

UNIT 1: WHAT IS ISLAM?

**THE PROGRESSIVE ISLAM
CURRICULUM FOR ADULTS**

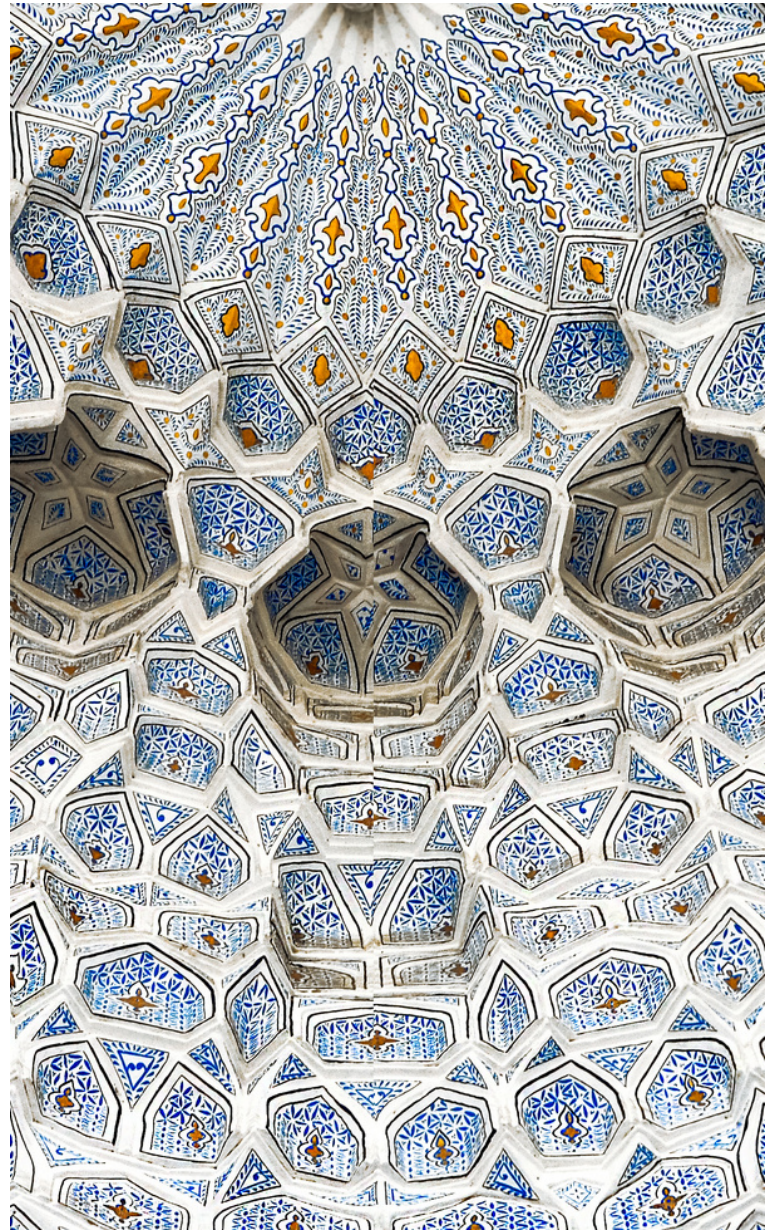
**PREPARED & PRODUCED
BY MUSLIMS FOR
PROGRESSIVE VALUES**

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WHY A PROGRESSIVE ISLAM CURRICULUM FOR ADULTS?

Founded in 2007, Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV) is the oldest progressive Muslims nonprofit in the United States. Our mission is to advocate for human rights, social justice and inclusion in the United States and around the world by inculcating a culture rooted in human rights through public education,

advocacy, and the arts. Recognizing that the only way to return the practice of Islam to a truly traditional one, one that is rooted in social justice, compassion, and pluralism, we have sought out to produce educational resources for the general public to learn from. It is our belief that progressive interpretations of Islam should be as accessible as possible but for far too long, these interpretations have remained in scholarly and theological texts. The Progressive Islam Curriculum, generously funded by the A&A Foundation, is a culmination of MPV's to increase accessibility of these progressive interpretations so that the general Muslim population has the tools to understand and practice the truly traditional form Islam.



LESSON 1: PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA

Today, Arabia before Islam is referred to as the Age of *Jahiliya* (ignorance) but aside from scholars and historians of Islam, few know what life was like in Arabia prior to the birth of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the rise of Islam across the region. Contrary to popular belief, both monotheism and polytheism were common across the Arab peninsula, primarily because of the lifestyle of the Bedouin, the nomadic tribal group that inhabited the Arab peninsula and surrounding areas. In addition to the polytheists who made up the majority of the population, there is archaeological evidence of significant Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian populations across the region as well.

RELIGIOUS GROUPS PRESENT IN ARABIA (PRE 7TH CE)

ARAB POLYTHEISM

JUDAISM

MANICHAEISM

MAZDAKISM

MIAPHYSITISM CHRISTIANITY

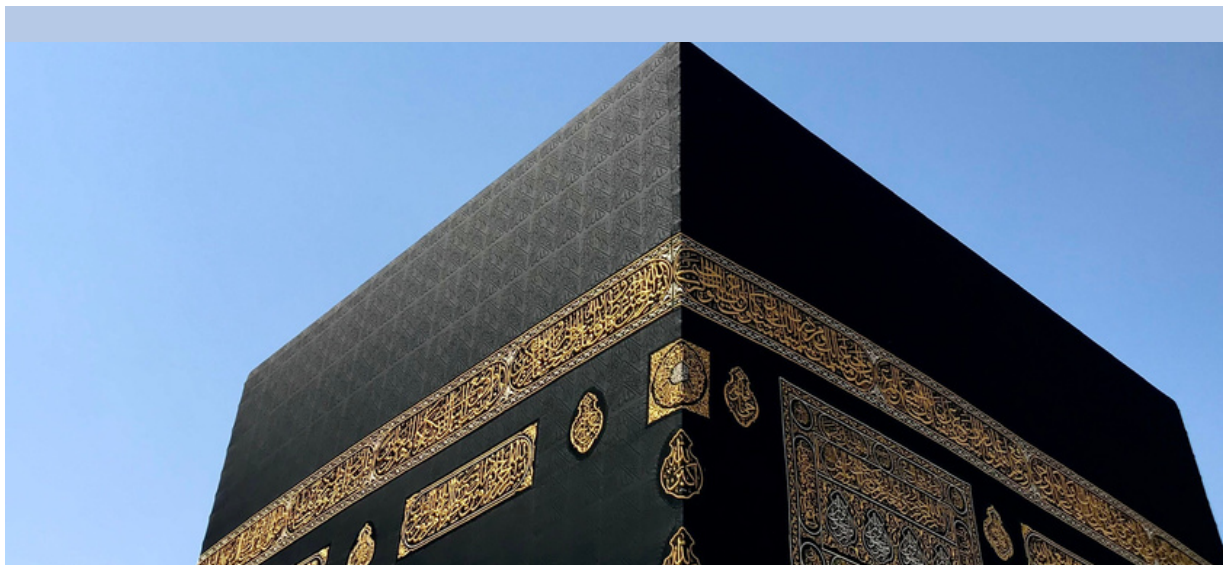
NESTORIAN CHRISTIANITY

ZOROASTRIANISM

The presence of these religious groups was likely a result of the two major empires that surrounded Arabia, the Roman and Byzantine Empires, who caused an exodus of Jews into Arabia and who also converted significant portions of the population to Christianity. There is also historical evidence of converts to Judaism from Yemen and the influence of polytheism beliefs, and deities, from Egypt. Despite the presence of these significant powers in Arabia, the Arab peninsula was largely ignored by the surrounding empires, primarily because it was seen as unforgiving land that had much to take and little to offer to their empires. This was due to the rugged terrain, the limited water resources, and the limited access to ports, especially in the central part of the Arabian peninsula. This terrain made it nearly impossible to develop settlements and contributed significantly to the nomadic lifestyle of the Bedouin who traversed the desert as tribes and later on in their clan offshoots. This rocky terrain was especially common in the Hejaz, the Western portion of the Arabian peninsula that contained Mecca and *Yathrib* (now Medina). How then, did Mecca, the birthplace of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) come to be a thriving desert city?

