
What Every Latter-day Saint Should Know about Islam

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Islam began in Arabia in the seventh century a.d. and since then has spread to all parts of the earth to become a worldwide faith with about 1.2 billion followers. Given its importance not only to its many adherents but also to the rest of the world, it is surprising how little Westerners know about it and how many misconceptions concerning Islam thrive in our culture. Latter-day Saints—who are under a scriptural injunction to learn about “things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, . . . and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:79)—would be wise to become better informed about this influential and rapidly growing religion.ⁱ¹

The name *Islam* means “submission” (submission to God), and each believer is called a “Muslim” (one who submits to God). Muslims worship the same God (Arabic *Allah*) that Christians and Jews worship, “the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob” (Mosiah 7:19), “the Compassionate, the Merciful” (Qur’an 1:1). Muslims are not a nationality or an ethnic group but a community of believers. They can be found among all races and in every nation, not only in the Middle East. Although Arabia is the birthplace of Islam, being an Arab is not the same as being a Muslim. An Arab is someone whose native or ancestral language is Arabic, and millions of Arabs in the Middle East are Christians. Indonesia, the most populous Muslim nation in the world, is three thousand miles from the nearest Arab country and three thousand miles from the Middle East. Only 20 percent of Muslims worldwide are Arabs, and of the nine nations in the world with the largest Muslim populations, only one is an Arab country and only three are in the Middle East.ⁱⁱ² There are roughly as many Muslims in the United States as Jews or Latter-day Saints.

History

Muslims view the life of their prophet Muhammad and the origins of Islam as a sacred history. For Muslims this means that God’s hand is evident in the life of Muhammad and what occurred in the centuries after his death. Muhammad’s birth was anticipated, and his entire life is viewed as the model life for every Muslim. Therefore, his life story and the early history of Islam give meaning to and inform every aspect of the life of Muslims. Even the name *Muhammad* (“One Who Is Praised”) is the most common name given to male Muslims. But Muhammad is not a god or divine person who intercedes on behalf of the followers of Islam to provide salvation. He is not a savior figure. In the Islamic view, Islam began with Adam and was restored by subsequent prophets, the last of whom was Muhammad. He is considered the last in a long succession extending back to Jesus in the New Testament and farther back into the Old Testament to include prophets such as Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Solomon, David, and a few not mentioned in the Bible (for example, Hud and Salih).



Mosaic of Muhammad's name from the 14th-century tomb of Rumi in Konya, Turkey.

Muhammad was born about a.d. 570 to the clan of the Banu Hashim of the Quraysh tribe in Mecca, a bustling city of commerce in the Arabian Peninsula. His father died before his birth, and he lost his mother at about age two. After his guardian grandfather also passed away, Muhammad was placed in the care of his uncle, Abu Talib, who raised him to adulthood. At age twenty-five, Muhammad married Khadija, a merchant woman fifteen years his elder. Khadija and Muhammad had a happy marriage that produced several children.

According to Islamic tradition, Mecca at the time of Muhammad exhibited all the ills of a corrupted and apostate city. Its religious focal point was the Ka'ba, a large, black, cube-shaped structure that still stands in Mecca today. In Muhammad's time, the sacred Ka'ba complex, which Adam reportedly constructed and Abraham and Ishmael later rebuilt, housed more than 365 idol gods. Tribal and clan warfare dominated the area, and the practice of female infanticide prevailed, wherein newborn daughters, who were looked upon as a drain on family production and finances, were left to die in the desert. Muhammad was very critical of the Meccans. He was particularly sensitive to the idolatry and corrupted business practices of the Quraysh merchants toward the poor, the widows, and his fellow orphans. Muhammad was also quite contemplative and inclined to a more spiritual outlook on life. Periodically, he would retreat to a cave on Mount Hira, near Mecca, to practice religious devotions and contemplate "his life and the ills of his society, seeking greater meaning and insight."ⁱⁱⁱ3

Muslim tradition records that during one of those retreats, the angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad and commanded him to recite to his people: "Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created, created Man of a blood-clot. Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the Pen, taught Man that he knew not" (Qur'an 96:1-5).^{iv}4 Muhammad received 114 revelations over a twenty-three-year period. Within twenty years of his death, Muslims collected the revelations and bound them together to become their sacred book of scripture, the Qur'an ("the Recitation"). The Qur'an is about the same length as the New Testament.

