

Special Topics

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9 Independent Topics

9.1

Muslim Converts - Welcome to Islam!

So now you're a Muslim. Welcome to Islam! Converting to Islam is not a new thing. Many people convert to Islam. However, not many people, including people who were born into the religion, are aware of the implications of being a Muslim aside some basic beliefs and some ritual actions.

Our curriculum is full of lessons covering the basics of Islam, its creed, and dos and don'ts. So as you can guess, our goal here isn't to rehash all of that as you can simply browse and learn on your own at this point.

What we do want to do though is go over some of things you've achieved as a new Muslim as well as the challenges that you will face as a Muslim. In terms of what you have achieved, remember that now you are an ambassador to Islam. That is, you are a representative of the religion. So in this sense, you need to be careful in how you conduct yourself as a Muslim as now people will pay more attention to you.

That's the easy part. Being a Muslim will also present itself with new challenges. From our own experience, we've seen that the challenges usually revolve around personal and social struggles rather than issues with Islamic creed.

In our lesson, we look at the following challenges that converts often face:

1. Loneliness
1. Despair
1. Muslims giving Islam a bad name

Make sure to tune into the full lesson to learn how to deal with these challenges.

9.2

Basic Dos and Don'ts of Being a Muslim

When people first convert to Islam, they will quickly realize that their lives are significantly different compared to the lives they had before converting.

Islam is not just a religion of beliefs. It is a religion of action. As such, it is a religion that makes demands on people from the time they wake up until they go to sleep. In this lesson, we're going to go over some of the major areas where you will see your life change as a convert to Islam.

These areas are the following:

1. Waking up very early in the morning for prayer.
2. Cleanliness and ritual purity (going to the bathroom isn't going to be the same again, you will have to be a lot stricter in your washing and follow step by step rules)
3. Sexual relations with your spouse (you will be required to perform the major ablution after relations, you won't be able to carry on your day as usual as you will have to be in a state of ritual purity in order to pray.
4. Eating Halal (this means that you will have to eat only ritually slaughtered meat and avoid forbidden foods like pork and forbidden drinks like alcohol).

9.3

Halal Food and Zabiha

Zabiha, or dhabiha, literally refers to something that is slaughtered. In technical terms, it refers to the ritual slaughtering of animals that are permissible to eat in Islam. Once the ritual slaughtering is done, the meat of the animal is permissible

to cook and eat as long as the animal is not forbidden to eat from the get go.

For example, ritually slaughtering a pig, dog or cat does not make it halal to eat! The animal has to be “okayed” by Islam before the ritual slaughter is even valid. So in addition to pigs and dogs, the zabiha of dead animals or animals who have been sacrificed to pagan gods are not permissible.

So let’s look at four of the major rules of zabiha

1. The zabiha must be done by a sane, adult Muslim. A minority of scholars within the school of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), however, believe that the animal can also be slaughtered by someone from Ahl al-Kitab, that is, a Jew or a Christian. The tendency to accept meat slaughtered (not electrocuted!) by the Ahl al-Kitab is more popular among Sunni Muslims.
2. While slaughtering the animal, one must say the name of God as the Qur’an says "Therefore eat of that on which Allah's name has been mentioned if you are believers in His communications." (Chapter 6 verse 118 of the Holy Qur’an)
3. One must let the blood of the animal drain out.
4. The slaughtering must be done by hand. The cut should be made on the neck.

When meat is properly slaughtered, it gets the label zabiha or halal.

To learn more, please tune in to the full version of this lesson.

9.4

Family, Parents and Marriage in Islam

Parents, however, also have moral/religious duties to their children. (say moral slash religious duties)

Both parents have the responsibility of being moral examples for their children. An unfortunate reality today is that many kids pick up vices like lying from their parents. Have you ever seen a parent telling his or her spouse that “they aren’t

there” when someone calls? Well, that’s a form of lying, and kids see that and pick up on it.

The same goes for other acts of dishonesty, such as parents lying to each other. Here is another example, angry children often pick up their anger from their parents. Similarly, anxious and fearful kids also inherit much of their fears and panic attacks from their parents.

Parents therefore have the duty to be proper role models for their children in Islam. Parents need to be morally upright and also be calm sources of emotional security, not emotional ruin!

Parents also have the duty to educate their kids about Islam. First, they need to teach them the basic principles of Islam, both the *usul al-deen* where the basics of Islamic creed are taught.

