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## Centre for Faith and the Media – A Journalist's Guide to Islam

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### Introduction

Since 9-11, the North American news media have reported on thousands of stories involving Muslims, in local, national and international contexts. Often these stories are written under pressured deadlines, in shrinking newsrooms, by journalists with almost no knowledge of any religion. While there is an ongoing effort by professional journalists to write objective reports, the sheer number of stories focused upon violence, conflict, and abuse of rights in some Muslim international contexts, create the a negative and often stereotyped picture of Muslims and Islam.

Now numbering over 1 billion, the world's growing Muslim communities are extremely diverse in their ethnic and racial backgrounds, and in their interpretations of the Qu'ran. In spite of how frequently this phrase is used, there is in fact no such thing as —The Muslim Worldll, just as there is no —Christian World.ll The complexities and nuances however are rarely served well by abbreviated news copy and 30 second sound bites on TV.

Meanwhile, in Canada, our own Muslim community, now a million strong, is equally diverse. Muslims in Canada can be found at every level of government and civic leadership, in every profession, and they continue to make very positive contributions to Canadian society.

With our nation's steadfast commitment to maintain an immigrant intake of a half a million people a year, Canada's Muslim communities will continue to grow as many of these immigrants come from Muslim countries.

It is imperative that Canadian journalists continue to expand their awareness of and appreciation for the diversity within Canada's Muslim communities, to research the traditions, the cultural issues, the range of viewpoints within the communities on the stories that make it to the front page. Whereas the same Muslim voices on both extreme ends are often given the microphone, it is time for the media to become more sophisticated and balanced in its effort to provide the public with the full range of Muslim perspectives on many issues.

It is our hope that The Muslim Project in its entirety, and this newly revised —Journalist's Guide to Islamll will serve to assist journalists who are keen to cover Muslim stories in Canada, and who seek to provide the public with angles, picture and nuances which have not yet surfaced in most coverage.

Richelle Wiseman  
Executive Director  
Centre for Faith and the Media

*The Centre wishes to acknowledge the hard work and research done by its founder, the late Gordon Legge, in writing the first Journalist's Guide to Islam on which this revised version is based. The materials here have been updated to reflect the changes in Canada's Muslim communities since the original writing in 2003, and changes in what kinds of information journalists are looking for as they prepare news stories.*

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# 1

## The Multi-Dimensional World of Islam

Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the world. It's estimated that there are as many as 1.3 billion Muslims throughout the world. Of those, as many as 1,000,000 live in Canada. There are another 6 to 7 million in the United States.

Contrary to popular perception, however, Arab Muslims make up only 15 per cent of that total. Furthermore, not all Arabs are Muslims. Some are Christian or belong to other religious groups. Of the world's 220 million Arabs, about 10 per cent are non-Muslims. Anyone whose native tongue is Arabic is considered an Arab.

Muslims the world over learn Arabic so they can read the Qur'an, the Holy Book of Islam, and understand its meaning. They also perform their ritual prayer in Arabic.

Islam is one of the world's three major monotheistic religions. Muslims, along with Jews and Christians, believe in one God, whom Muslims call Allah, Creator of the universe and all that is in it. Islam was revealed to the world through Allah's messenger, the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

From its beginnings in the 7th Century C.E. (Common Era), it spread from France to China within a century. The revered Golden Age of Islam kept intellectual inquiry alive during the height of the European Dark Ages. There were 36 public libraries in Baghdad when the Mongols devastated it in 1258.

Today it is considered the fastest growing religion in North America. Among the most famous adherents are boxer Muhammad Ali and Cat Stevens, a British rock musician who changed his name to Yusuf Islam.

"It will be wrong to judge Islam in the light of the behavior of some bad Muslims who are always shown on the media," says Islam (Stevens). "It is like judging a car as a bad one if the driver of the car is drunk and he bangs it into the wall. Islam guides all human beings in their daily life—in its spiritual, mental and physical dimensions. We find the sources of these instructions in the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet. There we can see the ideal of Islam."

