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Glossary of Islamic terms

In 1980, the symposium *Dimensions of Islam in North America* was held at the University of Alberta (Edmonton). Muslim Brotherhood leader Ismail Faruqi, Yvonne Haddad, Muhammad Abdul-Rauf and others spoke at the event. Their speeches were published in a book entitled *The Muslim Community in North America*.

A glossary of Islamic terms was added to the book. Four straightforward definitions that would be hard to find today in books intended for the general public and to which Muslim Brotherhood operatives are associated are particularly worth mentioning:

Dhimmi: A follower of a religion tolerated by Islam, i.e. Christianity and Judaism.

Jihad: War against all who are not Muslim; sometimes the battle against personal evils.

Kafir (pl. **Kufr**): Literally, "the one who covers up the truth," but generally the word for unbeliever.

Taqiya: Camouflaging principles when admitting them would invite persecution; especially utilized by the Shi'ites.

The Muslim Community in North America



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Glossary

The Arabic terms in this book may be transliterated in various ways as represented by the bracketed words after some entries. We have tried to use the most common forms. [Eds.]

‘Abbāsīd A dynasty of Arabs, descendants of the paternal uncle of Muḥammad, who ruled from Baghdad (749–1258 A.D.).

ādāb Official culture including code of conduct in Islamic civilization; in modern Arabic, confined to literature.

‘ahd Agreement, covenant, treaty. Early seen as designating the relationship between God and man; in later times, commonly seen as a political treaty or agreement.

‘ahd Allah Covenant of God with mankind, implying binding commitments and responsibilities.

Ahmadiyya (Aḥmadiya) The name given to adherents of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Kadiani, outstanding religious figure from the Punjab. Recognized by most as a separate Muslim sect.

al-Akhira The "other world" or "hereafter."

‘ālim (pl. ‘ulamā’) A scholar or learned individual, especially in the legal or religious sciences.

Allahu Akbar A phrase of praise meaning "God is great."

apnā (Urdu) Adjective meaning that which belongs to one's own family or tradition, as opposed to that which is foreign or **ghair**.

aqīqa Legal requirement of Muslim law involving the shaving of the newborn child's hair after seven days and the sacrificing of a sheep.

‘asabiya (‘aṣaba) Legal term for male relation on father's side.

ashrāf An honorific term meaning noble, distinguished, implying relationship to early Muslim nobility.

Barmakī (al-Barāmika) A leading family in Iran, often political secretaries or state overseers (**wazirs**) of the early Abbasid Caliphate, Yahya having risen to unprecedented success under Harun al-Rashid.

Barmakids Collective designation for Barmakī **wazirs** who held great power from 786–803 A.D.

bay‘a (bai‘) Agreement to acknowledge Muḥammad as sovereign or leader.

bint al-‘amm Female cousin on the father's side; preferential marriage to father's brother's daughter (Arab tradition).

bismilla Literally, "in the name of God," a phrase used at the commencement of any activity; celebration of introducing child to Islamic teachings.

caliph A deputy, or vicegerent, and the title given to the successors of the Prophet.

da‘wa Literally, "a plea for the help of God," or call, in the religious sense, interpreted as a charge or responsibility placed upon believers.

dhikr Literally, "remembering," but commonly the religious ceremony of praise found in Sufi circles.

dhimmī A follower of a religion tolerated by Islam, i.e., Christianity and Judaism.

Eid (Eid al-Fitr) The festival celebrating the breaking of the fast month, Ramaḍān.

Eid prayers Prayers at the termination of the fast which incorporates prayers for remission of sins and divine assistance in misfortune.

faḍl Surplus, remnant, overflow, or of secondary importance.

fard (**fard** 'ayn) A religious duty enjoined on every Muslim, such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, etc.

fiqh In the first instance, jurisprudence, but may be regarded as the entire set of rules derived from the **sharī'a**.

ghair (**ghaira**) Foreign, strange, not of Muslim culture.

ghar (Urdu) The immediate household.

ḥadīth (pl. **aḥādīth**) Normally translated as "tradition," but in actuality a report of some activity or saying of the Prophet. Sometimes refers to the entire corpus of reports.

ḥalāl That which is lawful or acceptable.

ḥajj The pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the required duties of every Muslim, health permitting.

Ḥanafi fiqh A legal school of the Sunnis, deriving from Abū-Hanīfah (699–767 A.D.).

hijra Immigration of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina in 622. This became the founding year of Islamic chronology.

ʿibādāt The ordinances of divine worship, such as prayer, fasting, etc. incumbent on all believers.

iftā' The act of delivering a formal legal opinion.

iftār Breaking of the fast.

ijmā' The consensus of the community as the basis for a legal pronouncement, principally Sunni.

ijtihād Individual, (as opposed to divine) involvement in the determination of legal interpretation.

imām Among Sunnis, the leader of the congregation in prayer, and by extension of the Muslim community. Among Shi'is, the spiritual successors of Muḥammad and the proper leaders of the umma.

Inshallah "If God wills," an invocation common to Muslims.

isrā The journey undertaken by Muḥammad from Mecca to Jerusalem subsequent to his ascension to God in the heavens.

iṣṭinā' The relationship between two parties involving personal obligation, concern, and affection, usually with lifelong importance.

iṣṭi‘mar Rebuilding and reconstruction of the community on earth.

jamat khana (jama‘at khāna) Ismaili term designating religious community organization.

jihād War against all who are not Muslim; sometimes the battle against personal evils.

juma (jum‘a) Friday, day of corporate prayer.

