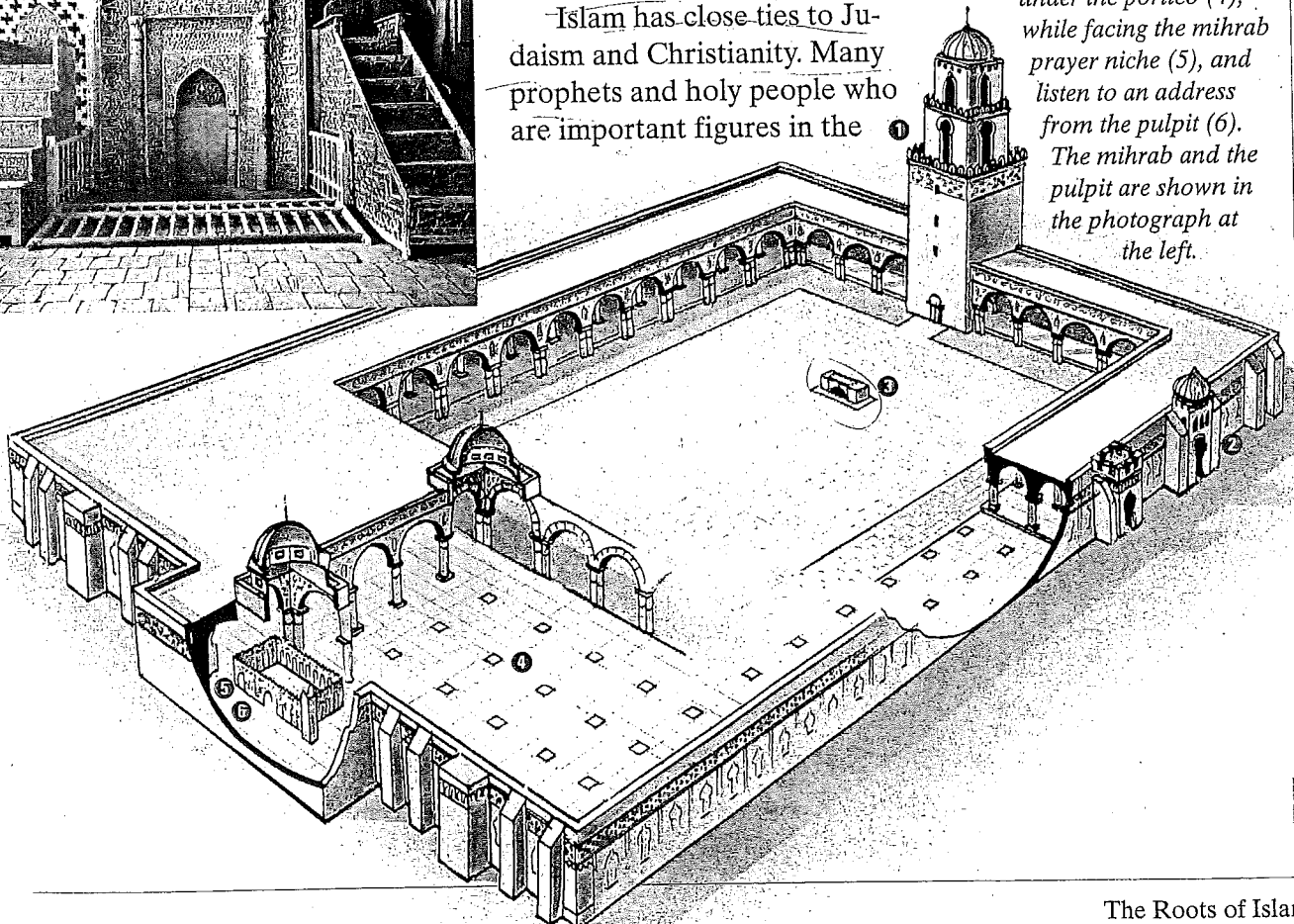
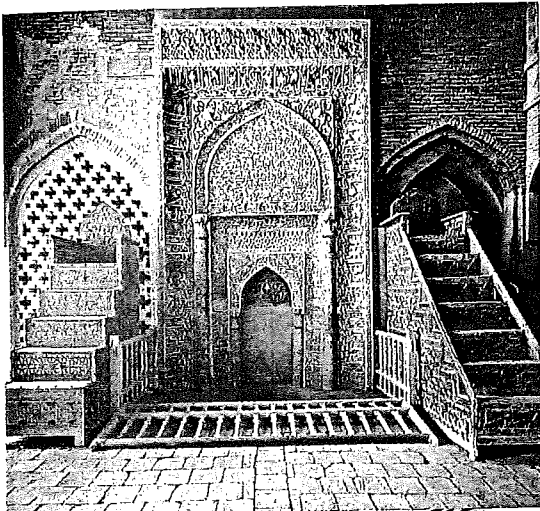
For the followers of Islam, the Koran completes the earlier revelations of Old Testament prophets and Jesus. The Koran is the final revelation, just as Muhammad is the final prophet.

