



EDMONTON COUNCIL OF
MUSLIM COMMUNITIES



Towards Understanding Muslims in Canada

**2nd Edition
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Edmonton, Alberta**



*Read in the name of your Lord Who created,
He created man from a clot,
Read and your Lord is Most Bountiful,
Who taught with the pen,
Taught mankind what he knew not.*

Qur'an 96:1-5

INTRODUCTION

“Towards Understanding Muslims in Canada” is prepared by the Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities, an umbrella organization of Muslim communities in Edmonton. Our aim is to assist non-Muslims in their interaction with Muslims and to foster greater understanding and harmony.

This introduction is by no means comprehensive and readers are directed to further readings to enhance their understanding of Islam, not only as a faith, but as a civilization which has made significant contributions in, the sciences, medicine, arts, architecture, and culture.



Established in 1938, Al-Rashid Mosque in Edmonton was the first mosque built in Canada.

Muslims constitute nearly a fifth of the world's people. They comprise a majority of the population in some 44 countries. There are over 1 billion Muslims worldwide with an estimated of 7 million Muslims living in the United States and about 650,000 living in Canada. Approximately 35,000 Muslims reside in Edmonton.

One of the most widespread misconceptions is that Islam is the religion of the Arabs. The reality is quite the opposite; not all Muslims are Arabs and by the same token not all Arabs are Muslims. In fact, Arabs represent only about twenty per cent of the Muslim population worldwide. Countries with the largest populations of Muslims are Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Egypt, and China.



Al-Rashid Mosque relocated to better serve a growing community but, the original building still stands in Fort Edmonton Park.

The Canadian Muslim community comes from all over the world, comprising a vast range of nationalities and cultures.

Muslims have been an integral part of the Canadian cultural mosaic for over a century and continue to make important, positive contributions to Canadian civil society.

The Muslim community in Edmonton in particular reflects this rich diversity, which has been a historical reality within Islam over its 1,400 years of existence. The plurality of its cultures, ethnicities and religious traditions is beyond the scope of this booklet. Thus, the basic beliefs, rituals and practices within the ethnically and culturally rich Muslim community are briefly outlined.

Islam is the third of the three major *Western* and monotheistic religions along with Christianity and Judaism. For Muslims, Islam is more than just a religion; it is a way of life that values justice and the pursuit of knowledge to ensure human development and growth and to mitigate ignorance that often contributes to feelings of contempt, hatred, and violence in societies.



The University of Alberta Muslim Students' Association built the Muslim Community of Edmonton mosque in the 1980's.

Islam is principally concerned with the creation of a just and equitable community in which all members, particularly the most weak and vulnerable are protected and respected. This is unfortunately not the image of Islam or Muslims that is prevalent in the minds of many today.

This guide is an attempt to outline some of the basic concepts about your fellow Muslim citizens and their faith and a starting point for further research.

And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are Signs for those who know.

Qur'an 30:22

UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

FOUNDATION OF MUSLIM PRACTICE

Islam is founded upon five cardinal pillars that are described below:

1. **Declaration of Faith**—The two part declaration of faith professing the oneness of God and that Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him (pbuh), is the Messenger of God and the final prophet,
2. **Daily Prayers**—Prescribed prayers throughout the day - prayers are a direct link between the worshipper and God,
3. **Alms**—Muslim are required to give a percentage of their wealth to the needy every year,
4. **Fasting**—Fasting (abstaining from food and drink) during daylight hours in the lunar month of Ramadan as an act of self-restraint and to move one's attention from the material world to the spiritual realm, and
5. **Pilgrimage**—If one is able, make a pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime. This annual event, also known as *Haji*, attracts more than 2 million people to Mecca each year.



Muslims pray towards this mosque (the 'Kaaba') in Mecca, the city of the annual pilgrimage.

ESSENTIAL MUSLIM BELIEFS

- Belief in the Creator, the One, Unique, Incomparable, Most Compassionate God,
- Belief in all God's Prophets and Messengers through whom His revelations were brought to humanity, starting with Adam and including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elias,



Jonah, John the Baptist, Jesus, and Muhammad, (peace be upon them)

- Belief in all God's Original Scriptures (e.g., Torah, Gospel of Jesus, Psalms of David, and the Qur'an),
- Belief in individual accountability for one's actions on the Day of Judgement and eternal life after death,
- Belief in the Angels created by God.

DAILY MUSLIM PRACTICES

- Regular worship, both individual and congregational,
- Congregational prayer on Fridays,
- Ethical behaviour and good manners,
- Developing one's intellect,
- Physical cleanliness is an essential part of Muslim worship,
- Abstaining from pork, intoxicants, and gambling,
- Being of service to the family and the community,
- Respecting parents and elders,
- Giving of one's time, skills, knowledge, and money to benefit the disadvantaged and those in need.

By the Time.