According to Islamic scholarship, Mecca was founded by Hajaar, the wife of Prophet Ibrahim and the mother of Prophet Ismail. As the story goes, after the birth of Ismail, Ibrahim was instructed by God to bring his wife and their new son to a remote area in the Arabian peninsula. When they arrived in the desolate dry land, Hajaar asked her husband, "For who are you leaving us in the forsaken valley?". When she was met with silence, she asked, "Has Al-lah commanded you to do this?". Abraham responded yes to which Hajaar said, "Then Al-lah will not cause us to be lost". They were then left alone with some dates and a small container of water. After some time, Hajaar and Ismail began to suffer from severe dehydration, and in desperate search for water for her son, Hajaar ran frantically between the Sofa and Marwa hills seven times in search of water. After the seventh time, she heard a voice and saw the Angel Jibril who told her that God had heard Ismail's cries and that God would provide for them. Suddenly, water began gushing out from the ground near Ismail's heel. Afraid the water would run out, she began saying "Zome, zome" or "stop, stop" but the water did not stop flowing and the place from which this water flows is now known as the well of ZamZam. It serves as an important place of pilgrimage for Muslims today as they perform their Hajj but centuries ago, it allowed a flourishing merchant town to sustain itself in the desert.

The Kaaba, the revered building that now sits at the center of Masjid Al-Haram, is said to have been built by Ibrahim and Ismail and has for centuries been a place of pilgrimage for various religious groups. Beginning in the 5th century, the Qurasyh established rule over Mecca and the rocky terrain surrounding the small settlement. There were few agricultural or maritime activities available for the Qurasyh but because of the presence of the Kaaba and the pilgrims who flocked to the Kaaba once a year, they were able to cultivate a sufficient economy, which allowed them to settle permanently in Mecca, becoming caretakers of the city and the sacred Kaaba. They invited other tribes and religious groups to establish shrines in the Kaaba, ensuring the continued flow of pilgrims to Mecca, as well as the relative peace in Mecca because of the sacredness of the site.



This sacredness can be traced back to Prophet Ibrahim, who declared the Kaaba to be a place of sanctity where war, bloodshed, and violence were prohibited. Despite the fact that the inhabitants of Mecca had strayed far from the monotheistic way of Ibrahim, they maintained that the sanctity of the building remained and that all types of violence were prohibited. Therefore, Mecca became a place of relative peace and order for those who worshiped deities at the shrine and the more deities placed there, the more communities across Arabia revered it and honored its sanctity, the safer and wealthier the Qurasyh became. The annual pilgrimage to Mecca became a core aspect of Arabian culture, as individuals would gather in the city not only to worship, but also to make up debts or resolve tribal disputes because of the impermissibility of violence in the city. According to Islamic scholarship, there were 360 individual deities in the Kaaba when Islam was first introduced to Mecca, demonstrating the breadth of worship at the Kaaba.

Building on the economic success the pilgrims brought with them to Mecca, the Qurasyh were able to become merchants and traders as they occupied an increasingly strategic position on the Arabian peninsula. The invention of camel caravans, said to have been started by the great-grandfather of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), supported the growing merchant economy in Mecca and soon, the Qurasyh became a wealthy tribe, dominating the spice trade across the region. With the influx of wealth, came income inequality amongst the clans and tribes in Mecca, a relatively new phenomenon in the previously nomadic tribes whose tribal structure had ensured a near equitable distribution of resources.

Despite the newfound income inequality between the clans, these clans still provided the same protection and safety to their clanspeople, ensuring protection from other clans and sufficient resources to survive. At the time of the Prophet, 14 clans, subsets of the Qurasyh, inhabited Mecca and were divided amongst their own established quarters across the city.

THE 14 CLANS OF THE QURAISH

BANU AL-HARIST	BANU JUMAH	BANU NAUFAL
BANU 'AMIR	BANU MAKHZUM	BANU HASHIM
BANU 'ADI,	BANU ZUHRAH	BANU MUTHALIB
BANU TAIM	BANU ABDU DAR	BANU ASAD
BANU SAHM	BANU ABDU SHAMS	

The ancestral lineage of the clans followed the male line and each tribe or clan was named after male ancestors. This also made it easier to associate individuals with their clan and their clans-people, maintaining the tribal order that was so necessary to survive in the unforgiving desert. We will see in Lesson 2 just how important these protections were for individuals who dared to confront the radical injustices in Mecca in their efforts to spread the newest monotheistic religion in the region - Islam.

LESSON 2: LIFE OF THE PROPHET

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was born in the year 570 CE, often referred to as *'Amul-Fil*, or the Year of the Elephant, because the Abyssinian king, Abraha, marched on Mecca with a herd of war elephants with the intention of destroying the Kaaba. Muhammad's early life was tumultuous from the beginning. Six months prior to his birth, his father, Abdullah fell ill and died while returning from a trading caravan trip to Palestine. After his birth, in accordance with Bedouin tradition for those who lived in established settlements, Muhammad was sent to the desert to be cared for by a Bedouin family. However, when he was just 6 years old, his mother Amina passed away and he was sent to live with his paternal grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, the chieftain of the Banu Hashim clan. Two years later, upon Abd al-Muttalib's death, Muhammad began living with his paternal uncle, Abu Talib, the new leader of the Banu Hashim clan. The continuation of custody on the paternal side reflects the patrilineal nature of Arab society and the vital nature of tribal affiliations, which were important for social cohesion and individual safety.

As a young boy, Muhammad became immersed in the economic trade of the Quraish, traveling on caravan trips across Arabia with his uncle. He became well known as an honest merchant and established a commendable reputation for himself within Meccan society, acquiring the nickname, "the trusted one". Through his work as a merchant, Muhammad met his first wife, Khadijah, a successful businesswoman and widower in Mecca. Because of Muhammad's reputation as the trusted one, Khadijah hired him to lead caravan trips for her trading business. In his work as a merchant, Muhammad demonstrated impressive business skills and people skills, engaging with travelers he met along the way to understand their needs and their recommendations. Before long, Khadijah proposed marriage to him and they were married in 595 CE, when she was 40 years old and Muhammad was 25 years old. Little other than the births, and tragic deaths, of his children with Khadijah including Qasim, Zainab, Ruqayya, Umm Kulthum, and Fatima, is documented about the specific events that occurred in Muhammad's life over the next 15 years. However, his actions and disposition continued to earn him a reputation of an honest and pious man.