Islam has close ties to Judaism and Christianity. Many prophets and holy people who are important figures in the

Across Time & Space

Muslims believe the Koran is best read in Arabic, the language in which it was given to Muhammad. Muslims believe that much of the meaning of Allah's words is lost in translation.

Called to prayer from the minaret (1), Muslims enter the doorway (2), and wash in the ablution fountain (3). They pray under the portico (4), while facing the mihrab prayer niche (5), and listen to an address from the pulpit (6). The mihrab and the pulpit are shown in the photograph at the left.



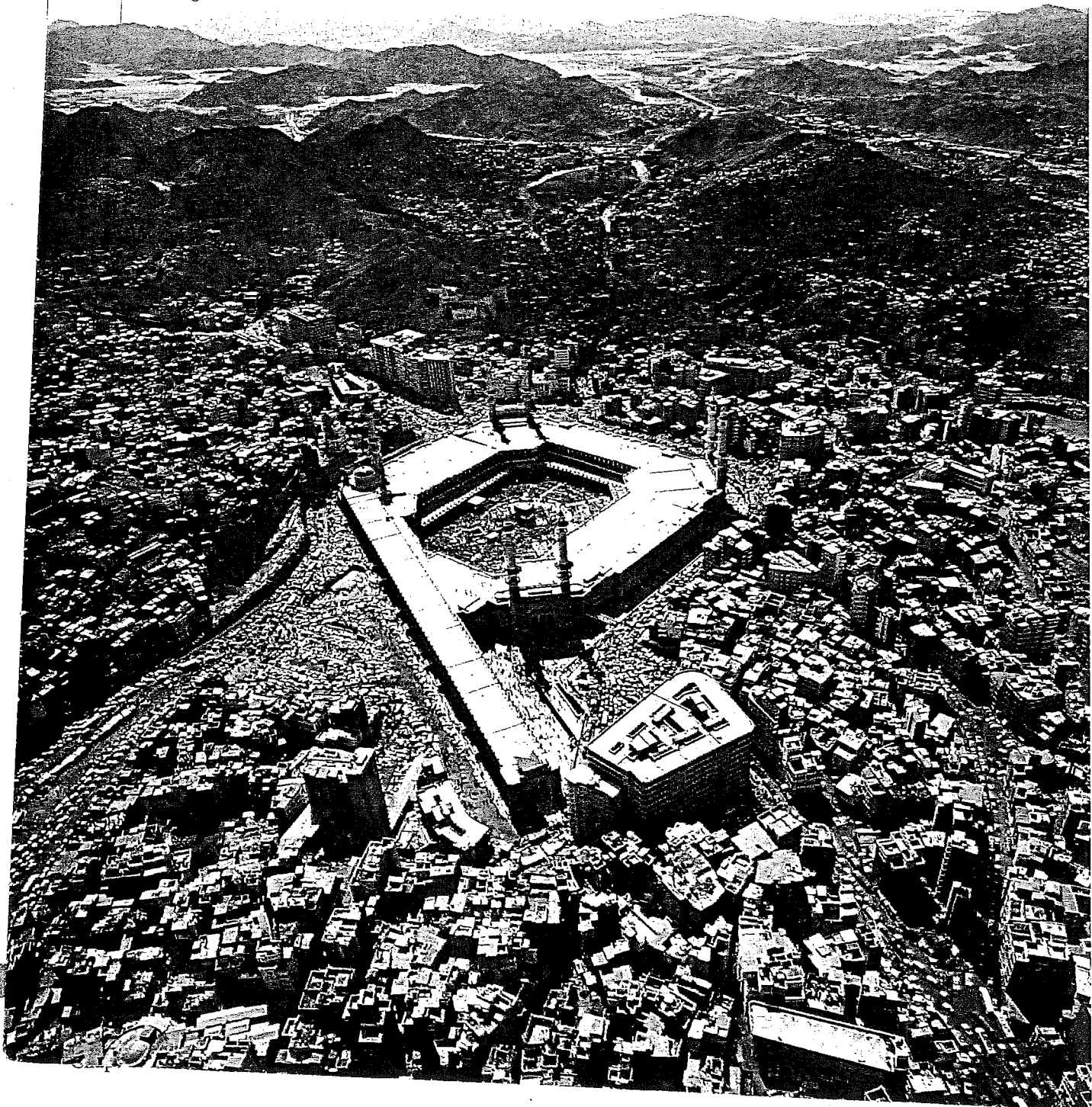
Bible are also described in the Koran. For example, Abraham is thought to be the father of Jews through his son Isaac. Abraham is also considered to be the father of Arabs through his other son Ishmael.