### A Brief History of Islam

Islam arose in 6<sup>th</sup> Century CE (Common Era) Arabia. The region was a melting pot of religious beliefs. There were pockets of Judaism and Christianity but, for the most part, they were overshadowed by the cults of the tribal gods that indulged in some barbaric practices.

Muhammad, Islam's Prophet, was born in Mecca on the Arabian peninsula in what is now Saudi Arabia, in 570 CE. Raised in a trading family, at the age of 25 he married an older widow who had employed him as a trading agent.

At the age of 40, during one of his periodic meditative retreats in a

nearby cave he began to experience visions and auditory revelations. The angel Gabriel appeared to him with a book and commanded him to "Read."

Initially, he shared the messages with his family and friends. But over time, he began to meet daily with a growing circle of people to share the message of Peace (Islam).

A major part of Muhammad's mission was devoted to ending the vicious cycle of murder and warfare perpetrated by pre-Islamic tribes engaged in bitter blood feuds.

As might be expected, Muhammad's message faced opposition forcing him to flee to the neighboring city of Medina, a town 400 km north of Mecca. This event, the Hijrah (emigration) marks the beginning of the Islamic era and its dating.

Eventually, following a period of intense conflict, Muhammad and his men returned to Mecca. Muhammad died in Medina in 632 and left no male heir.

Islam is an Arabic word. It means peace, greeting, obedience, loyalty, allegiance and submission to the will of the Creator of the Universe.

The name of the Creator of the universe is Allah, an Arabic word which means God Almighty. Allah, the one and only God, has 99 names and numerous attributes. He is the Merciful, the Protector, the Mighty, the Forgiver, the Provider, the Loving, the Wise, the All-Knowing, the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, the First, the Last, the Eternal.

Muslims believe that Muhammad was chosen by Allah(God) as the final prophet and messenger to humanity to deliver his message of Peace (Islam). They do not worship Muhammad, only Allah. Muhammad was both a Prophet and a statesman.

This message was recorded in the Qur'an, the Islamic Scripture. It is considered the exact words of Allah revealed to Muhammad through Gabriel over a period of 23 years. The language of the Qur'an is Arabic. It contains 114 Suras or chapters.

It is read and recited according to a set of rules and regulations. In order to read the Qur'an, a Muslim must be clean and in a state of cleanliness.

In addition, the sayings and practical guidance offered by Muhammad were compiled and collected shortly after he died.

Known as Hadiths, taken together with the Qur'an, they provide Muslims with a comprehensive and practical guide to daily living. The Qur'an teaches that all people are called to live in peace and submission to Allah and in peace within one's self, with other people, the environment and the cosmos. Therefore, the goal of life is to worship Allah, obey His commandments by striving to go to Heaven and escape Hell in the life hereafter.

Muslims trace their beginnings back to the Prophet Adam, who is also recognized by both Jews and Christians. Muslims believe that Abraham established a house of worship in Mecca. This house, the Ka'bah, is believed by Muslims to be the first one devoted to the worship of one God.

It is believed that Allah sent different messengers to humanity throughout history, all with similar teachings. But over time, people misunderstood and misinterpreted them.

Nevertheless, Muslims believe in the prophets commonly revered in Judaism and Christianity, including Noah, Isaac, Jacob, and David. They also regard Jesus as a prophet but, unlike Christians, do not consider him divine.

Muslims also respect the Hebrew and Christians Scriptures. The followers of Islam, Judaism and Christianity are sometimes referred to as *the People of the Book*. Muslims do not believe in religious coercion. People must be allowed to follow their own beliefs.

Muslims also believe in angels and a Day of Judgment and are commanded to combine their beliefs with practice in their daily lives.

## The Five Pillars of Faith

In order to bring people's lives into daily submission to Allah, Islam has five pillars of faith which are incumbent on all Muslims.

### **Declaration of Faith:**

A Muslim must express his or her faith by declaring in Arabic, "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah." Muslims must recite it, understand it and follow it by action in their daily life. Faith without action, and action without faith is fruitless.