Verily humanity is in loss,

Except those who believe, and do good, and enjoin on each other truth, and enjoin on each other patience.

Qur'an 103:1-3

LIVING THE VALUES

The Muslim community in Canada strives to live by the values in the Qur'an and the examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), such as his concern for the poor, the weak and the sick. In support of these values, the Edmonton Muslim community supports various initiatives locally, nationally and internationally over and above those done by Muslims



individually. These include:

- An annual *Eid* dinner for the needy in the inner-city,
- Donations to various local charities such as food banks, public libraries and other institutions that support disadvantaged youth and families,
- Annual World Partnership Walk that supports sustainable development in many third world countries,
- Disaster relief and recovery development projects, such as in Iraq, Afghanistan and the 2004 Tsunami ravaged countries, and
- Participation in anti-hate Edmonton police task force.

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteousness is this that one should believe in God and the last day and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and give away wealth out of love for Him to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observe proper worship and pay the poor-due. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere, the God-fearing,

Qur'an 2:177

BRANCHES OF ISLAM

The two major branches of Muslims are *Sunni* and *Shi'a* (*Shiite*). While these branches hold similar beliefs and practices, there are differences in the interpretation of spiritual authority, Islamic jurisprudence and rituals. Customs and cultures may emphasize or de-emphasize certain practices within the ethnically vast Muslim community.

IMPORTANT MUSLIM CELEBRATIONS

There are two major annual festivals, which are reckoned on the lunar calendar:

- *Eid-El-Fitr*, "Celebration of the Feast" which takes place

- after the month of fasting (Ramadan), and
- *Eid El-Adha*, “Celebration of the Sacrifice” which takes place after the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. The festival commemorates the sacrifice made by Prophet Abraham (pbuh).

Some Muslims also commemorate the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday (pbuh), which acts as a reminder of the wonderful legacy he left behind.

PLACES OF WORSHIP

The Muslim places of worship in English are typically called mosques, the Arabic equivalent is *masjid*, a word that means a place of prostration. Other names include *jammahs* and *jamat khana*s. Besides being a place of worship, these centres are also used for community events, education, promoting social and cultural activities.



Diversity in places of worship in Edmonton:
 Belle Rive Jamat Khana (top),
 Markaz ul-Islam (middle),
 Ithna'asheri Jamat (bottom)

VISITING MUSLIMS

- It is a common practice to remove one’s shoes before entering Muslim places of worship, such as mosques. This also applies in many Muslim homes where shoes are typically removed to ensure cleanliness since Muslims use their homes to pray.
- Unless they are related, some Muslims may decline to shake hands with an individual of the opposite sex. This is meant as a sign of respect, and non-Muslims should not be offended if this happens.
- In many Muslim cultures, it is not acceptable for a man to be alone with an unrelated woman, and vice-versa.



Therefore, if a man or woman is home alone they may not invite you in. This is not meant to be inhospitable but in keeping with this social custom.

- Food or drink is often offered to guests; it is courteous to accept and helps to foster mutual respect and understanding.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

HOW DO MUSLIMS VIEW OTHER RELIGIONS?

The Qur'an states that no peoples have been left without God's prophets and guidance and that this plurality of faiths must be respected. As Islam is along the Abrahamic lineage, Muslims share many common traditions and values with Jews and Christians; who are referred to in the Qur'an as the "People of the Book", recognizing the revelations from God through prior prophets (e.g., Torah of Moses and Gospel of Jesus).

O mankind! We created you from a single soul, male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Truly, the most honoured of you in God's sight is the greatest of you in piety. God is All-Knowing, All-Aware.

Qur'an 49:13

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY MODERN CONFLICTS INVOLVING MUSLIMS?

Much of the traditional Muslim world is emerging from colonization and de-colonization, and adjusting to new borders that were often drawn by foreign powers. Many of the post-colonial borders divided ethnic groups from their traditional lands and has in part led to conflicts among communities that had traditionally coexisted. Many Canadians have family and friends in their ancestral homelands and may be affected by conflicts that arise in these regions. Canadian Muslims are no different in their concern for family and friends caught in the midst of political unrest and strife.



DOES THE QUR'AN CONDONE TERRORISM?

The Qur'an indicates about one who kills an innocent person: *"...it would be as if he killed the whole of mankind: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole of mankind."* [Qur'an 5:32]. Islam is a faith built on the foundations of justice and peace, unfortunately, like all religions, Islam is not immune to extremists who would twist its teachings to pursue their political goals.

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM?

Women rights in Islam, including the right to work, inherit, vote, and own property were established by the Qur'an over 1400 years ago, before the Renaissance and well before Canada's Supreme Court acknowledged that women are "persons" under the law and entitled to similar rights as men. However, over time many of these rights have been affected or usurped owing to economic, cultural, and political conditions, including patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an. Women's rights globally irrespective of culture or religion are under constant threat of further erosion.