Second, kids need to learn the proper rituals and dos and don'ts of Islam. So they need to learn how to pray, fast, do wudu and also know what is impermissible and ritually impure.

Some parents think that by sending their kids to Islamic schools they’ve done their job and they don’t need to teach them anything. But remember that words can only go so far. If kids see their parents not practicing Islam, the teachings of Islam won’t mean anything.

When parents don't practice, kids often think about Islam the following way: "if Islam isn’t good enough for my parents to practice, why should it be good enough for me to practice?"

To learn more, please tune into the full version of this lesson.

9.5

Marriage in Islam

SUMMARY

No society can function without healthy marriages. Generally speaking, not many children can grow into religiously and morally successful human beings without a stable and healthy marriage existing between parents.

Islam therefore offers a formula and a system of marital responsibilities to ensure as much as possible a successful community of believers, both in their emotional and religious well beings

Husbands have many responsibilities in Islam. Among these responsibilities, it is to provide their wives with maintenance. This maintenance includes:

1. Shelter
2. Food that satiates
3. Adequate clothing
4. Creams, perfumes, cosmetics
5. Things which she was used to under her father's house

If a wife requests it, a husband must provide his wife with a maid to help around in the house. If the husband cannot afford to do so, then he must become the maid himself.

According to Islam, the act of serving one's wife in household or domestic affairs brings about the grace of God and great spiritual reward. So it is in the husband's interests that he help his wife.

Wives have fewer responsibilities. Like husbands, wives are to encourage their husbands in leading the morally and religiously good life. If the husband falters in his religious and moral duties, wives, like husbands, must remind their spouses of their responsibilities on this earth.

However, their primary responsibility is to be available sexually to their husbands.

This may sound a bit weird or even offensive to some, but we need to understand

where Islam is coming from with this ruling. According to Islam, the greatest sin that humans, especially men are prone to are sexual sins and sins of immodesty. This means that men in particular are susceptible to gazing at the haram or engaging in zina, that is, fornication.

As Islam sees it, and as people can often observe, many men are prone to compulsive sexual behavior. So just like the husband is obligated to work and provide for his wife and fulfill her intrinsic need for security, a wife must also make sure to protect her husband from sin and spiritually damaging behavior.

To learn more, please tune into the full version of this lesson.

9.6

Islam and Sex

In many conservative cultures, sex is seldom talked about publically. Within the Muslim community, this is often the case as well. Human sex, however, is of central importance in understanding salvation in almost any religious tradition.

In Christianity, and in the New Testament in particular, we are taught how sexual deviance alters our intellects and warps our conceptions of morality. In an identical manner, Islam also teaches us the same message.

In Islam, halal intimate relations can lead to closeness to God. Plenty of hadiths talk about how married couples are blessed by God's angels when they are intimate with one another. Haram relations have the opposite effect.

They darken and corrupt the human soul. They remove Allah's saving grace from one's life. Sexual sins open up spiritual wounds through which demons can enter our being and make us even more prone to their evil suggestions.

In this lesson, we look at two sexual vices in Islam:

Zina and Liwat

Zina is illicit sex. The two English words that are often used for zina are fornication and adultery, both of which are applicable. In our current modern context, zina can refer to illicit sex outside of marriage, such as premarital sex or adultery.

Liwat refers to sodomy between men. It is the classical term for homosexual acts. In Islam, homosexual orientation is not a sin, homosexual acts are sinful. So here it doesn't really matter whether one was born a homosexual or not, the sin is the ACT, not the ORIENTATION.

To learn more, please tune into the full version of this lesson.

9.7

Modesty in Islam

Modesty is central to Islam. Modesty can mean different things. Modesty can be in speech or in behavior where one becomes unassuming and humble in how one talks or relates to others. These are virtues that Islam obviously accepts, encourages and even makes mandatory.

Modesty can also be in dress, which is the subject of this lesson. By modesty in dress, Islam means a mode of dress AND a mode of behavior that goes along with it. Both are intended to decrease the likelihood of sexual attraction. Purposefully dressing or behaving in such a way that incites sexual attraction is forbidden in Islam.

Just covering the hair and body, however, is not enough. Clothes must also be loose fitting so as to cover the shape of one's body. It is therefore forbidden to wear tight pants and shirts even if the head covering or head hijab is observed.