### **Prayer:**

Muslims are required to pray five daily prayers. It is to be performed with mental concentration, verbal communication, vocal recitation and physical movement to attain peace and harmony. There is also a special congregational prayer on Friday at noon delivered in the mosque. It lasts about an hour. Ritual cleanliness is essential.

Prayer can be performed anywhere. In recent years, more and more employers and educational institutions across North America have created areas to which Muslim employees retreat for prayer.

### **Fasting:**

Islam relies on a lunar calendar. Fasting takes place during Ramadan, the ninth month in the lunar calendar.

Every Muslim who has reached the age of maturity, usually around the age of 14 or 15, is required to fast. The fast begins at daybreak each day and ends at sunset. Eating, drinking and smoking are not permitted between dawn and sunset. For those who are married, sexual relations are prohibited from dawn to sunset.

The sick, pregnant women, nursing mothers, women who are menstruating and people travelling are all exempted from fasting. People excused for medical reasons are required to feed a poor person one meal each day. Others are required to make up lost days later.

As in other spiritual traditions, fasting is regarded as a blessing from Allah. It is regarded as spiritual training that enables a person to resist temptation and develop self-control.

### **Support Almsgiving:**

Islam teaches that wealth is a trust from Allah and the poor and needy have rights on the wealth of the rich. It is a sin not to share one's wealth with the needy or to allow them to suffer from hunger or

disease. Muslims are required to make an annual payment to charity called *zakat*, as a means of purifying their wealth. The amount is based on a percentage of their income or property. wealth.

### **Pilgrimage to Mecca:**

Muslims believe that the Prophet Abraham, acting on God's command, built a place of worship in Mecca solely for the worship of the one God. Known as the Ka'bah, Mecca is the centre of the Islamic world. It symbolizes the worship of Allah alone and is a symbol of Muslim unity.

Once in a lifetime, Muslims are required to make a pilgrimage or hajj to Mecca—if health and wealth permits. As many as two million Muslims from around the world gather annually in Mecca for the Hajj. Pilgrims dress in simple white garments to emphasize their equality before Allah without discrimination because of race, color, language or nationality. It also reminds them that, regardless of their circumstances in life, they will all be buried wrapped in a simple sheet.

## **The Spread of Islam**

During the 100 years following Muhammad's death, Islam spread to many parts of the world, including West Africa, the Indian subcontinent and Indonesia, as well as large parts of what had been the Roman and Persian empires.

It has been commonly said that Islam was spread by the sword, a claim that dates back to the time of Christian crusades in the Holy Land. More than anything, that depends upon the perspective. Because Islam historically combined the roles of spiritual and political leader in one person, political and territorial aspirations often were confused with missionary zeal. Moreover, because Muslim beliefs and values were often at odds with the prevailing culture, Muslims found themselves as much under attack, as on the attack. More to the point, Muslims believe it was their witness of faith that accelerated the spread Islam across most of the known world.

"...I became more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days in the scheme of life," Mohandas Gandhi wrote in *Young India*. "It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the scrupulous regards for his pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and in his own mission. These, and not the sword, carried everything before them and surmounted every trouble."

The Qur'an encourages followers to acquire knowledge and explore the universe. Islam made tremendous contributions to the intellectual, scientific and cultural progress of humanity during a time when Europe was regarded as being mired in the Dark Ages. The period from the 10th century to the 13th century is often known as the Golden Age of Islam.

Muslim scholars contributed to a variety of fields: Art, music, physics, medicine, education, literature, astronomy, geography, mathematics and architecture. Cairo, Baghdad, Cordoba and Samarkand were centres of scientific research. Their universities, in Spain, Egypt and elsewhere, were unequalled. Islam is credited with opening the way for the European Enlightenment.

## Muslim Branches

For a variety of political reasons, over time the Muslim community broke into different branches. It is here that a journalist must be particularly diligent. A reporter must be careful not to rely for information on a religious organization that lies outside what is regarded as mainstream Islam.

For the purposes of this guide, it is not essential to know the origins of the various groups but simply be sensitive to the various groups within the framework of Islam.