In 610 CE however, Muhammad's life and the life of those across Mecca would change dramatically. As a pious man, Muhammad would often retreat to the caves outside of Mecca to meditate and pray. One evening, during the month of Ramadan, Muhammad was meditating in a cave when he heard a voice commanding him to "*recite*".

The voice was that of the Archangel Gabriel, who embraced Muhammad tightly and spoke the first Qur'anic revelation to the future Prophet, "Read: In the name of Allah Who created, (1) Created man from a clot. (2) Read: And Allah is the Most Generous, (3) Who taught by the pen, (4) Taught man that which he knew not." (Surah Al-Alaq 1-4). Disturbed, Muhammed returned to his wife Khadijah, who consoled him before bringing him to her cousin, Waraqah ibn Nawfal, a *hanif*, or any early Arab who practiced monotheism.

"THERE HAS COME TO HIM THE GREATEST LAW THAT CAME TO MOSES; SURELY HE IS THE PROPHET OF THIS PEOPLE"

WARAQAH IBN NAWFAL

Well educated about the monotheism of the prophet Ibrahim, Waraqah was the first to attest to the Prophethood of Muhammad, confirming that he had indeed received a revelation from God.

After this first revelation, three years went by without another revelation from God. In despair, Muhammad turned further towards spiritual development and devotion to prayer. In 613 CE however, the revelations returned and with this return came a renewed confidence for Muhammad, who slowly began sharing these revelations with individuals he was close with in the community. Some converted while others mocked the invitation to join the new religion that was slowly making its way through Mecca. The majority of Meccan society however, remained indifferent and little changed in the first years following the first revelations of the Qur'an. For a time, Muhammad and the small community of Muslims practiced Islam with little trouble from the rest of Meccan society. Over time though, the revelations and their subsequent commands from God became more specific, clarifying one of the central tenets of Islam, *tawhid* or the oneness of God and denying the existence of other gods, specifically the three goddesses who were believed to be the daughters of *al-Lah*, the God that Meccans acknowledged as the Supreme God.

In accordance with these commands, Muhammad began to condemn idol worship and emphasized that *al-Lah* was not only the supreme God, which Meccans believed, but that *al-Lah* was the only God, which denied the existence of the dozens of other deities that the Meccans worshiped. These statements criticized the beliefs of the Meccans but they also criticized the beliefs of the thousands of other polytheists across Arabia, many who came to Mecca each year to worship their respective deities. The denial of the existence of these deities and the expressed impermissibility of worshiping these deities not only threatened the community's belief system, it threatened the entire financial empire the Quraish had built as a result of the annual pilgrimage to the Kaaba. With this new threat to their economic system that had enriched so many of the Qurasyh, prominent leaders across Meccan society demanded that Prophet Muhammad and his dissemination of Islamic teachings be stopped so they could begin to salvage their political and economic power they were afforded as a

result of guarding the Kaaba.

Abu Talib, the head of the Banu Hashim clan, and so by default, the protector of Muhammad, was approached by his fellow clan leaders, demanding that he put a stop to his nephew's proselytization. Abu Talib, although a polytheist, was bound by tribal duty and blood, to defend and protect his nephew. With this protection, no direct harm could come to Muhammad as the other tribes risked retribution if they were to attack a member of the Banu Hashim clan. This however, did not stop the Qurasyh from mocking Muhammad on the streets of Mecca or harassing him during prayer at the Kaaba. This protection also did not apply to the many Meccans who had converted to Islam who were enslaved or who were without a clan to protect them. In the next lesson, we'll take an in-depth look at specific instances of persecution that the Muslims faced at the hands of the Qurasyh but for context, it's important to highlight the story of the first martyr of Islam.

THE STORY OF SUMAYYAH BINT KHAYYAT

Sumayyah bint Khayyat was a Black woman from Abyssinia and a freed slave who commanded significant respect in her community in Mecca. She became one of the first 7 people to convert to Islam, alongside Khadijah and Abu Bakr. Her family, including her husband Yasir and her two sons Ammar and Abdullah, soon converted to Islam as well. Because of their status as freed slaves, meaning they did not have a clan to protect them nor did they have an "owner" to offer them protection as well, Sumayyah and her family were at risk of persecution from the Qurasyh. Over the course of a few years, Sumayyah was threatened and subsequently tortured by Abu Jahl, who demanded that she renounce Islam. During these torture sessions, it was reported that she would yell out "One, One" affirming the oneness of God. Ultimately though, Sumayyah was killed when Amr ibn Hisham attacked her and stabbed her to death. Upon her death, she became the first martyr of Islam, followed shortly after by her husband Yasir, who was also killed by one of the Qurasyh.

For five years, the Muslims in Mecca continued to endure increasing terror, torture, and violence directed at them, particularly at those who were lower class and without clan protections or wealth, like Prophet Muhammad, Khadijah, and Abu Bakr. Despite the internal siege, boycotts, starvation, and persistent persecution of the Muslims at the hands of the Qurasyh, the Muslims were able to survive with food and basic needs provided for with Khadijah's wealth. In 619 though, which would become to be known as the year of sorrows in the Prophet's life, all of that changed when Abu Talib, his uncle and protector died, as did his beloved wife Khadijah. Alongside the loss of his wife and uncle, Muhammad also lost the immunity and protection that he was afforded because of Abu Talib's position as chief of the

Banu Hashim clan. With the increased risk to his life, and the life of his fellow Muslims, Muhammad began making arrangements to flee Mecca and settle in *Yathrib*, which would come to be known as Medina.

After fleeing Mecca in 622, a migration now referred to as the *hijrah*, Muhammad began to settle in Medina, establishing a safe community for the Muslims alongside the indigenous population in Medina, who would come to be known as the helpers in Islamic scholarship for the assistance and refuge they provided to the refugees from Mecca. In Medina, Muhammad built a home for himself and his wives, which would also serve as a place of prayer and a community gathering

space, where Muhammad mediated issues between community members and shared new revelations from the Qur'an with the Muslims. With Muhammad as the leader of this new mixed society, we began to see the more political aspect of Islam arise, most evident through the Constitution of Medina, which established an alliance between the Muslims from Mecca, the Muslim converts in Medina, and the local Jewish tribes in the town.

Despite the alliance established by the Constitution of Medina and the relative harmony in Medina, the Muslims were still not safe from the constant attacks from Mecca on Muslim travelers and pilgrims. In the later years of his life, Prophet Muhammad, now a religious and political leader, also assumed the title of military leader, commanding the Muslim army in battles with Mecca and their allies, defending the Muslim community and their right to practice their faith and at the same time, expanding allyship for Muslims in the region. This new role for Muhammad, as military leader for Muslims and the interfaith community of Medina, was supported by a number of verses in the Qur'an, which we will assess later on in the curriculum.

