

Core Curriculum

2 Foundations of Islam - Theology

2.1 Entering Islam: The Shahada

Question : What is shahāda?

Answer : The shahāda is the Islamic Creed, the fundamental key of entering Islam.

Question : How is the shahāda pronounced and what does it mean?

Answer : Ash-ha-du... an Lā ilāha ...illAllāh ...wa Ash-ha-du ... anna ... Muhammadan ... rasūlullāh. These Arabic words can be translated in the following way: I testify that there is no deity but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

Question : Does the shahāda differ among Muslims?

Answer : All Muslims believe in the same shahāda, Muslims also acknowledge an extended version in which they testify to the vicegerency and sainthood of Imam Ali (as) Ash-ha-du... an Lā ilāha ...illAllāh ...wa Ash-ha-du ... anna ... Muhammadan ... rasūlullāh. wa Ash-ha-du ... anna Aliun waliullah Translation: I testify that there is no deity but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah and I testify that Ali is the vicegerent and saint of Allah.

Question : How is Imāmah an extension of the Prophet Muhammad's (s) message?

Answer : After the Prophet Muhammad, the Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) preserve the authentic interpretation of Islam as intended by the Prophet (s).

Question : What is inner transformation?

Answer : It is changing your whole life and personality in accordance with what Allah wants from us.

Question : What does it mean to follow the Prophet as a role model?

Answer : Among other things, it means to adopt his compassion and love for God's creation and to acquire inner peace in God.

Question : Why do I have to perform ghusl after converting to Islam?

Answer : It is a ritual purification that enables you to perform ritual practices like prayer or fasting, which are obligatory in Islam.

Question : What can I do to treat the shahāda as a fact rather than just a belief or opinion?

Answer : Consider the Afterlife as more important than this one. That is the first step of knowing God.

2.2 The Usūl al-Dīn: The Fundamental Beliefs of Islam

Question : How many usūl al-dīn are there?

Answer : 5

Question : Do I need to believe in all of the usūl al-dīn in order to be a Muslim?

Answer : No, you need to believe in all so that your understanding of Islam, and your subsequent responsibilities that come thereof, is complete. There are some aspects of the usūl al-dīn that a person does not need to believe in in order to be a Muslim as long as it is done in good faith and out of innocent ignorance of the truth.

Question : What are the usūl al-dīn?

Answer : They are the foundational beliefs of a Muslim. They are: Tawḥīd (Oneness of God), ‘Adāla (Divine Justice), Nubuwwa (Prophethood), Imāma (Divinely Guided Leadership) and Ma‘ād (Resurrection on the Day of Judgment)

Question : If the God of Islam is One and has no partners, then what do angels and prophets do? Aren’t they partners that help God manage the world of creation?

Answer : A partner is someone who is your equal and you are in need of them in order to do things. Angels and prophets are servants of Allah who by His choice, enact His will in the world of creation. He does not need them to manage the world or create it, He simply chooses them as His servants to enact His will although He can do this without them.

Question : Will the resurrection on the Day of Judgment be physical or spiritual?

Answer : Physical.

2.3 Tawḥīd: The Unity and Oneness of God in Islam

Question : Why is tawḥīd the most important part of the usūl al-dīn?

Answer : Without tawḥīd, none of Islam, let alone the usūl al-dīn, would make sense for all of Islam depends on the concept of the Absolute Oneness and Unity of God.

Question : Are idols statues only?

Answer : No, our desires and egos can be idols as well for idols are simply entities which we enslave ourselves to.

Question : What is worship in Islam?

Answer : Worship in Arabic is ‘ibāda, meaning to “enslave oneself to something.” From an Islamic perspective, we may worship objects like money, or people like our bosses if our hearts and minds are totally submitted to them.

Question : What is shirk

Answer : Shirk is associating partners with Allah, either in creation, or in His attributes. For example, thinking that your parents are your sole providers is shirk since only Allah holds the attribute of sole Provider and Sustainer (al-Razzāq).

Question : Is tawhīd compatible with the Christian notion of the Trinity?

Answer : No, tawhīd means that God is absolutely one where He is not only one in essence, but is one person only and not three persons.