The principal groups include:

**Sunnis:** The Sunnis make up about 85 per cent of the world's Muslim population. In all major Canadian cities, the Sunni community is the predominant Muslim community.

**Shi'as:** They comprise the majority of the remaining 15 per cent of the Islamic community, coming primarily from places such as Iran.

**Ismaili's:** This is a branch of the Shi'as, led by the Aga Khan. There are several Ismaili communities in Canada, mostly comprising refugees who fled East Africa in the 1970s.

**Sufis:** This is the mystical branch of Islam and perhaps the best known of all the Muslim groups. In Canada, the Sufis were popularized by famed singer/songwriter Sylvia Tyson during the 1970s. One of the most well known Sufis is the Sufi poet, Rumi. Small in number, Sufis can be found among both Sunnis and Shi'as.

Ahmaddiyas:

### **Other groups**

There may be other groups in the community who regard themselves as Muslims, some even going so far as to use the word Muslim or Islamic in their name. Mainstream Muslims consider some legitimate; others heretical. It is best to check to determine whether a group is considered part of mainstream Islam.

Furthermore, Muslims may appear to the outsider as being a single, monolithic group. They are not. There are several schools of thought within Islam. Like other religious movements, they carry on an active dialogue and may be regarded as classical, traditional, modern or reformist in their interpretation of Islamic teachings.

Another caution is also in order. The word *fundamentalist* is often used concerning Islam. It is a shorthand way of equating Muslims with movements within other religions. In fact, all Muslims are, by definition, fundamentalists since they adhere to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet. Therefore, to use the word fundamentalist in association with Islam is misleading at best, harmful at worst.

## Celebrations

News organizations often use major celebrations to focus on religious activities, such as Christmas and Easter for Christians, and Passover and Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur for Jews. So it should be, for these are important events in the lives of believers.

From the Islamic perspective, there are two major celebrations,

Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha. These events will vary from year-to-year because of the Muslim use of the lunar calendar. In North America, it is important for news organizations to be mindful that the dates for the beginning of important activities such as Ramadan are determined by whether or not a new moon is sighted. Oftentimes, Muslim organizers cannot provide an exact date till the day before the event. Generally, the Muslim community rents a large facility such as an auditorium or sports arena for community prayer to mark these celebrations.

Eid Ul-Fitr: It comes at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. It is a time of great joy and gratitude as they complete their obligation of fasting. A special Eid prayer, visiting relatives and friends, exchanging greetings and good wishes characterize the festival. Children often receive money and new clothes. Sweets and other delicacies are served to guests.

Eid Ul-Adha: It comes at the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca. This is the greater of the two festivals and usually falls about 2 1/2 months after Eid Al-Fitr. Even though only about two million Muslims actually make the pilgrimage, all Muslims celebrate its end. Here Muslims celebrate the Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ismail, and Ismail's willingness to be sacrificed. (This is not to be confused with Jewish and Christian belief that it was Abraham's son, Isaac, through his wife Sarah who was to be sacrificed. Rather, Muslims believe that it was Abraham's son Ismail, through his wife Hajirah, who was to be sacrificed.) Because of Ismail's total obedience, an animal was sacrificed in his stead.

Animals slaughtered during the annual pilgrimage are canned or frozen and shipped to needy countries throughout the world. When Muslims offer meat in celebration, it is divided into three equal portions—for family use, friends and neighbors, and the poor.

## Modern Day Islam

The roots of modern day Islam were sown a couple of centuries ago when the once proud Muslim empire began to be overwhelmed by expansionist movements dominated by European colonialists. Much of the Muslim world is still suffering the impact of those exploits. Now Muslims the world over are looking to reassert themselves after a long period of humiliation and oppression, sometimes at the hands of foreigners and sometimes at the hands of their own leaders. Muslims regard the fall of Islam as their own fault for they succumbed to spiritual laziness.

The question then becomes, how is that accomplished while adhering to the principles of the Qur'an? The Muslim community worldwide is grappling with that delicate but complex question. Muslims are not a monolithic group. Further, there is no centralized authority within Islam.

