

ISLAM: BELIEFS AND PRACTICES



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Recent events have brought heightened attention to Islam, but not necessarily deeper understanding. The Islam Project can help to change that by raising public awareness, offering information, and bringing people together in dialogue. The Project uses as a springboard *Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet* and *Muslims*, two important documentaries that can help members of your community better understand Islam and the people who practice it. This module, which includes clips from both films, briefly explores the experience of Muslims living in the United States, Iran and Malaysia.

FACILITATING A DIALOGUE

Discussions are most productive when people feel safe, comfortable, and challenged. That balance can be difficult to achieve when the topic is religion or politics or prejudice, so you may want to consider finding an experienced facilitator for your event. If you plan to facilitate the dialogue yourself, think about how you will ensure that the tenor remains respectful and everyone has an opportunity to be heard.

In planning an event, be clear about what you hope to accomplish. This module can:

- Help participants **learn** more about Islam and those who practice it.
- Provide participants with an opportunity to **listen** to each other, hear diverse voices, and gain new insight.
- Inspire participants to take the **lead** in their community by resolving to act. Below are suggestions for meeting these goals. Choose the ones that best meet your needs.

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LEARN

For some people, providing basic information will be an appropriate and useful starting point.

The purpose of this module is to review a sampling of the basic tenets of Islam, so you may want to ask people to note everything they learn about Islam as they view the films. Here is what they'll hear in the module:

- The five central tenets of Islam are: declaring faith, giving to charity, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca, and prayer. Muslims are called to help immigrants, feed the hungry, spread peace, and do devotional practice.
- Muslims believe that all people are connected to one another and responsible for one another.
- Women should put their family first, but that does not preclude them from working outside the home.
- Islam values cleanliness.

With groups of non-Muslims, you might ask which, if any, of these concepts are new or surprising. With Muslims, you may want to ask if they thought the clips accurately reflected their understanding of their faith.

Before viewing the films, it may help to familiarize people with terms included in the module:

Ayatollah	Imam	shahadah	zakat
hadith	Ka'aba	Sharia	
haj	mosque	umma	
hijab	Qur'an	wudu	

Definitions are available on www.theislamproject.org.

LISTEN

When we listen actively to others' stories, we're more likely to understand them rather than judge them.

What can you learn — about assimilation, for example — from what people in the films reveal?

Exploring Cultural Differences

Michael Wolfe summarizes Muhammad's teachings, saying, "He tells them to be good to each other, and not to violate each other's rights. For men and women to treat each other humanely. . ." These are universal values that most people living in the West would also proclaim. So when Ayatollah Hadavi and Imam Rahman talk about American ways or Western ideology as being counter to Islamic values, what do you think they mean? Which things in American culture may seem to be in conflict with Islamic principles? What are the things in American culture that might not differ much from Islamic principles? Note: More information on this topic appears in the module *Muhammad's Example in Action*.

Imam Mustafa Rahman's chalets provide an intersection of cultures. Tourists who don't follow an Islamic dress code cross paths with Muslim villagers. What allows for this peaceful co-existence? How does the Imam reconcile his business with his personal faith?

LEAD

The film clips can help people think of ways to lead their community to action.

Part of Muslim faith is to reach out to the poor and to those who are not Muslim. Najah Bazy takes a group of kids to work in a soup kitchen because she believes that charitable work and helping non-Muslims are core precepts of Islam. How might you reach out to help people beyond the confines of your own religious group or neighborhood?

The man who is studying to become a Catholic deacon and is reaching beyond the confines of his group to support the work of the soup kitchen admits that he once knew little about Islam and judged Islam by its most stereotypical or extreme representatives. What might you do to ensure that your community has access to accurate information about Islam? What might you do to involve Muslims in community and interfaith charitable projects?