In 628, the Muslims attempted to perform hajj but stopped at the border of Mecca, where the sacred territory began. There, they drew up a treaty with the Meccans, which would allow them to perform hajj the following year. However, when the time came for the pilgrimage they were attacked by Meccan allies and the treaty that had been made the previous year was dissolved. Finally, in 632, led by Muhammad, the Meccans successfully arrived in Mecca for hajj, defeating the Qurasyh and declaring immunity for those that had

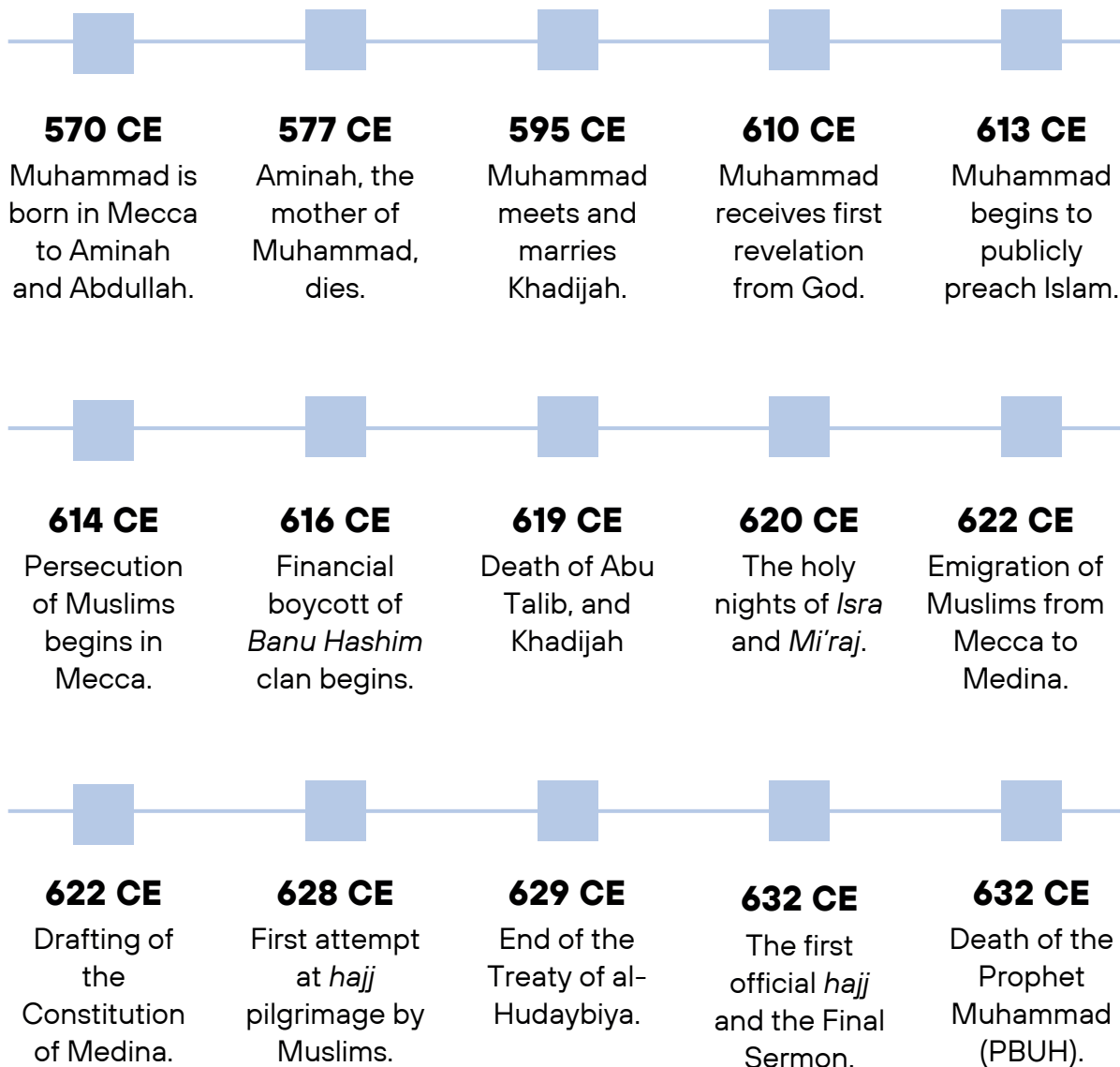
THE CONSTITUTION OF MEDINA

- Written between 622 CE and 624 CE.
- Drafted by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) upon his arrival in Medina.
- Established the collective responsibility of 9 tribes, including the group of Muslim Qurashyi refugees, to protect each other
- Sought to end inter-tribal fighting and establish a multireligious state.
- Built upon the idea of one community of diverse groups living under the divine sovereignty of one God.
- In addition to protecting the religious freedom of non-Muslims it also stated these groups had the same political and cultural rights as Muslims.

engaged in battle against the Muslims. At Mount Arafat in Mecca, Muhammad delivered a farewell sermon to the Muslims, offering advice and commandments for them to follow in their faith. Later that year, in June 632, the Prophet fell ill and passed away at the home he shared with his wife Aisha, with his head resting in her lap. His last words were reported to have been:

O ALLAAH, (WITH) THE HIGHER COMPANIONS

A TIMELINE OF THE PROPHET'S LIFE



LESSON 3: ISLAMIC VALUES

When an individual converts to Islam or a Muslim child begins to learn about the religion they were born into, the lessons they are taught typically include the five pillars of Islam and various rules associated with the Hadith and the Sunnah (i.e. no gambling, dressing modestly). They're encouraged to read the Quran and study the Hadith and attend the mosque to pray and listen to the imam's khutbahs to learn from the "experts". They'll learn about the practices of Islam, what it encourages and what it forbids but rarely will they learn about the kind of person that Islam encourages you to be. In this lesson, we'll delve into Islamic values, including the *maqasid al-Sharia* and 9 core Islamic values, the scholarly basis for them and the protections they offer to individuals, values that are far too often neglected in basic Islamic education and scholarship.

THE 5 PILLARS



SHAHADA



PRAYER



ZAKAT



FASTING



PILGRIMAGE

Maqasid al-Shariah translates literally to purpose or objective (*maqasid*) of the way (*shariah*). It is commonly used by Muslim scholars to explain the wisdom, divine intentions, and moral concepts behind various scholarly rulings that Islamic law is based upon but it can also be used by lay people to better understand how to implement Quranic teachings in their everyday life. Ultimately, the *maqasid al-Shariah* serves to reinforce the idea that each individual is a responsible member of society and as a result, has an obligation to act justly. It ensures that a community can achieve social and economic justice in their society, through individual and community responsibility. Utilizing the *maqasid al-Shariah* to understand Islam ultimately ensures that Muslims have a holistic and intersectional view of life. The *maqasid al-Shariah* consists of five key points: the protection of life (*nafs*), protection of faith (*deen*), protection of intellect (*aql*), protection of lineage (*nasb*), and protection of property (*ma'al*).

PROTECTION OF FAITH (DEEN)

- Religious Tolerance
- Mutual Care
- Freedom of Religion & Belief

PROTECTION OF LIFE (NAFS)

- Spiritual & emotional wellbeing
- Dignity for all
- Mental peace & happiness

PROTECTION OF INTELLECT (AQL)

- Freedom of Expression
- Right to education
- Freedom of Consciousness

PROTECTION OF LINEAGE (NASB)

- Protection of children
- Emotional wellbeing of children
- Healthy environment to raise children

PROTECTION OF WEALTH (MA'AL)

- Right to preserve wealth through lawful livelihood and trades
- Prohibition of theft
- Eradication of poverty

In the remaining portion of Lesson 3, we will review the 8 core Islamic values that we have identified as being vital for long time practicing Muslims and new converts alike to understand and incorporate in their daily lives.

