

## 2022-2023 ENCOUNTERING DIFFERENCE

### MARCH MONTHLY FOCUS:

## ISLAM

Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam is rooted in the Middle East but is now a global religion. With nearly two billion adherents, Islam is the second largest religion after Christianity. Islam itself means “to submit” and to be Muslim is to be one who submits to God (Allah in Arabic). In this way, Islam is a way of living one’s life before God and is characterized by five pillars of action. The core text is the Qur’an which is believed to be a direct revelation of God to Muhammed, the final prophet following a series of prophets (including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Hagar, Moses, Miriam, and Jesus, figures known in Jewish and Christian scriptures as well). Sacred to Islam is the first pillar which requires Muslims to declare: “I bear witness that there is no God but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.”

### Some Notes:

- **Qur’an**—Understood as a direct revelation of God through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammed. Contains 114 *surahs*. Written in Arabic, the recitation of the Qur’an is both an art and science.
- **Muhammed**—Born in Mecca in 570 CE and lived as a married merchant. At age 40, Muhammed began to receive revelations calling to worship one God. In 622, the Prophet and his followers emigrated to Median. Returning to Mecca in 630 following a series of battles, by the time of his death in 632 much of the Arabian peninsula had embraced Islam. While understood as a messenger and not himself divine, the Prophet’s name is often followed by the phrase, “peace be upon him,” which in Arabic is abbreviated “saw.”
- Following the Prophet’s death, records of his words were collected in books of traditions, or *hadith*. These *hadith* are part of the *Sunnah*, which include both the Prophet’s words and practice.
- **5 pillars**
  - *Shahada* [Faith] – The declaration of faith in one God and His messenger.
  - *Salah* [Prayer]—The ritual prayer required of every Muslim five times a day.
  - *Zakat* [Almsgiving]—The act of giving a portion of a Muslim’s wealth to those in need.
  - *Sawm* [Fasting]—The act of fasting during the holy month of Ramadan.
  - *Hajj* [Pilgrimage]—The sacred pilgrimage to Mecca required of every Muslim at least once in their lifetime if it is within their means.
- Both the Qur’an and the *hadith* tell of the Prophet Muhammed’s **Night Journey** (Al-Israa’ and Al-Mi raj), which includes a trip to Jerusalem and from Jerusalem to the heavens. Al-Aqsa Mosque (i.e. the Temple Mount), the site of this dream in Jerusalem, remains a sacred site to Muslims second only to Mecca.
- Muslims throughout the world greet one another with the phrase: *Assalamu ’alaykum*, “peace be upon you.”
- While globally Muslims unite in one *ummah*, or community, there are also different schools of thought and tradition that create diversity. One of the large distinctions revolves around leadership following the Prophet’s death. **Shi’i** groups historically argue for succession through Muhammad’s family whereas **Sunni** groups historical argued for succession from the wider Muslim community. The **Sufi** movement focuses on devotional practices and mystical thought.
- **Eid al-Fitr** is a major celebration that marks the end of Ramadan with a feast. It is the first day of daytime eating following the fasting of Ramadan.

### Words of the Tradition:

“In the name of God, The Lord of Mercy, The Giver of Mercy!

Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds,  
The Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,  
Master of the Day of Judgment.

It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help.

Guide us to the straight path:

The path of those You have blessed  
those who incur no anger  
and who have not gone astray.”

-Qur’an opening lines, recited daily in *Salah*

“O God, if I worship You out of fear of Hell,  
then burn me in Hell;

If I worship You in hope of Paradise,  
then exclude me from Paradise;

But if I worship You for Yourself alone,  
then deny me not your Eternal Beauty.”

-Rabi’ah of Basra, 8<sup>th</sup> century Iraqi Sufi woman