That is why contradictions are evident to people both inside and outside the Muslim community. Those contradictions often catch the eye of reporters looking for an angle.

Unfortunately, while there are a variety of interpretations, media accounts headline the extremes without paying attention to the viewpoints of moderate, mainstream Muslims across North America and elsewhere, who comprise the majority. It is a complex situation that,



all too often, is over-simplified for the benefit of readers and viewers, to the point where news accounts are distorted.

This does an enormous disservice to the broader Muslim community because the reporting tends to be alarmist, reinforcing stereotypes and setting the stage for racial or religious profiling.

It is important to put the apparent tensions and contradictions within the Muslim community into context. Reporters must seek out Islamic scholars and commentators, especially in North America. Journalists reporting on Islam must cultivate trustworthy sources to help them sort out the social, cultural and political factors that have become interwoven with the Islamic beliefs and customs in different countries around the world.

It is also important to avoid the temptation to label terrorist activities as *Islamic* or ascribe responsibility to *Muslims*. Simplistic, sensationalized reporting loaded with *newspeak* or jargon must be replaced by clear, accurate and nuanced reporting.

## Islam in Canada

In 1996, Daood Hassan Hamdani, one of the country's foremost authorities on Islam in Canada, gave an address on Parliament Hill marking Eid Al-Adha. In it, the Ottawa engineer noted that the 1991 census showed there were more than 250,000 Muslims in Canada compared with 98,000 in 1981 and 33,000 in 1971. Most came to Canada to escape racial or ideological intolerance, flee religious and political persecution, escape famine and pestilence, and most of all, to seek a better living in one of the best countries in the world.

The 2001 census numbered Canadian Muslims at 579,000. Current projects place the community at around 1,000,000.

Muslims make up the largest non-Christian community in 10 of 25 metropolitan areas across Canada. They have settled everywhere but that said, about 85 per cent live in six major cities. In fact, Metropolitan Toronto has more Muslims than all of the provinces and territories combined, excluding Ontario. Two-thirds have settled within 350 miles of each other.

Islam has a long and interesting history in Canada. Though a large portion of this information is not public knowledge, it is important to disseminate it in order to give readers a fuller appreciation of the Canadian Muslim experience.

Islam's presence in Canada dates back to the mid-19th Century. Agnes Love, a teenage bride of Scottish origin, gave birth to the first Muslim born in Ontario, 13 years before Confederation. The first Muslims to arrive in Canada were settlers and adventurers. Ali Abouchadi, known as Alexander Hamilton, walked 50 kms with his uncle to Beirut, Lebanon to board a boat to Montreal on his way to the Klondike. He later became a successful businessman. Others came to help build the railway and settle the West.

After the Second World War, skilled workers and professionals helped reconstruct the post-war economy. Scholars and academics began arriving from different parts of the world. Then in the mid-1960s, teachers, technocrats and entrepreneurs began arriving to contribute to the expanding economy. "The demographics and work

ethic of the Muslim labour force have very significant implications for the cost and funding of the country's social security system...," says Hamdani. "Proportionally, they withdraw much less from the system and contribute much more to it than the Canadian population as a whole."

Canadians have become accustomed to seeing the signature minaret atop a mosque in most Canadian communities. Today there are more than 200 mosques in Canada. What most people don't realize, however, is that the first mosque in North America, Al Rashid, was built in Edmonton in 1938. It has since been moved from its original site and now serves as a museum of Islamic artifacts.

Today there are third and fourth generation Muslims living in Canada alongside new immigrants from virtually every part of the world, from China to Nigeria. This marks a new era in the development of the Muslim community in Canada. Islam has entered the mainstream of Canadian life.

"From self-preservation in the early years manifest in the formation of local community associations to identity revolving around the mosque, Muslims are finally seeking to establish themselves as a cohesive community," says Hamdani.

Maybe one indication of this new era is the appointment of two Muslims to the Order of Canada: Lila Fahlman, an Edmonton teacher, community activist and founder of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, and Haroon Siddiqui, Editorial Page Editor Emeritus of the Toronto Star.