Lā ikrāha fī al-dīn | Religious Freedom

This Islamic principle that endows individuals with the right to make their own decisions and choices, as long as it does no harm to others is enshrined in Quran 2:256, which states "*there is no compulsion in religion*".

This freedom extends to all individuals, regardless of their religious affiliation, and affords them freedom from coercion of any kind, but especially religious coercion.

We understand this to mean that Muslims cannot compel an individual to become a Muslim nor can they punish an individual who chooses to leave Islam. This latter point is important because we so often see individuals in power using religion as an excuse to regulate the bodies and lifestyles of individuals whose choices differ from the religious beliefs of those in power. *Lā ikrāha fī al-dīn* however, affords Muslims with the right to make choices of their own free will, including decisions around their bodily autonomy, reproductive autonomy, and gender presentation.

Hurma | Inviolability of the human body

An ancient Arabic term signifying the sacred inviolability of the human body, extending to the physical, social, and emotional safety of all individuals, both living and dead. The goal of *hurma* is ultimately to protect the dignity and honor of all individuals, which according to this principle, supported by Quranic verses, is a right that all human beings are entitled to.

This sacredness of the human body is further underscored by a Hadith recorded during Prophet Muhammad's farewell sermon. *"Verily, Allah the Exalted has made sacred your lives, your wealth, and your honor except by right of justice, just as your day, your city, and your month are sacred. Have I not delivered the message?"* (Sahih Bukhari 6403). In this Hadith, Prophet Muhammad compares the sacredness of Mecca, the month of Hijjah, and the day of Arafat to the sacredness of the human body. When we understand just how sacred the inviolability of the human body that is invoked by *hurma* is, then we understand that Islam prohibits bodily harm, humiliation, and disfigurement of any kind, including rape, sexual abuse, gender based violence, harassment, and female genital mutilation.

Karamah al-insan | Human Dignity

The Quranic concept of human dignity, or *karamah*, affirms that God has *"dignified the children of Adam"* (Quran 17:70), affording dignity as the right of every person regardless of identity. This dignity is extended to an individual's body, a divine miracle that people are tasked with caring for. Because of the miracle that is the human body, God has commanded that all individuals maintain dignity over their body, preserving and caring for it as they see fit.

"And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference" (Quran 17:70)

In the same verse highlighted above, God states that humans, regardless of their background or circumstances, are entitled to dignity. Using the Islamic value of *karamah al-insan* and its support in both the Quran and Hadith, we can infer that torture, insults, humiliation discrimination, and extremism are all prohibited in Islam because they violate a person's human dignity.

Rahmah | Compassion

Rahmah, the Arabic word for compassion and mercy, comes from the root word *rahm*, or womb, and is closely tied to the love and the compassion a mother feels for her children. As an Islamic value, *rahmah* is often used to describe the all encompassing divine compassion and concern that God has for humanity, providing the source of compassion on earth. In theology, it is a theoretical way of understanding Islamic scholarship and text but it can also be used as a concept that can be practically applied to everything that we as human beings do.

As Muslims, we are tasked with taking the *rahmah* that God has put on this earth and applying it to our treatment of ourselves and others and to our social, political, and economic systems. This means showing empathy and having sympathy for our fellow humans and ensuring that the system that we live in is one that is as compassionate as possible. It is often said in Islamic texts that having a heart that is compassionate implies one that is spiritually well, a point underscored by the Prophet in the following Hadith.

"The Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said that it is more meritorious to feed a hungry widow than to pray whole night."

The concept of *Rahmah* however, is not limited to the human world because according to the Quran, God designed humans to be caretakers of this earth. Therefore, Muslims are required to apply *rahmah* to our treatment of the natural world and to animals. This application of *rahmah* is demonstrated by one of the rules that Muslims must follow - that when slaughtering an animal, its fellow species must not hear its cries as this causes them duress. It is also underscored by two Hadiths from the Prophet:

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) spoke so much about compassion and mercy that his companions felt compelled to respond by saying: 'but we are compassionate and merciful to our spouses and children.' The Prophet (PBUH) clarified what he meant by saying: 'What I mean is rahmah in an absolute sense, towards each and everything - including the entire universe (the animals, the plants and the environment).'

'O Messenger of God, will we be rewarded for being compassionate to animals?' He said: 'Yes, there is a reward for showing goodness and compassion to every living creature.'

Ijtihad | Independent Interpretation

Ijtihad is less an Islamic value rather than an Islamic practice but overtime, it has become a practice that is increasingly weaponized by jurists who claim the right to practice *ijtihad* is exclusive to a specific few, becoming a core value to those who defend everyone's right to *ijtihad*. The practice of *ijtihad* refers to the independent interpretation of the Qur'an, Hadith, and *ijma* (scholarly and community consensus). In early Islam, this right to independent thinking was afforded to all individuals. However, beginning in the 16th century, this right was slowly taken away by Sunni jurists who stated that only those with the highest qualifications could practice *ijtihad*. In addition to the fact that this was contrary to earlier Islamic practices, it also refutes the fact that Islam is not a hierarchical religion, in contrast to the Catholic Church, and therefore *ijtihad* should be accessible and practiced by all. This accessibility is especially important in the 21st century because *ijtihad* serves as a tool for understanding Islam in a way that fits the needs and challenges of a society by articulating a compassionate and truly traditional way of understanding Islam.

Athbata al-'adl | Justice

Quran 55:7 reads "God raised up the heavens and established the Scales of balance", interpreted as "God established justice" or *athbata al-'adl*. This concept of balance means upholding the rights that are due to all individuals and adequately taking the rights due to you. Like the other Islamic values that we have covered, *athbata al-'adl* does not only apply to the practice of individuals, but applies to society as a whole. Justice is a universal principle in Islam, a principle that when neglected, denies prosperity to individuals and nation states. Zakat, one of the five pillars of Islam we covered previously, is just one of the ways to ensure justice in the economic system. In the Sunnah, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have declared that all people must support the weak and help the oppressed. And as custodians of the earth, humans have a responsibility to ensure there is justice both within and outside the human world.

The universality of this concept also means that we as Muslims are not only required to pursue justice, but that we have an obligation to stand up in the face of injustice that others are subjected to. This obligation to stand up to injustice is not a blanket right, as the Quran commands that Muslims must be wise about our actions as we stand up to injustice to ensure that these actions do not backfire and promote further injustice or evil. Additionally, as Muslims we are obligated to manifest justice and oppose injustice for all people, regardless of their belief system.

Qist | Fairness

If *athbata al-‘adl* is a universal principle, *qist*, or fairness, is the practical application of the concept of the universal principle of justice. *Qist*, which appears 27 times in the Quran, is interpreted in a number of different ways, including fairness, equity, or giving others their due share. It entails a sense of fairness and equality in the practical distribution of love, resources, land, peace, and wealth. Like the *maqasid al-Sharia*, it is presented as a specific social and economic goal for Muslim societies that sees the fair distribution of goods, the application of distributive justice, the fulfillment of obligations to others, and the reconciliation after a dispute.