WHY DO SOME NEW ADHERENTS TO ISLAM CHANGE THEIR NAMES?

Well-known figures to have embraced Islam such as Muhammad Ali (Cassius Clay), Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens) and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (Lou-Al Sinder) publicly changed their names upon becoming Muslims. Many converts to Islam voluntarily change their names to signify their rebirth into a new faith. Others will adopt a cultural name but not change their name officially.

WHY DO MANY MARRIED COUPLES HAVE DIFFERENT LAST NAMES?

Women are not expected in Islam to take their husband's last name upon marriage. In fact, she is encouraged to retain her own name to honour her heritage and identity.



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Muslims live in almost every corner of the world, and speak almost every language, from English, to Chinese, to Creole. Only about 20% of the Muslim world are native Arabic speakers, however, many of the words commonly used by many Muslims, such as *Allah* are Arabic.

Much of this may be attributed to the fact that the Qur'an has been preserved in its entirety in its original language, to prevent any alterations of meanings which may arise due to translations. Often non-Arabic speaking Muslims get accustomed to hearing and using many of the common words. Some of these commonly used words are described in this section.

ALLAH

Allah is the Arabic word for God. The word is part of the lexicon of Arabic speaking Christians and Muslims alike. *Allah* is not a separate deity worshipped by Muslims.

ISLAM

The Arabic term *Islam* means "submission" to the will of God. Islam is also closely related to *salaam* the Arabic word for peace.

MUSLIM

A person who follows the religion of Islam is called a Muslim.

QUR'AN

Literally, Qur'an means "recitation," and refers specifically to the revelations, which Muhammad (pbuh) received from God through the angel Gabriel between the years 610 and 632 C.E. These revelations were written down by scribes and compiled into the Qur'an – the final revelation or testament to humanity. The Qur'an is an inclusive vision of society that gives primacy to justice, nobility of conduct and human intellect. It is the prime source of guidance and inspiration for Muslims in how to live a

noble life, both, spiritually and materially.

HADITH

A collection of sayings and actions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). It is believed that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) best exemplified how to live one's life according to the teachings in the Qur'an. The hadith literature serve as a basis to emulate his way.

HIJAB

Islam teaches both men and women to dress modestly. Typically *hijab* refers specifically to a headscarf worn by many female Muslims. Traditions and societal norms influence modest dress in various cultures.

IMAM

An *imam* is simply one who leads the prayer. In established congregations, Imams often perform multiple roles such as performing religious ceremonies and providing pastoral care and guidance. Shi'a Muslims use the term to refer specifically to their leaders (descendants of Prophet Muhammad, pbuh) who they follow on spiritual and temporal matters.

JIHAD

Literally, *jihad* means "to strive" or "struggle". In the Islamic sense it is a struggle to overcome injustice and oppression. Jihad can be an inward struggle directed against negative aspects in oneself and an outward struggle against injustices in society.

SHARIA

Refers to Islamic Law as revealed in the Quran and Prophetic Traditions (recorded in Hadith). Sharia covers the totality of religious, political, social, economic, and private life. Different branches may interpret Islamic law differently using the legal reasoning of scholars and imams and other forms of jurisprudence.



SELECTED QUR'ANIC VERSES

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.
All Praise is for God, the Lord of the Worlds.
The Compassionate, the Merciful.
Master of the Day of Judgement.
You alone do we worship
And You alone do we ask for help.
Guide us along the straight path.
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace,
not those who earn Thine Anger, nor of those who go astray.*
Qur'an 1:1-7

*Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear
from Error. Whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath
grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks.
And God heareth and knoweth all things.*
Qur'an 2:256

*Read in the name of your Lord Who created,
He created man from a clot,
Read and your Lord is Most Bountiful,
Who taught with the pen,
Taught man what he knew not.*
Qur'an 96:1-5

*Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not
transgress limits; for God loveth not transgressors.*
Qur'an 2:190

*And if they incline to peace, then incline to peace, and trust in
God; surely He is the Hearing, the Knowing.*
Qur'an 8:61

*Say: "O my Servants who have transgressed against their souls!
Despair not of the Mercy of God: for God forgives all sins: for
He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.*
Qur'an 39:53



ABOUT ECMC

Finding Strength in Diversity

VISION

The Council works with Muslim communities in Edmonton to help improve the lives of Muslims in the region and to enhance their contribution to society at large.

MISSION

The Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities strives to speak and act on behalf of Edmonton Muslims with fellow Canadians in a manner that protects, promotes, and enhances the understanding of Islam and Muslims in matters of public policy, education, peace and safety.

SUGGESTED ISLAMIC RESOURCES

The Qur'an (Translated by Yusuf Ali or Ahmed Ali)

Islam: An Introduction by Annemarie Schimmel

Islam: A Short History by Karen Armstrong

Islam in Focus by Hammudah Abdalati

What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam by John L. Esposito

CONTACT INFORMATION

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