## Women in Islam

Before Islam, women in Arabia were often treated worse than animals. Pagan Arabs used to bury their female children alive. Women were made to dance naked near the Ka'bah during annual visits. They were treated as property and objects of sexual pleasure with no rights whatsoever.

Muhammad totally opposed these practices and sought to end all cruelty against women. Women were soon regarded as an integral part of Arab society. As a result, the teachings of the Qur'an were revolutionary and sometimes faced considerable opposition because of it.

Again, contrary to popular perception, a Muslim woman is a completely independent personality. She can make a contract or bequest in her own name. Regardless of her role—mother, wife, sister or daughter—she is entitled to an inheritance. Moreover, she also has the freedom to choose her husband.

The worst calamity for a woman is when her husband dies and, as a widow, she is responsible for raising her children alone. Therefore, Muhammad strongly upheld the cause of widows, encouraging the community to do the same. The family is the most important element in Muslim life and women, in their role as mothers, command great respect.

Islamic law, Shari'ah, regards women as spiritually and intellectually equal to men. The main distinction is physically with respect to an equitable division of labour. Men are allotted more strenuous work and responsibility for maintenance of the family while women

are responsible for raising and training children and managing the home. As head of the family, the man is required to consult his wife and then have the final say. She is not his subordinate but is regarded as “the queen of her house.”

So why do many non-Muslims believe that Islam treats women as second class citizens? Because, culture has interfered with the teachings of the Qur’an and the Prophet Muhammad. There are many cultures and patriarchal societies where chauvinism reigns and women continue to be treated as chattels. This is not the Islamic way.

Non-Muslims also make much of the way in which women are expected to dress in some Islamic cultures. Let it be noted that Islam places great stress on dress and grooming for both men and women. This is because modesty is an essential virtue. Both men and women are commanded to lower their eyes after the first look and avoid evil intentions and lewd looks. Some Muslim women wear the hijab, covering the head, some wear the niqab where the head is covered and the face is veiled, and some cover the entire body with a burqa which leaves only a tiny screen of material to permit the woman to see.

Within the Muslim communities, there is controversy over whether or not the Qur’an makes the wearing of the hijab, niqab, or burqa mandatory. Most moderate Muslims do not believe it is an Islamic requirement but rather a woman has the option to choose.

The Qur’an does suggest women dress modestly.

What is required is modest dress that is loose and non-transparent, concealing her form and not be tight fitting. Clothing must be thick enough not to attract men’s attention. Many women wear a Jalbab, a cloak over their clothes.

Likewise, modesty requires men to cover the area between the navel and the knees. Clothing should be neither tight nor provocative. And for the record, Islam does not forbid women to drive; the Qur’an forbids a *bride price*, as well as female genital mutilation.

Conversely, in Islam women have the right to own property, pursue an education, and participate fully in social and political life. That said, by Western standards, it is easier for a man to divorce his wife than it is for a woman to divorce her husband.

## What is Jihad?

There is no term in Islam that is so misused or abused as jihad. Contrary to popular understanding, jihad does not mean holy war. The concept of holy war does not exist in Islam. It is a term that originated during the Crusades by the Christians. Nor is it a war to force Islam on others. The Qur’an states, “There is no compulsion in religion.” (2:256)

Rather jihad means to struggle or strive for a better way of life. It refers to the difficult task of implementing Allah’s will at every level of life, personal, social and political. The most urgent task for a Muslim is to remove injustice and wrongdoing from one’s heart and from society. The most important struggle is purifying the heart. The only time that jihad is permitted in a combative sense is in self-defense—as a defensive war waged against unjust leaders, not against the people of a country. Furthermore, only a recognized head of state or governing body can declare jihad. Islam condemns suicide, t

errorism, kidnapping and hijacking. All such acts are regarded as criminal and should be punished. People who undertake such actions in the name of Islam have hijacked the religion for their own political purposes.