▽ *All Muslims in good health and with enough money must make a pilgrimage to Mecca once in their lifetime. The people camp outside the Great Mosque in tent cities that protect them from the burning sun.*

According to Muslim belief, Jews and Christians are "people of the book." Their holy book, the Bible, is considered by Muslims to be an earlier and incomplete version of God's words. Because

of this, Muslims believed that it was wrong to compel Jews and Christians to convert to Islam. Muslims considered these other religions to be less correct.

The Arabic word *Koran* can loosely translated as "recitation." In fact, the very first word the angel Gabriel spoke to Muhammad was "Recite." By reciting aloud, many Muslims memorize a much of the Koran as they can.



The Sunna

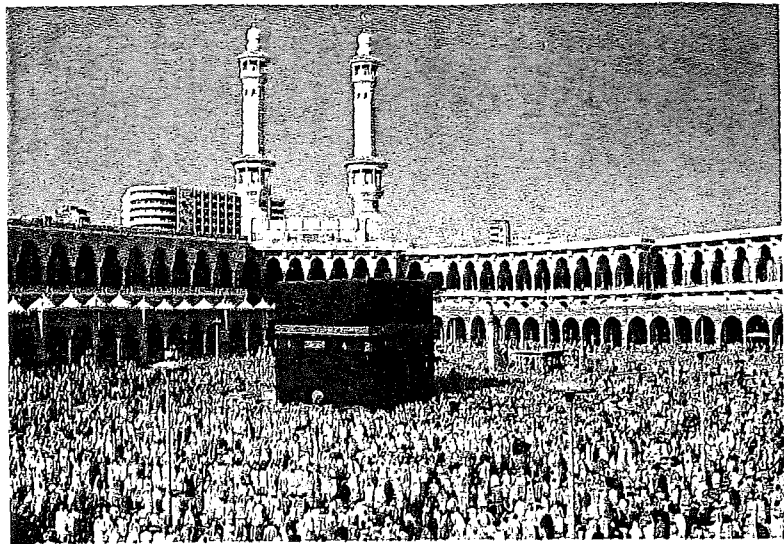
The Sunna were the guiding rules for Islam and were based on the way the prophet Muhammad lived his own life. The most basic of these rules were the Five Pillars of Islam. The ideas behind these five duties came from the Koran, but it was in the Sunna that the leaders of Islam set them down.

The first of these pillars is the profession of faith. To express their acceptance of Islam, Muslims repeat the phrase, "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet."