Masalih Mursalah | Public Benefits

Masalih mursalah is defined as the public benefits or interests that are not mentioned in the Quran or Hadith but are accepted by Islamic law principles. The goal of *masalah mursalah*, similar to that of *maqasid al-shariah*, is to protect humanity and the issues of the public interest. There are three conditions that *masalih mursalah* must fulfill in order to be considered acceptable. These conditions require that *masalih mursalah* must be consistent with the objective of Sharia, be rational, and must be to avert harm rather than fulfilling personal desires. Examples of decision making that considers public welfare in Islamic history include Abu Bakr’s compilation of the Quran into a single volume and his decision to not use violence against those who did not pay their zakat.

Lā ikrāha fī al-dīn
Freedom of religion

Ijtihad
Independent interpretation

Hurma
Sacred inviolability of the body

Athbata al-‘adl
Justice

Karamah al-insan
Human dignity

Qist
Fairness

Rahmah
Compassion

Masalih Mursalah
Public benefit or interest

LESSON 4: HUMAN RIGHTS & ISLAM

Human rights, as understood by the international community, in particular legislating bodies, is defined as the "*rights that are inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status*" (United Nations). These human rights are enshrined in human rights documents, state constitutions, and by legislative and judicial bodies. It is something that individuals are entitled to on the basis of these legal documents and the decisions of political bodies and individuals. In Islam, however, rights are not given by any authority, rather they are bestowed by God and apply to every single individual on earth, regardless of religious affiliation, race, or language. Because these rights are conferred by God, no one, Muslim or non-Muslim, has the right to amend or withdraw the rights of another. Like all religious teachings, this core Islamic teaching is often neglected or violated but it is a vital teaching to address when it comes to learning about human rights if there is any chance of returning to a traditional interpretation and practice of Islam.

This idea, that God and God alone can give or withdraw the human rights of an individual, is a part of the most fundamental teaching of Islam, the concept of *tawhid*. *Tawhid*, as we learned previously, is the assertion that there is one God and that They are the only God. *Tawhid* not only establishes monotheism but it also asserts the equality of all individuals because each of us is a creation of God and therefore deserving of the rights that God has bestowed on all Their creations. The phrase that Muslims understand to mean human rights, *huqaq al'ibad*, literally translates to the rights of the servants of God.

Justice, or *athbata al-'adl*, which is a core part of human rights, is also central to *tawhid* because only God can determine justice in the afterlife, therefore assertions that the actions, behaviors, or identities of an individuals will condemn them to hell, are a direct violation of *tawhid*. Likewise, the behavior of many individuals, in particular political and religious leaders, who force others to submit to them and blindly follow their rule, also constitutes a violation of *tawhid* as Muslims are taught to follow God and God's rule alone, rather than the rule as defined by Muslim scholars from centuries ago. It is important to emphasize that these actions are indeed a violation of Islamic teachings because the basic human rights established in the Qur'an are not simply suggestions or recommendations for individuals to follow. They are commands (*huqaq*) from God that individuals are required to fulfill, for both themselves and for those in their community. As Muslims, we believe that the Quran, and the commands included in the text, is the word of God and should be read, analyzed, and

followed accordingly. It helps, however, to better understand the word of God if one can understand the time period and the events that occurred to establish the context in which the various Quranic verses were revealed. For example, the verses that were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) while he and his fellow Muslims were undergoing persecution and torture at the hands of the Qurasyh in Mecca are known as verses "*for all times*". On the other hand, the verses revealed while the Prophet (PBUH) and the Muslims were safely established in Medina and building an interfaith community while simultaneously defending their sovereignty are considered to be specific to the Muslims at the time. By reviewing the early days of Islam in Mecca and the societal development of Medina, we gain a better understanding of why Islam is so oriented towards social justice and human rights.

The social and political system of Mecca at the time of the Prophet, as we learned about in Lesson 1, was deeply unequal with severe limitations on the rights of marginalized individuals, especially those from minority groups. Despite the later proliferation of Islam and the political dominance that Muslim leaders came to acquire, Islam was initially practiced by people who were inherently disenfranchised, lacking any sort of political or economic power in the first years of the religion. The most marginalized of the Muslims, including enslaved people and those unaffiliated with tribes, were also the most vulnerable to attacks by the Qurasyh. The story of Summayah bint Khayyat, shared in Lesson 2, depicted the constant violations of human rights that Muslims were subjected to. Bilal ibn Rabah, another enslaved individual who converted to Islam, was also subjected to torture at the hands of the man who claimed him as property. According to Islamic history, Umayyah ibn Khalaf, his slave master, would whip Bilal in public and wrap him in a cow's hide, chaining him up, leaving him to suffer under the hot desert sun as punishment for his conversion to Islam. Eventually freed by Abu Bakr's purchase of him from Umayyah, Bilal would later go on to be a key figure in the Muslim community in Medina, becoming the first Muezzin at Al Masjid an Nabawi. The trajectory of Bilal's story demonstrates how the social injustices and human rights violations that the Muslims were subjected to would impact how they would later develop a society from the ground up, a society that is rooted in equality and justice.

After Hijra, with the Muslims safely established in Medina, a new social system was introduced to the community, combining both religion and social life. Medina became a nonhierarchical community state as opposed to the political state of Mecca, which was dominated by a political tribal elite. The society that developed out of Medina was a community unlike anything the Arabs had ever experienced. Tribal affiliations, gender inequality, marginalized individuals destined to servitude were deemed un-Islamic and therefore impossible to condone in the new society of Medina. Societal relationships and identity were instead built around religious affiliations, as enshrined in the Constitution of Medina, which outlined the civic duties and responsibilities of all individuals who lived in Medina. The Jews and Christians of Medina were subjected to the same taxes as the Muslims but they were also referred to as the *dhimmi*s, or the protected ones, denoting the human rights they shared with the Muslims. Their freedom of religion and belief was also enshrined in the Constitution of Medina, which granted them the right to practice their

without fear of violence, harm or persecution. The rights enshrined in the Constitution of Medina offer insight into the changes that came about in Arabian society as a result of the introduction of Islam. Next, we'll take a deep look into the differences between Pre-Islamic Arabia and Post Islamic Arabia

Pre Islamic Arabia	Post Islamic Arabia
Revenge in the name of manliness (<i>murū'ah</i>) demonstrated an individuals morals	Essence of morality was derived from moral responsibility to self & community.
Tribal and blood ties were of the utmost importance.	An individual's personhood, governed by compassion & justice was most important.
A small aristocracy controlled the community's power and wealth, resulting in an unequal distribution of wealth.	<i>Zakat</i> was introduced to strive for a more equitable distribution of wealth across the community.
Infanticide, especially for baby girls, was a common practice.	Infanticide was outlawed.
Women, children, and orphans had few rights and were often financially dependent on male benefactors.	Explicit rights mandated by the Quran were given to women, children & orphans.
Slavery was common and socially acceptable.	Economic and social incentives to enslave people were removed, however slavery was not eliminated.
Education was limited to a privilege portion of the population.	Education and the pursuit of knowledge was a right that all people were entitled to.
Women were unable to leave their husbands or divorce.	Women obtained the right to separate and divorce their husbands.
Rich individuals lent money to poor Meccans with high interest rates.	Interest on loans and predatory banking was forbidden.