In wartime, Islam prohibits soldiers from harming civilians, children, women, the elderly and religious men, including priests and rabbis. It also prohibits removing trees, burning crops and polluting drinking water.

## A Final Word About Covering Muslims

In covering Canada's Muslim community, it is important to be aware of cultural and political differences that may affect newsgathering. It is especially important for journalists to cultivate long-term contacts within the Muslim community in their area.

As hosts, Muslims are extremely gracious and self-effacing. But to get beyond the surface, it is important to develop relationships and build trust in order to enhance understanding.

Furthermore, North American culture centres on the cult of the individual. Conversely, in Muslim culture, the community takes precedence over the individual. That's why Muslims are less inclined to be critical and outspoken about others in their community, regardless of disagreement. They are also less inclined to air their displeasure in public, particularly via the news media.

Certain courtesies ought to be followed when covering Islam and Muslims. For instance, when visiting a mosque, remove shoes upon entering. Further, it is inappropriate for a stranger to shake hands with a member of the opposite sex due to the Islamic etiquette of modest behaviour between genders.

When taking photographs of Muslims at prayer, do not film or photograph them from behind. It is offensive. Don't enhance racial profiling by simply running photographs and images of Muslims who, because of the way they dress, fit the stereotype. Most do not conform to the stereotype.

Do not seek out the Muslim community only when there is a crisis or major problem and a reaction is required. Islam offers a rich bounty of feature stories. Help the local community learn more about their Muslim neighbors.

Islam offers a rich bounty of feature stories:  
*Examine the traditions around major celebrations.*  
*Compare their marriage and funeral customs.*  
*Outline how Muslims conduct business when charging interest is forbidden.*

Conversely, avoid labeling extremist or terrorists groups as Islamic, even if they describe themselves as such. Journalists do not refer to white supremacists as *Christian* although they will cite the Bible to justify their actions. If the term is essential to the story, strive for balance and seek out an opinion and context from the local Muslim community. Be particularly careful in headlines. Finally, do not rely on non-Muslims for information about Islam. And do not rely on Muslims for information about other faiths. By and large, Jews, Hindus, Muslims and Christians know little about the others' faith and what they may know may be erroneous.

## Dig deep to get it right.

### Online Resources

If you are assigned to cover a story which involves Islam or Muslims, these resources might be of help in obtaining information, offering clarification, providing background or simply looking up an Arabic word and its meaning.

### Centre for Faith and the Media

The Centre is based in Calgary, and is a national, independent, nonprofit organization committed to increasing the quality and quantity of religion reporting in Canada. The Centre provides training and resources to journalists covering religion and spirituality, as well as media relations training for members of faith communities seeking to access the media more effectively. The Centre also conducts public forums, public polls, and other research.

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This revised guide was researched and written by The Centre for Faith and the Media of Calgary. The Centre is an independent, not-for-profit organization. Its objective is to assist both the news media and faith communities across Canada with the coverage of religion and spirituality.

The original guide's author, Gordon Legge, was a writer and journalist in Canada for more than 30 years. He reported on religion and spirituality for the past 15, including 12 years as Religion Editor of the Calgary Herald. He was the founder and former director of the Centre for Faith and the Media. Gordon passed away in 2004.

Much of the content of the guide was drawn from background materials provided by the Muslim Council of Calgary. As well, the practical guidelines for editors and journalists at the beginning of the guide were paraphrased from an article by Aiden S. Enns entitled, Questioning our Images of Islam, which appeared in the March 2002 issue of the online magazine, Thunderbird – UBC Journalism Review. They are used with the writer's permission.

## Glossary of Muslim Terms

**Adhan:** Call to prayer.

**Allah:** God.

**Chador(Persian chaadar):** A large cloth worn as a combination head covering, veil, and shawl, usually by Muslim women, especially in Iran.

**Da'wa:** Literally "invitation." The invitation of non-Muslims to Islam.

**Du'a':** Individual, private supplication.

**Eid:** A day of festivity and major religious holiday.

**Fatwa:** An Islamic decree issued by a mufti or a religious lawyer on a specific issue. A fatwa has no weight unless accepted by the community of scholars, their consensus is recognized as legal opinion to be followed. Islam has no central authority, which allows diversity of opinion, though major scholars agree on core issues.