Ka‘ba (Kaaba) A simple square shrine, originally built by Abraham in Mecca, and the centre of Muslim religious activities.

kāfir (pl. kufr) Literally, "the one who covers up the truth," but generally the word for unbeliever.

kamadia Member of the Ismaili hierarchy of religious leaders.

khatīb The preacher officiating at the Friday prayer.

khums An Ismaili term meaning benevolence.

masjid Mosque, place for performing religious duties.

mawālī Converts to Islam who had no Arab ancestry.

Medina Literally, "The City," referring to Yathrib, which became the home of Muḥammad after his flight from Mecca.

Millet (millāt) A religious community or confessional group that became part of Ottoman governance.

mi‘raj Ascension of Muḥammad to heaven where he met with God.

mithāq A covenant or agreement, confirming a lifelong mutual bond.

moulid Birthday celebration of the Prophet or of famous Muslim saint.

muḍaraba Silent partnerships.

muezzin The mosque functionary who calls the faithful to prayer.

Mughal (Moghal, Mongol) Timurid dynasty from Afghan mountains who conquered North India. Mughal is the Indo-Persian form of "Mongol," which was applied to Northern Turks in India.

Muhammad (Mohammed, Muḥammad, Mahomet) Literally, "The Praised One"; the name of the Prophet as transliterated by contemporary scholars.

Muḥarram The Islamic month, the first ten days of which the Shi'is lament the martyrdom of Husain, the grandson of the Prophet.

Mujaddid The renewer, or reformer. Based on Muslim eschatological hope that a renewer will appear every 100 years.

mukhi Ismaili leadership term, implying great purity and insight.

muṣṭana' (pl. **muṣṭana'un**) Protégé or devoted individual who accepts the leadership or superiority of an important man as his guide.

nasia (**nasī'a**) Credit, delay of payment.

Pathān Ethnic group whose origins are in the Pakistan-Afghanistan region; early Muslim dynasty in India.

pardah The system of seclusion in India, designed to screen women from male strangers, which includes using the veil.

qāḍi Judge, magistrate; in classical times, the head of the local court.

qiyās Deduction by analogy.

Qur'ān (**Koran**) The word of Allah, as received by the Prophet and embodied in the holy book of Islam.

Qur'ānkhwani Formal recitation of the Qur'ān in any context.

rak'a Ritual of bowing, which is part of Muslim prayer.

Rajputs Converts to Hinduism who became part of the Indian warrior class, who became part of the Muslim empire under Akbar and retained leadership positions within Indo-Muslim society.

Ramaḍān The ninth month of the Muslim calendar (December in the Christian calendar), during which no food nor drink may be consumed during daylight hours.

ribā Literally, "increase," but has come to mean interest or usury.

ṣadqa Literally, "alms," but has been used both as obligatory tax

- (**zakât**) and as voluntary gift giving.
- ṣalât** Liturgical form of prayer, recited five times per day.
- ṣani'** (**ṣani'â**) Protégé, one protected by institution of *iṣṭinâ'*.
- shahâdah** The declaration, "There is no god but God and Muḥammad is His Prophet," the foundational belief of Muslim faith.
- shaykh** Honorific term applied to aged relatives or the patriarch of the tribe; also used to designate religious leaders or Sufi saints.
- sharī'a** The law or entire corpus of rules guiding Muslim life.
- Shī'a** Shortened version of Shī'at-ʿAlī, connoting those who see "true religious" leadership as belonging only to ʿAlī and his descendants. Shī'ī is the adjectival form, Shī'ites the common transcription for the collective noun. Represents a Muslim minority tradition.
- shūrâ** Literally, "the consultation," deriving from the Qur'ānic commendation to believers to consult together; in modern parlance, a legislative assembly.
- ṣiyâm** Fasting, spiritual discipline through deprivation, most specifically during **Ramaḍân**.
- siwâk** Arab toothbrush; instrument for cleaning teeth made from thorn-like plant.
- Sufi** (**ṣūfi**) The practitioner of the mystical tradition in Islam.
- sunna** The custom of the Prophet, incorporated into the ḥadith.
- Sunni** Majority division within Islam of those who accept the entire first generation of Muslim leaders as legitimate, in contrast with Shī'īs who accept only ʿAlī and his descendants.
- sura** A "chapter" in the Qur'ân.
- syed** (**saiyid** or **sayyid**) A lord in its original meaning, but used almost universally as a title of a descendent of the Prophet.
- tamkīn fi-al-ʿard** Triumphant possession of the earth as a gift from God.
- taqiya** (**taqiya**) Camouflaging principles when admitting them would invite persecution; especially utilized by the Shi'ites.
- tariqa** (**ṭariqa**) Literally, "the way," but has become the word for primarily mystical religious orders.

tawḥīd Literally, "making one," but theologically referring to the oneness of God or the oneness and single nature of all reality.

‘ulama’ See ‘alim.

Umayyad The first Muslim dynasty, centred in Damascus, that ruled the Muslim empire from 661 to 750 A.D.

umma The community of believers, including all those who confess Islam.

Wahhabiyyah Reform movement begun by Ibn ‘Abd-al-Wahhāb in the Najd in Arabia, which gained the support of the Sa‘ūd family and eventually became the central ideology in the area. Generally held strict views drawn from conservative Ibn-Taimiyyah (d. 1328) who rejected much of Sufi Islam and became strongly intolerant of any form not built on the Qur’ān. Preached a new form of purification of Islam. Collectively known as **wahhabism**.

walī Roughly equivalent to "saint," implies special mystical knowledge and gifts. These figures became objects of cultic activity and honor.

waqf An endowment for religious purposes, or for the collective good, such as hospitals, libraries, etc.

zakāt A yearly "tax" paid by Muslims as a contribution to community welfare or as a charitable gift.