Men also need to be modest. Although they don't need to cover their hair, they need to wear clothes that are loose fitting and cover most of their bodies. Wearing armless shirts and tight sports pants for example is considered inappropriate in Islam.

To learn more, please tune into the full version of this lesson.

9.8

Women's Menstruation in Islam

Menstruation, according to Islamic law, leads to ritual impurity. This means that one cannot pray, fast or touch the Arabic letters of the Qur'an. Women are not being singled out here as men also become ritually impure through others means that are particular to them.

From a Sharia point of view, there are different types of blood. These include the loss of virginity, injuries to the vaginal area or post-natal bleeding. Menstruation in Islam has its own rulings which are different than other categories. Menstruation in Islam is known as hayd (pronounced hayz in Persian and Urdu).

The most popular opinion in Islamic law states that women are generally considered pubescent at the completion of the age of 9 in lunar years.

Menstruation in Islamic law has three signs:

1. warmth of the blood
2. the blood is dark red or black in color
3. there is pressure or slight burning in the discharge

If these three signs are found in a female at the age of 9 lunar years or more, then she will be considered to be in a state of hayd.

To learn more, please tune into the full version of this lesson.

9.9

Music, Alcohol, Drugs and Pork in Islam

A/N

9.10

Islam and Science

Islam believes that observing and studying nature is a way to grow closer to God. In this way, science is a good way to strengthening one's belief in God for it reveals to us the complex but beautiful way Allah's created world works.

From this vantage point, Islam therefore encourages scientific research. It also encourages us to make a living out of it for it is an honorable profession as long as we don't use science as a means for immorality.

How can science be used for immoral purposes? Well, as science has given us a lot of good, like curing diseases or bringing sanitary water to people's homes, it has also given us the atomic bomb or the creation of deadly diseases in the form of biological weapons.

Science is a tool, it can either be used for good or bad. Islam supports science when it is a means for good, but opposes it when it becomes a means for evil.

In our pursuit of science and knowledge, we must always keep in mind that our pursuit must always be for the sake of God. Imam Ali (as) once said:

“Do not seek knowledge for four aims: (1) Self-glorification in front of people of knowledge(2) Quarrelling with the ignorant(3) Showing off in gatherings of people(4) Attracting attention of people in order to secure an office of authority.”

To learn more, please tune into the full version of this lesson.

9.11

A Reading List of Islamic Knowledge

N/A

9.13

Ritual Prayers and Supplications in Islam

Islam has many kinds of ritual prayers called salat. Some of these prayers are obligatory, and some of them are recommended. In addition to this, Islam also has supplications (du‘a). In some other religions, prayers and supplications are often the same thing. In Islam, although both are performed together, they are theoretically distinct.

Prayers are the ritual movements that a person must do. They require special conditions and ablutions before one can perform them. We’ve spoken about these conditions before so we’re not going to go into them now.

Du‘as are a bit different. Du‘as don’t have ritual actions that accompany them,

they are simply supplications that one utters to God, either during salāt or outside of it. When done outside of ritual prayers, there is no obligation to do wudu or ghusl, or be in a special place. One can make them at any time.

Du‘as don’t have to be formal either, whereas prayers have to. If you don’t do your salāt the right way, you have to correct yourself somehow, either by making up for some missed units, or repeating the entire salāt again. In du‘as, there is no such thing.

As long as one maintains proper respect to Allah, they are fine. So you can say them in a language other than Arabic, and you can say them in a state of ritual impurity. You can simply pour your heart out to God and you can do it anywhere at anytime.

We do, however, have standard du‘as that are present in the Qur’an as well as in the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt (as). These are important not only for their majestic beauty, but they are also important because they teach us the proper ethics of how to supplicate to God.

To learn more, please tune into the full version of this lesson.

9.14

Death & Burial Rituals in Islam

According to Islamic belief, when a person dies, he or she immediately begins life in the afterlife. In Islam, the afterlife begins in the grave itself. Everything turns dark, but then the angels Munkir and Nakir show up and question the person about their life and deeds. According to the Prophet Muhammad (s), this process is an excruciating one.

When the questioning is done, for most people, everything turns blank until the person is woken up again when the Day of Resurrection begins. Only two types of people do not see their existence go blank during this period, the really evil people and the really good people.

The really evil people begin their punishment in the world of barzakh or

purgatory. The really good people who led morally good lives and were faithful to God live in bliss. In the next work, they live in a heavenly state before the real heaven.