As seen in the chart above, significant shifts took place in the aftermath of Islam's introduction to Arabia but how can Islam's application of human rights be understood on a more general and globalized level? Numerous scholars and theologians have sought to frame specific principles of Islamic human rights but for the sake of brevity, we have selected the principles written by Anis Ahmad in *Human Rights: An Islamic Perspective*.

Unity of Life	The Unity of all Life is represented by the concept of <i>tawhid</i> , which explains the oneness of God and therefore the unity of all Their creations. As a human rights principle, this unity derived from <i>tawhid</i> signifies that coherence and cohesiveness, not conflict, should be the objective of life.
Justice	Justice and equity, or <i>adl</i> , requires that all individuals act justly toward the people they encounter in their life, whether they be strangers or family members. It also requires that individuals act justly towards themselves, honoring their own rights that God has granted to them.
Protection of Life	The sanctity of life, underscored in Qur'an 5:32 " <i>Whosoever killed a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption into earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind</i> " demands the preservation, protection, and promotion of all life.
Religious Freedom	Qur'an 2:256 " <i>there is no compulsion in religion</i> " mandates the practices of religious freedom and tolerance for all Muslims. As a human right, we understand pluralism and religious freedom to encourage inter-religious harmony and equality of faiths, the basis for the development of a civilization.
Intellect	<i>Aql</i> describes the rational conduct that all humans are required to practice, conduct that can only be achieved through education and the pursuit of knowledge. As a principle of human rights, <i>aql</i> demands that all individuals be afforded the right to education and meaningful experiences, formal or informal, so as to contribute to society while promoting peaceful dialogue and interaction.
Honor & Dignity	The insistence on the honor and dignity afforded to individuals, particularly the children of a society. This principle requires that children be dignified so as to sustain a healthy and successful society.
Ownership	The right to ownership (<i>mal</i>) of resources and property, including the equal access of this ownership of resources for all individuals of society. <i>Mal</i> also forbids the deprivation of an individual ownership of a resource or a property and the deprivation of an individual's right to economic independence.

LESSON 5: 1.8 BILLION WAYS

Today there are about 1.8 billion Muslims in the world, making up nearly a quarter of the world's population. Unlike the 7th century where Muslims were practically isolated on the Arab peninsula, Muslims can now be found on every continent and in nearly every corner of the world. In Lesson 5, the last lesson of Unit 1, we'll look at how Islam spread across the globe, becoming the global religion it is today and the diverse identities and beliefs of global Muslims, whose diversity demonstrates there are 1.8 billion ways to be a Muslim.

Islam is practiced by one of the most, if not the most, demographically diverse populations across the world. But how did people from Malaysia to Nigeria to Serbia to China begin to practice Islam? In the aftermath of the death of the Prophet (PBUH), came centuries of Islamic expansion, dominated by caliphs, or leaders of the ummah, who led Muslim armies to new lands, bringing their political power, but also this new religion of Islam. These empires, including the Umayyads, the Abbasids, and the Ottomans, established dynasties across land previously colonized by empires, like the Byzantines but also across territories previously untouched by outside forces.

In addition to the military conquests, Islam also spread out from the Arab peninsula through missionary trips, merchant voyages, pilgrimages, and nautical adventures. Some of these influences, like the use of trade and merchant voyages, were isolated from military campaigns while others, like missionary trips, sometimes preceded the expansion of the empire. Through the expansion of Islam, which ultimately touched 3 continents, sophisticated centers of culture and science emerged, whose creations and inventions still contribute to our world today.

Some individuals were converted by force, either by the new Muslim caliph or after the adoption of Islam by their leader, while others willingly accepted the religion and its beliefs. As Islam spread to these diverse lands, the way the religion was practiced evolved as well, mingling with cultural beliefs and practices of the new lands it was introduced to. The language in which Islam was predominantly practiced, Arabic, also shifted, with translations of the Qur'an becoming available in Malay, Persian, and Turkish. These linguistic and cultural intricacies helped to further solidify Muslims as the predominant or minority population in the regions listed below. In the chart below, we see examples of how Islam was introduced, or spread to what are now some of the most populous Muslim countries in the world.

Country / Region	Timeframe	Primary Method of Introduction
Palestine	7th CE	Caliph Umar led a siege of Jerusalem, ultimately defeating the Orthodox Patriarch.
North Africa	Mid 7th CE	Military conquest of Egypt, followed by Tunisia and Morocco and missionary trips.
The Horn of Africa	Mid 7th CE	Early Muslims sought refuge from the Qurasyh in modern day Somalia and settled in modern Ethiopia.
East Africa	9th - 10th CE	Muslims established port colonies off the coast of East Africa, engaging in the slave trade with locals.
West Africa	7th - 9th CE	Trade networks that connected West and North Africa brought Islam to West Africa through merchants.
Persia	7th CE	A military campaign by the Rashidun Caliphate resulted in the conquest of Persia.
Central Asia	7th - 9th CE	Missionary efforts led by the Umayyad caliphate introduced Islam to the region, especially Afghanistan.
India	7th CE	Islam was introduced to the Indian subcontinent through merchants on trading voyages.
Southeast Asia	9th CE	Muslim traders first introduced Islam to Southeast Asia but Sufi orders encouraged the spread of Islam.
Iberian Peninsula	8th CE	A Berber led army invaded the Iberian Peninsula bringing Islam.

Today, most of the regions above have flourishing Muslim populations, while others like the Iberian Peninsula, saw the demise of the Muslim population at the hands of imperial expansion. Although originating in the Arab Peninsula, Indonesia is now the most populous Muslim country and 60% of the world's Muslims live in Asia. Population experts have determined that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world as a result of a high birth rate across the Muslim world and new converts in locations like the United States and Latin America. And like the way Islam spread across the globe, the way that the global Muslim population practices Islam and understands the Islamic belief system can be described as nothing but diverse.

As a result of the rupture that took place in the Muslim community after the death of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), two prominent sects emerged in the leadership struggle for the position of the caliph. Those who followed Abu Bakr, the father of Aisha (RA) and the dear friend of the Prophet (PBUH), and the subsequent caliphs came to be known as Sunni Muslims. Shi'a Muslims on the other hand, believed that Ali, the husband of Fatima and the cousin of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), was the rightful caliph.*

From these two distinct sects, various schools of thought have emerged, each with their own understanding of *usul al-fiqh*, or principles of jurisprudence. The different interpretations of jurisprudence have resulted in four different schools of Sunni thought, the Hanafi, Hanbali, Shafi, and Maliki schools, and three different schools of Shi'a thought, the Zaidi, Ismaili, and Twelver schools. In addition to the two major sects of Islam, other schools of thought and sects have emerged since the original Sunni-Shi'a fissure, as a result of different religious leaders and conservative movements. These include the Kharijites, who were originally supporters of Imam Ali and his caliphate before turning on him and implementing the practice of *takfir*, or the practice of claiming another Muslim is not a Muslim and punishing them for this.