2.4 **Adala: Divine Justice in Islam**

Question : What is the Good?

Answer : The Good is that which leads human beings to salvation in the Afterlife.

Question : What is ‘Adāla?

Answer : ‘Adāla is a balance in the form of Divine Justice which God makes obligatory upon Himself and on His creation

Question : What is Evil?

Answer : Evil is the absence of Good, it corrupts the heart, corrupts one’s beliefs and actions, and ultimately leads people to damnation.

Question : Why does transgression of the balance lead to corruption?

Answer : The world is carefully designed, and there are special boundaries put so that people are led to salvation in the Afterlife. Transgression from these bounds means that one deviates and goes the wrong way. The wrong way leads to corruption.

Question : Why does Allah make justice obligatory upon Himself?

Answer : Because Allah, in His nature, is good, and justice is the result of God’s good nature.

Question : Why does God allow evil?

Answer : Because He allows free will, without free will, there is no real good or evil.

2.5 **Nubuwwa: The Purpose of Prophethood in Islam**

Question : What is the purpose of Prophethood in Islam?

Answer : Its purpose is to give humankind the blueprint on how to attain salvation in God as well as providing a human example on how to put that blueprint into practice.

Question : What’s the difference between wahī and ilhām?

Answer : Ilhām is usually a form of private inspiration from God, but wahī is revealed through the medium of the Archangel Gabriel (as) and is conditioned upon propagation to the public. Wahī is usually something new, often in the form of a new law.

Question : What’s the difference between a nabī (Prophet) and a rasūl (Messenger)?

Answer : A nabī receives basic revelation from God, usually in the form of a specific law whereas a Messenger receives a whole new system of laws which other nabī-only prophets usually follow.

Question : Why is the Prophet Muhammad (s) the last Prophet?

Answer : Because he is the prophet for the end of times, meaning that his message was perfect, complete and universal. Universal means for all times, all places and all peoples. As such, there is no more need for a new nabī.

Question : What's the difference between Sunnah and hadīth?

Answer : Sunnah is the tradition, practice or culture of the Prophet. The sunnah is preserved in a oral tradition called the ḥadīth, which are sayings of the Prophet, or sayings about him, as in his actions.

Question : What is salvation?

Answer : Salvation is to purify the heart from sins and evil and to fill it with the remembrance of God and surrender to the divine.

2.6 Imāmah or divinely guided leadership in Islam after the Prophet Muhammad.

Question : What is an Imām?

Answer : A divinely guided leader (after the Prophet) tasked to guide humankind and protect the message of Islam.

Question : What does the Qur'an say about Imāms?

Answer : It is the final state of spiritual ascension. A sinner (ẓālim) cannot be an Imām. See Q2:124.

Question : Who are 'Alī and the Mahdī?

Answer : 'Alī is the first of the 12 Imāms, and the Mahdī is the 12th and last of the Imāms.

Question : What is the difference between Imāmah in Sunnism and Shi'ism?

Answer : For Shi'ism, Imāmah is a form of divine leadership after the Prophet Muhammad in which God tasks Imāms in question to guide mankind. For Sunnism, Imāmah is more "secular", that is, it is a fallible enterprise and is not selected by God. Imāms for Sunnis can include Friday Prayers, or high ranking jurists.

Question : What is the difference between Imāmah after the Prophet Muhammad and Prophethood in general?

Answer : The Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) who succeeded the Prophet (s) do not receive direct revelation (wahī) from God which comes through the medium of the Archangel Gabriel, they only receive ilhām or divinely inspired knowledge without a medium, this form of

knowledge is largely private and not conditioned upon propagation, as is the case with wahī.

Question : Do the Imāms have to be present in order to guide us?

Answer : No they can from a distance through their light, they instill good thoughts and guidance in our hearts.

Question : Can God enforce Imāmah upon mankind?

Answer : Allah does not do that, He gave mankind the choice to accept it or reject it.

Question : How is it possible for an Imām to indirectly guide so many people via his light?

Answer : How do computers compute so much information? How does Satan deviate so many people on his own (without the need for his legions)? Is a divinely appointed Imām any less?