While these are happening, we who are alive have responsibilities for the dead. Immediately after a person dies, these rituals must begin without delay. Here we will outline some of the key funeral rituals and practices of Islam.

Death and funeral rituals are obligatory on the community. Only when the obligation is fulfilled by some people is the rest of the community relieved of the obligation.

For more information on the process of Islamic burial laws, please tune into the full lecture version of this lesson.

9.15

The Battle of Armageddon: An Islamic View

According to Islam, when corruption on earth reaches its climax towards the end of times, the battle for Armageddon will begin. There are a number of major events that will happen. Remember that the hadiths on the subject are plenty and it is often difficult to put an exact chronological date on the sequence of events. In this lesson, we will try to outline them as simply and as best as we can.

At the climax of evil, two major antagonists are reported to emerge in the end of times. These two antagonists are the Dajjal and the Sufyani. The Sufyani will be a descendent of Banu Ummaya (Tribe of Ummaya) and will be responsible for the murder of many of the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt (as). He will take over Greater Syria and parts of Iraq and rule from Damascus.

It is reported that the 12th Imam, Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi (aj) will battle the Sufyani until he submits to al-Mahdi's order. Other reports, however, state that the Dajjal, a more global and more powerful evil, will succeed in eliminating the Sufyani by invading his land and consolidating his evil reign on earth.

The Dajjal is also known as the Anti-Christ (the full name is al-Masih al-Dajjal,

which literally means “the Lying Messiah”). He will establish a new world order around the globe towards the end of times as opposed to the Sufyani who will yield power in Greater Syria. Once the Sufyani is put down, the final battle will take place between the Dajjal and Imam al-Mahdi (aj).

To learn more, please tune into the full version of this lesson.

9.16

The Muslim Calendar

The Muslim or Islamic calendar is officially known as the Hijri calendar. The word hijri comes from the word Hijrah, which means migration. More specifically, it refers to the Prophet Muhammad’s (s) migration from Mecca to Medina when he was fleeing his assassins.

So the migration therefore marks year one in the Muslim calendar. The Muslim calendar has 12 months just like the Gregorian calendar, and it has around 354 or 355 days.

The Hijri calendar is a lunar calendar. The difference between the solar and lunar calendar is that the solar calendar is a measure of the earth’s rotation around the sun which is around 365 days. The lunar calendar is a measure of the moon’s rotation around the earth which is about 354 days. For this reason, the lunar calendar is shorter so you will see a drastic change in a month’s season as the years go by.

The current year in the Islamic calendar is 1437 and there is usually an “A.H” that follows it, meaning “After Hijrah.”

The names of the Islamic months are as follows:

1. Muharram
2. Safar
3. Rabi al-Awwal
4. Rabi al-Thani
5. Jumada al-Awwal

6. Jumada al-Thani
7. Rajab
8. Sha'ban
9. Ramadan
10. Shawwal
11. Dhu al-Qa'dah or al-Qi'da
12. Dhu al-Hijjah

To learn more, please tune into the full version of this lesson.

9.17

Muslims and non-Muslims in the Shariah

In a hadith from the Prophet Muhammad (s) he is reported to have said: "Whenever you see a funeral procession, stand up till the procession goes ahead of you".

One day a funeral procession passed in front of him and he stood up. Some protested and complained that it was the coffin of a Jew, he said, "Is it not a living being (soul)?"

This historical background of how the Prophet Muhammad (s) related to non-Muslims is a key basis that informs much of the Shari'ah's treatment of non-Muslims.

The Shari'ah and Non-Muslims

The Qur'an is clear that no one can be forced to convert to Islam. Allah says:

"Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things."
(Chapter 2, verse 256).

Non-Muslims, just like Muslims, who live peacefully, have inalienable rights under the Shari'ah. These means that non-Muslims have the right to work, live in safety, have access to healthcare, right to property and inheritance and all the basic rights that Muslims have.

Muslims living in non-Muslim Majority Countries

The Shari'ah obliges Muslims to obey all rules when living under a non-Muslim government as long as the rules don't explicitly and directly ask them to disobey God. For example, if a government were to ask a Muslim to stop praying, the Muslim would be under no obligation to follow it. In cases of extreme hostility, the Shari'ah may ask or request that the Muslim leave the country.

As far as we know, this isn't the case with most non-Muslim countries, especially those in the West. Muslims are therefore urged to obey all traffic rules, tax laws, and conduct themselves as peaceful and productive citizens of their country.