Other notable movements include the Wahhabi movement, an offshoot of the Hanbali school of thought, the Alawites, a minority group of Twelver Shi'as, and the Ahmadiyya, an offshoot of Sunni Islam which originated in Pakistan but has sizable populations in the United States and Canada as well. Certain groups, like the Nation of Islam, a movement that started in the United States' Black community, are not considered offshoots of the two main sects of Islam and operate as separate entities. Sufis, or Muslims who represent the mystical dimension of Islam, which focuses on esotericism and the unification with God while here on earth, can be found in both the Sunni and Shi'a sects. The table below demonstrates the relationships between these various sects and their offshoots, while highlighting the geographic diversity and distribution of who follows these particular schools of thought or movements that all fall under the religion of Islam.

**As this lesson seeks to provide a brief overview of the Islam today, we will not go into the details of the various caliphs and their struggles to lead the Muslim world but additional resources are included in the syllabus that offer excellent insight into sectarian divides in Islam and their historical origins.*

MUSLIMS OF THE WORLD

SUNNI

Hanafi

Turkey, Syria,
Upper Egypt

Hanbali

Saudi Arabia, Qatar

Shafi

Indonesia, Saudi
Arabia, Yemen,
Jordan, Palestine,
Syria, Malaysia,
East Africa,
Somalia, West
Egypt

Maliki

North & West
Africa, UAE, Kuwait,
Lower Egypt

KHARIJITES

Ibadi

Oman

Wahabi

Saudi Arabia, Qatar,
UAE

Alawite

Syria, Lebanon

SHI'A

Zaidi

Yemen, Saudi
Arabia

Ismaili

Iran, Indo-Pakistan,
Canada, Lebanon

Twelvers

Iran, Azerbaijan,
Bahrain, Iraq

UNAFFILIATED

Ahmadi

Pakistan, United
States, Canada

Sufis

Senegal, Tunisia,
Morocco, Turkey

Nation of Islam

United States

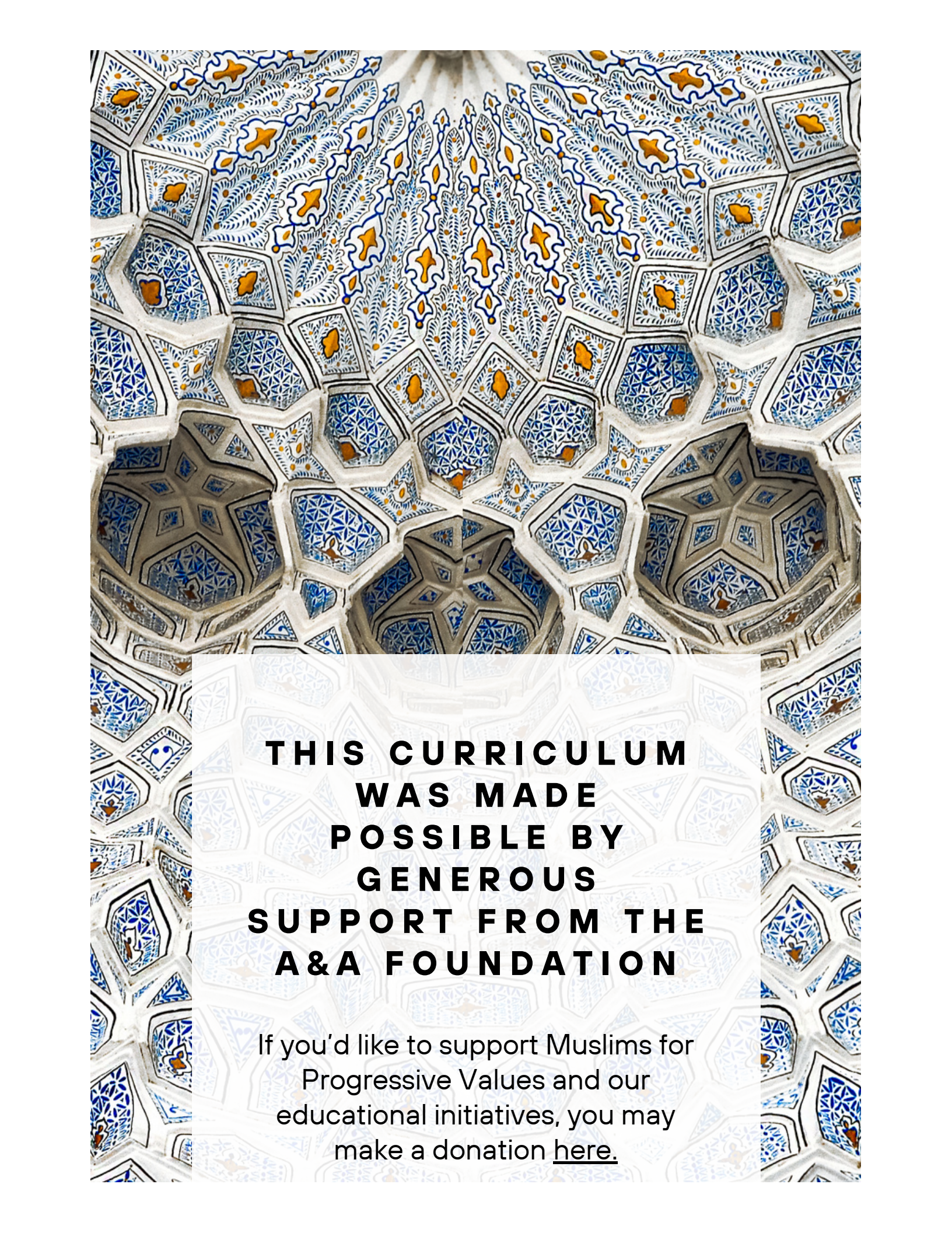
Alawite

Syria, Lebanon

As demonstrated in the chart above, the diversity of the global Muslim community extends beyond geographic borders and is defined by belief systems. Muslims today are categorized by themselves and by other Muslims according to the schools of thought they identify with but ultimately all it means to be a Muslim is their affirmation and assertion that they follow the religion of Islam. Tragically, we often see specific groups deny the existence of legitimacy of other groups who make up the global Muslim community. In later units, we'll review these practices and why they are impermissible in Islam but here, we want to acknowledge that not all Muslim individuals celebrate the diversity of beliefs and practices within the Islamic faith. These disputes are a far cry from the Islam that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) shared with the early Meccans and that is taught in the Qur'an and that remains in the sanctity of Shariah but it is an undeniable fact that the Muslim community is diverse and grows more diverse by the year.

1.8 BILLION WAYS

The title of Lesson 5 of Unit 1 depicts the lesson that we hope readers will take away from Unit 1 and the Progressive Islam Curriculum as a whole - that while common values and beliefs unite us, there are ultimately 1.8 billion Muslims on this earth, meaning there are 1.8 billion ways to be a Muslim. As we learned about in this chapter and as we will review in later chapters, Islam is a deeply personal religion that teaches individuals to submit to God and to God alone. For centuries though, there has been a significant effort to shift individuals away from this submission and towards a submission to a political identity as Muslim that aligns with a specific group's or individual's political or self-serving ambitions. What we hope individuals will take out of this curriculum, particularly those who identify as progressive, is that there is no one way to be a Muslim or to practice the religion of Islam. Rather, Islam exists to provide a way for those who identify as Muslims to claim their God given human rights while ensuring those in their community have these same rights.



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