

**Chapter 24**  
**Muslim Beliefs and Practices**  
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**Chapter Summary**

**I. The Qur'an**

Expositions of Muslim belief usually begin by discussing the teaching of Muhammad about God. It is essential to note, however, that Islamic teaching about God is based on their distinctive conviction regarding God's revelation in the Qur'an.

As compared to the way most Christians view the Bible, Muslims consider the Qur'an to be a revealed book as opposed to merely inspired. The Muslim doctrine of wahy is a major source of misunderstanding of Islam in the West. The term ilham is much closer to what Christians mean when they speak of the Bible as "inspiration" as articulated by authorities like the Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield. For Muslims, ilham occurs when God reveals himself to an individual by putting his knowledge into their mind—the knowledge a person gains via ilham is inspired knowledge, quite distinct from human reason, and is the free gift of God.

However, Muslims do not claim the Qur'an is inspired as a product of ilham. Rather, it is the product of wahy, a term literally meaning "to hasten" and used to denote revelations given to prophets. Although Muslims believe that Muhammad spoke under the influence of ilham, what he said at these times forms the basis of the Hadith. This is different than the wahy that constitutes the Qur'an. The Qur'an is the pure revelation of God, the word of God that exists in heaven while all earthly editions are simply copies of the eternal heavenly archetype. As such the Qur'an was recited by Muhammad. At such times the words he spoke were literally the Word of God and not his own.

**II. The Doctrine of Abrogation**

It is entirely rejected by some Muslim scholars who suggest it is the teaching of those who went astray or are actually the enemies of Islam. The majority of Muslims, however, appear to accept that abrogation is a normal part of interpreting the Qur'an, with some claiming that hundreds of verses in the Qur'an are abrogated. The abrogated verses are usually the early, Medinan Suras, which are abrogated by the later, Meccan Suras. This can be a very confusing doctrine for a non-Muslim. Thus, when talking to a Muslim or attempting to understand the views of a particular group of Muslims, it is important to know how they regard abrogation. Those Muslims who accept the doctrine of abrogation argue that conflicts between modern Muslim practice and the teaching of the Qur'an actually reflect the power and glory of God, who, in his wisdom, adapted his revelation to changing circumstances and the need of both individuals and the community as a whole. They also argue it helps believers explain apparent contradictions.

Thus, for example, whereas modern Muslims are forbidden to drink alcohol, the Qur'an seems to imply that Muhammad's followers drank and that in heaven believers are allowed to enjoy wine. According to abrogation, Muhammad's followers were originally allowed alcoholic drinks, but because of drunkenness, alcohol was eventually banned with the promise that its use will be allowed in paradise.

Seen in this light, abrogation is a simple expedient by which God adapted his commands to Muhammad and the Muslim community in the light of changing circumstances. There is no contradiction in the Qur'an because the revelations progressively adapted God's will to human needs, so that humans were able to become good Muslims despite their many failings.

### **III. The Muslim State**

Islam rejects the secular Western notion of the separation of religion and morality from the duties of the state. Traditional Muslim teaching allows for no separation of church and state nor is this idea even a remote possibility. The Muslim community is the community of the faithful that submits to God's law as revealed in the Qur'an, taught by the example of Muhammad, expounded by Muslim legal experts, and enforced by the state.

Mawdudi's book *Let Us Be Muslims* bluntly advises that the way to root out the widespread corruption on God's earth is to stand up and fight against corrupt rule, take power, and use it on God's behalf.

The radical nature of his call for social revolution asserts that no true Muslim can live content in a country where secular law prevails. He thus argues for the imposition of Sharia law based on the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, rejecting the political doctrine of popular sovereignty.

### **IV. Jihad**

Popular writers in Western societies frequently argue that the term jihad does not mean "holy war" but, rather, a spiritual struggle. Attractive as this argument may be, Hexham suggests there is little backing for it in either the traditional Muslim texts or in the work of more recent writers whose influence shapes modern Islam.

Sunni and Shiite Muslims share a similar perspective that both jihad and the establishment of Sharia law are means of bringing freedom to all people so that they are free to choose to serve God. Jihad provides Muslims with a practical way of imposing God's law (Sharia) on society to free people from their own evil inclinations and the evils encouraged by rulers who do not acknowledge the true law of God. Jihad thus brings freedom through creating the conditions for the imposition of Islamic law on all people.

Despite popular Western interpretations that seek to dismiss anyone who holds such views as "extremist," Hexham insists the latter perspectives are misleading. Jihad is indeed primarily a form of warfare waged in defense of Islam so that it is highly misleading to dismiss someone like Osama bin Laden as "extremist" or claim that he "didn't understand Islam." The truth is, those like bin Laden and their followers are convinced that Islam is under threat from the West and that Western values are undermining Muslim societies. In their own eyes, therefore, they are fighting a legitimate war (jihad) in defense of Islam. No matter what the intent of those who minimize the military aspects of jihad may be, it is misguided in light of both traditional interpretations and current Muslim understandings of jihad.

Islam, for Muslims, is a religion of peace in the sense that the imposition of Islamic rule brings areas under Muslim control to peace and order in accordance with Islamic teachings about the will of God. It is therefore a Pax Islamica which imposes peace by dominating all opponents by force. Areas remaining free from control by Muslim rulers are viewed as the "realm of war," awaiting subjection to Islamic rule and the administration of Sharia law. This is why Muslims throughout history have regarded "the Conquests" of the first century of the Muslim era as the second greatest miracle of Islam, after the reception of the Qur'an.

To say "Islam is a religion of peace" is not at all the same thing as saying "Islam is a peaceful religion." Nowhere in Islamic teachings will you find statements such as those made by Jesus

to “love your neighbor as yourself” or “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

For the majority of Muslims worldwide, the primary meaning of jihad is war on behalf of Islam. That being said, there are indeed small pockets of Muslims who prefer the notion of jihad as “spiritual struggle” rather than its traditional meaning of literal, physical warfare.