**Fiqh:** "Understanding" in matters of religious law (shari'ah).

**Hadith:** "Report, account." A tradition about Mohammed, what he said or did. The hadiths were collected and came to be a record of the Prophet's Sunna, second only to the Qur'an in authority for Muslims.

**Halal:** Permissible by Islamic law.

**Hijab:** Clothing Muslim women wear in public. It is generally loose fitting and includes a head covering. Also called a khimar.

**Imam:** Prayer leader.

**Intifada:** "Shaking, uprising, insurrection." This word usually refers to the Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

**Isa:** Prophet Jesus; Arabic name.

**Jihad:** Effort and striving in the path of good—does not mean, or translate, as holy war.

**Qur'an:** Islam's revealed scripture.

**Shari'a:** Islam's law.

**Ummah:** The Muslim "community" or ideal state worldwide.

## Glossary of Common Muslim Phrases

**Ahl al-kitab:** "People of the Book." The term referring to Jews and Christians.

**Alhamdu-lillah:** "All praise is due to Allah." A Qur'anic phrase repeated by Muslims in all situations of life.

**Allahu akbar:** "God is Great." Used when acknowledging or recognizing an individual of an event.

**Assalamu Alaikum:** "Peace be upon you." An Islamic greeting.

**Bismillah:** "In the name of Allah." All actions of a Muslim should begin with this phrase to ensure good and meritorious conduct.

**Insha Allah:** "God-willing." A phrase often used.

**Jazaku Allahu:** "May Allah reward you." A form of saying thank-you.

**Masha Allah:** "Due to Allah." Pronounced when praising.

**Pillars of Islam:** The 5 basic devotional-ritual duties of Islam:

**Shahada:** testifying that "There is no god but God and

Mohammed is the Messenger of God."

**Salat:** "five daily prayer services;"

**zakat:** "almsgiving;"

**sawm:** "fasting during daylight in the month of Ramadan;

**hajj:** "pilgrimage to Mecca."

**Subhana Allah:** "God alone is worthy of praise." Used in appreciation or time of achievement, or blessing.

## Guidelines for Visiting a Mosque

from [www.pluralism.org](http://www.pluralism.org) The Pluralism Project (Harvard University, Boston)

<http://www.pluralism.org/research/guidelines.php>

**Of great importance for journalists is to understand some basics for entering a mosque. If you are planning to bring a video camera or recorder into the mosque, you should obtain permission in advance, and take directions as to whether or not and where you could be situated.**

**Here are some further tips:**

- Remove your shoes before entering the prayer hall of a masjid or Islamic Center; in some cases, the shoes are removed at the front door.
- Women should cover their heads and wear loose-fitting clothing that covers their legs and arms. A large scarf, draped over the head, neck, and shoulders, is ideal. Men should also dress modestly; wearing a "kufi" (skullcap) is optional for men.
- Some masjid or Islamic Centers have separate entrances for women and men. All prayer areas have separate sections for men and women. The women's area is often in the back of the room, sometimes separated with a divider; in other cases it is in a separate room. They also have separate washrooms which are designed with
- The Muslim greeting is "Salaam Alaykum" (Peace be upon you); the response is "Wa Alaykum Salaam" (And upon you Peace). Non-Muslims are welcome to exchange this greeting with their hosts.
- The religious leader is called an "imam"; he leads prayers and delivers the "qutbah" (sermon) during Jum'ah prayers (weekly communal prayers held mid-day on Friday). In some cases, he will serve as a spokesperson for the community; in other cases, the center may have a President or community member designated for this role.
- Non-Muslims should not participate in worship, although visitors are welcome in the prayer hall. N.B. Visitors do not enter prayer rooms in Nizari Ismaili *jamaatkhanas*.
- One should never walk in front of a person who is performing their prayers. Please keep this in mind if you have been given permission to take photographs during worship.