2.7 Ma'ād: The Day of Judgment in Islam

Question : What is the Day of Judgment?

Answer : The day all humans and jinns are resurrected and put to trial before God and questioned about the kind of life they led when they were alive. Did they worship God? Did they commit evil deeds or good deeds? The Day of Judgment will decide whether or not humans will enter heaven or hell.

Question : What is the difference between Qiyāmah and Ma'ād?

Answer : They are both the same thing, they refer to the resurrection on the Day of Judgment. Qiyāmah literally means to rise up, and Ma'ād means to return back to life.

Question : Who is Isrāfil?

Answer : The archangel who will blow his trumpet and bring about the Day of Judgment.

Question : What is one way we will be judged on the Day of Judgment?

Answer : We will be presented with two books, one which recorded our good deeds and the other which recorded our bad deeds. Depending on the balance of deeds and God's mercy, we will either enter hell or heaven.

Question : Who are munkir and nakīr?

Answer : They are the angels in our grave that will ask us about our relationship with God.

2.8 The Sharī'a: Purpose and Practice

Question : What is the literal meaning of the Sharī'a?

Answer : It means "way," as in the way to God and salvation in Him

Question : Can we enforce Sharī'a in non-Muslim countries?

Answer : No

Question : What is the purpose of the Sharī'a?

Answer : To help guide us to spiritual discipline and serve God

Question : How is the Sharī'a universal?

Answer : You don't need to be in a Muslim majority country to pray or fast or feed the poor or abstain from sin. This can be done anywhere.

Question : According to the Sharī'a, am I allowed to disobey civil laws?

Answer : As long as they don't contradict the foundations of Islam, you are not allowed to disobey them.

2.9 The Islamic Concept of the Nafs: Battling the Human Ego

Question : What is the nafs?

Answer : It can refer to the inner self, or the base self and ego that commands to evil.

Question : What is the fitrah?

Answer : The fitrah is our spiritual nature, the realm within us that commands towards the good and Allah.

Question : What is the pure heart?

Answer : The pure heart is a heart that is empty of sin and completely submerged in the remembrance of God.

Question : What happens when we refuse the whims of the nafs?

Answer : Your fitrah or spiritual nature becomes stronger. You become more disciplined in life.

Question : How do we win the battle against the Nafs?

Answer : By starving it and feeding the fitrah instead.

2.10 Satan, Jinns and Angels: Their Influence in the World

Question : Is Satan an angel according to Islam?

Answer : No, he is a Jinn. According to Islam, angels cannot sin or disobey God.

Question : How do the Jinn deviate us from the right path?

Answer : By whispering in our hearts and putting evil thoughts, or thoughts that eventually lead to evil.

Question : What's the difference between Angels and Jinns?

Answer : Jinns have free will and desires, they can disobey God. Angels either don't have desires, or don't have free will, or don't have either. Either way, they cannot disobey Allah nor sin.

Question : Why did Satan turn bad?

Answer : Because of his pride and arrogance, he refused to prostrate to Adam (as) - as per the command of Allah - whom he thought was an inferior being.

Question : How do whispers affect our psychological makeup?

Answer : Our minds, or psychological makeup, is shaped by the habits and choices we make. Through their whispers, the Jinn try to influence our habits and choices and thereby change our psychological makeup.

2.11 The Problem of Evil, Suffering and Pain

Question : What is the emotional problem of evil?

Answer : It is people's dislike or even hatred of God who permits suffering in the world. They are angry that God doesn't do anything about it.

Question : What is the intellectual problem of evil?

Answer : This problem sees God and evil as mutually incompatible from a logical perspective.

Question : What is one of the main reasons why God allows evil in this world?

Answer : Human evil is produced by free will. By preserving human free will, God allows humans to flourish and reach their highest potential of the good. But free will also means that humans can choose the wrong path.

Question : Why doesn't God punish people who do evil?

Answer : He does punish them, but that can take place in this world (if they are lucky) or take place in the Hereafter if they are unlucky as punishment in the next life is much worse.

Question : Are there rewards for people who suffer from evil in this world?

Answer : Yes, one of the rewards is having sins forgiven.