The second pillar is prayer. Muslims must pray five times a day. Prayers follow special rituals, including washing before praying, bowing, and then kneeling while praying. Muslims must always face Mecca when praying. Every Friday at noon, Muslims assemble for public prayer in a mosque.

The third pillar is giving alms, or showing charity to the poor. Muslims must also contribute to public charities, such as the building of mosques and hospitals.

The fourth pillar is the ritual fast during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim year. Ramadan is a holy time, because in this month Muhammad received



his first message from Allah. During Ramadan, Muslims must not eat or drink from the break of dawn until the setting of the sun. Muslims believe that this rigorous fast brings them closer to Allah.

The fifth pillar of Islam is Hajj—the pilgrimage to Mecca. All Muslims who can afford it must make the pilgrimage at least once. The pilgrimage involves elaborate rites that take place over many days. Before arriving at Mecca, the pilgrims bathe, cut their hair and nails, and take off jewelry. They then put on a white seamless garment, symbolizing a state of purity. Because Muslims from all over the world go on these pilgrimages, Hajj is a symbol of Muslim unity. ■

▲ Pilgrims circle the Kaaba in the Great Mosque in Mecca. The heavy black covering that protects the shrine is replaced each year. The cloth covers a single doorway that leads into a room inside the Kaaba.

■ Why are the Koran and Sunna important to Muslims?

Islam as a Way of Life

The Five Pillars tell Muslims the specific rituals they must follow in order to be good Muslims. But the Koran and the Sunna cover many additional moral standards that a Muslim must live by in his or her everyday life. The Koran and the Sunna cover diet, marriage, divorce, business contracts, and even the proper way to clean

one's teeth. Muslims are forbidden to eat certain foods such as pork, to drink alcohol or to gamble. Islam, like most other religions, also prohibits murder and theft.

One of the acts the Sunna calls for is jihad. This term itself means "struggle," to do one's best to resist temptation and overcome evil.



▲ *In some especially religious villages in Islamic countries, women still wear the veil and carry prayer beads. However, in large cities it is not unusual to see women with their faces uncovered.*

In time, that personal internal struggle also became an external struggle, as Islam expanded its territories and converted many non-believers. Islamic wars against those nonbelievers were often called *jihad*.

The Sunna also sets guidelines for the treatment of women. In pre-Islamic Arabia, women had very few individual rights and freedoms. The Sunna, which was a written record of the traditions and customs that were followed by Muhammad, stressed that women should be considered individuals with rights of their own. Women were granted the right to hold property in their own name and to inherit part of their father's estate, which they had not been able to do before Muhammad.

■ *How does Islam affect many aspects of daily life for Muslims?*

In many countries where the population is mostly Islamic, women are taking a greater role for themselves outside of the home. They are becoming involved in their societies. Today, Muslims live in many different parts of the world. The role a Muslim woman fills is more a reflection of the customs of the individual country in which she lives than an indication of how all of Islam treats women.

Islam does influence the everyday lives of Muslims, from birth to death. Parents chant the profession of faith over each newborn baby. Children use the Koran to learn to read and write.

Many Muslims carry prayer beads that they use during free moments of the day as they think of Allah. There are as many as 99 names for Allah, all of which describe what God is like. These include such words as *creator* and *protector*. Islamic prayer beads have either 99 or 33 beads, so that Muslims can count off God's names in order to enter paradise. When someone is about to die, the Koran is recited at the person's bedside. Islam is not just a religion—it is a way of life. ■

R E V I E W

1. **FOCUS** Find details to support the statement, "Islam is not only a system of beliefs but also a way of life."
2. **CONNECT** In what ways is Islam similar to Judaism and Christianity?
3. **SOCIAL SYSTEMS** How did Islam affect the rights and status of women?
4. **CRITICAL THINKING** Why do you think Christians and

- Jews did not accept Muhammad as a prophet of God, even though Muhammad accepted the Christian and Jewish prophets?
5. **ACTIVITY** Interview your classmates or use the encyclopedia to find out what these rituals have in common: Yom Kippur (among Jews), Lent (among Christians), and Ramadan (among Muslims).