To learn more, please tune into the full version of this lesson.

9.18

A Timeline of Major Events in Islamic History

N/A

9.19

Introducing the Qur'an: Why it is the way it is

The Qur'an is the revealed book of Allah. It is the foundational book of Islam and contains all the necessary principles to lead an Islamic life. Like anything in this world, the Qur'an has its own story and history.

In this lesson, we look at the major themes of the Qur'an, which include

1. The Qur'an's background
2. How the Qur'an is divided

3. Why the Qur'an doesn't follow a chronological order
4. What is in the Qur'an
5. How to read the Qur'an

To learn more, please tune into the full version of this lesson.

9.20

The School of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq

Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as) was born in the year 702 of the common era and he died in the year 765, which is the 148th year of the Hijri calendar.

He was the son of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (as), the grandson of Imam Zayn al-Abidin (as), the great grandson of Imam al-Husayn (as). Imam al-Sadiq (as) became an Imam when he was in his mid-thirties.

Since the beginning of the Imamate of Imam Ali (as) until the Imamate of Imam Zayn al-Abidin (as), the Imams were overwhelmed with political turmoil. Despite this, they still managed to educate their followers on the basic precepts of Islam.

Although the Imams had taught various subjects until this time, it is only during the time of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (as) that organized schools began to be established. In his capacity as an official teacher, Imam al-Baqir (as) began teaching various subjects, the most popular of which was Islamic law.

But it is during the time of his son Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as) that things reached its peak. It was the formative period of Islam. The Umayyads and the Abbasids at the time were waging wars against each other so they were too busy to oppress the Imams and keep them from spreading the authentic and unadulterated message of Islam.

Imam al-Sadiq (as) had thousands of students, much more than his father. He taught all subjects, Qur'anic exegesis, theology, history, law, ethics, science and more. Just like he was relatively free to teach, his students also had some more space to spread the message as well, although they still had to be careful.

9.21

Major Fields in Islamic Studies

N/A

9.22

The Caliphate in Sunni and Shia Islam

In Sunni Islam, a Caliph is only secondarily a religious leader, he is more of a political leader. This is why in Sunni law a Caliph does not need to be a scholar of Islam. But despite his primary role as a political and worldly leader, he still has some religious functions, such as determining for the Sunni community such as determining special days like Eid al-Fitr which is the festival that marks the end of the month of Ramadan. Although he does not have to be a scholar, he is still expected to have some acceptable level of knowledge when it comes to Islam.

In Sunni Islam, successorship to the Prophet Muhammad (s) is not necessarily determined by the Prophet himself. It can be determined in three other ways as well:

Through selection by a small but select group of the Prophet's companions.

Personal designation by the previous Caliph

Self-declaration or self-appointment

In Shia Islam, the Prophet's successor can only be chosen by God. Unlike Sunni Islam, the office of the Caliphate is primarily a religious one. The Caliph must be the most knowledgeable person on earth at the time, be infallible, and be divinely inspired. The primary role of the Caliph is the religious guidance of humankind. Political office is only secondary. In Shi'i Islam, person can still be the Prophet's caliph or successor yet not hold political office.

To learn more, please tune into the full version of this lesson.

9.24

Islam, Racism and Anti-Semitism

SUMMARY

Islam is against racism. In fact, Islam is one of the few premodern religions to have explicitly opposed racism of all kinds. This includes racism against people of different skin color, or against ethnic-religious groups like Jews.

Islam believes that we are all the children of Adam and as such we are all

honored by Him. The Prophet Muhammad (s) once said:

O people, Allah has removed the slogans of ignorance from you and the exaltation of its forefathers. The people are only two kinds: either a righteous, Godfearing believer dignified to Allah, or a wicked, miserable sinner insignificant to Allah. The people are all the children of Adam and Adam was created from dust. Allah said: O people, We have created you male and female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most noble to Allah is the most righteous of you.

Some people think that God honored all of humankind, but somehow He honored some more than others. They think that He honored whites over blacks, of blacks over whites, or men over women, or women over men, or rich over poor.

The honor, however, is an equal honor that applies to all. The ONLY thing which surpass others in is in piety, consciousness of God and righteousness. In other words, the closer you are to God, the higher in rank and value you are to Him and nothing else! So it doesn't matter if you're a man, woman, white, black, Arab, non-Arab, rich or poor, what counts here is righteousness and consciousness of God.