Muhammad and his followers experienced many trials and persecutions, particularly from the Meccans of the Quraysh tribe. One of the most difficult personal trials for Muhammad occurred when his beloved Khadija and protector uncle Abu Talib died within the same year. It was about that time that Muhammad is said to have been transported on a winged creature to Jerusalem, from which he ascended through several heavens and conversed with many Old Testament prophets. Muhammad even talked with God.^v5 Despite this Year of Sadness (as it later came to be called), Muhammad's Night Journey experience strengthened him both physically and

spiritually so he was able to take charge of the fledgling religion and provide the needed leadership for the rest of his life.

In a.d. 622, not long after Muhammad's Night Journey and ascension, God commanded him to leave Mecca and move to Yathrib, a city about two hundred miles north. Because of the significance of this move, Yathrib took on the name "the City of the Prophet" (*madinat al-Nabi*, or Medina). In Medina, Muhammad was able to set up the first Islamic state (*umma*), where Muslims acknowledged him as their prophet and political leader. The move from Mecca to Medina, called the *hijra*, was so important to Muslims that they began to calculate time from that year (a.d. 622). Hence, some Muslim calendars contain both *hijra* and Gregorian dates. After several battles and skirmishes with opposing Meccan tribes, in a.d. 630 the majority of Meccans accepted Muhammad and proclaimed him a prophet and the political leader of Mecca and Medina. Upon returning to Mecca, Muhammad cleansed the Ka'ba of the idol gods and declared Allah the one and only God.

Muhammad did not choose a successor before he died in the arms of his wife Aisha in 632. It is significant to Muslims that the leaders who followed Muhammad cannot be considered prophets because, according to the Qur'an (33:40), Muhammad was the final prophet. Instead, those early leaders were considered representatives or deputies of Muhammad, called caliphs. Today two major branches of Islam exist—Sunnis and Shi'is (or Shi'ites). Following the death of Muhammad, the question of who should succeed in the leadership of the community became critical. The main question involved whether the community should choose the leader or if a direct blood relative of Muhammad should lead. During the period after Muhammad's death, his cousin and son-in-law, 'Ali, became an immediate candidate of choice. However, the community selected others until 'Ali was chosen as the fourth caliph. By that time, enough Muslims were offended at 'Ali being passed over previously that they began to develop into the "Party of 'Ali" (*shi'at 'Ali*). After 'Ali and his son were assassinated, the split was cemented even more. Over the centuries, Shi'is (those who were loyal to 'Ali) became prominent from time to time as their influence grew through rising to high levels of leadership in the Islamic world. Today the main distinction between Sunnis and Shi'is is still leadership. In principle, Shi'is believe in a central leader who can trace his lineage back to Muhammad. Sunnis, on the other hand, govern through a consensus of community leaders. Apart from the question of leadership, Sunnis and Shi'is agree on most of the basic beliefs and practices of Islam. Geographically, a large concentration of Shi'is can be found in Iran, but Shi'ism also has a presence in other countries, including Iraq, Lebanon, and Pakistan. Sunnis, however, constitute the largest population of Muslims throughout the world (about 85 percent).

By the eighth and ninth centuries, Islam had already spread from the Arabian Peninsula westward to Spain and eastward to India. During the Middle Ages, while the West languished in relative intellectual darkness, Islamic civilization, first centered in Damascus and then in Baghdad, preserved and produced classical knowledge in philosophy, literature, and the sciences, as well as contributing its own unique advances to those and other disciplines. Today one-fifth of the world's population is Muslim, and Islam is now considered one of the fastest-growing religions on earth.



Shi'ite mosque, Damascus, Syria, marking the burial place of Sayyida Ruqayya, Muhammad's great-granddaughter.

Basic Beliefs and Practices

Like Judaism and Christianity (and other major world faiths), Islam is not a monolithic religion. The Islamic world is made up of diverse races, nations, languages, and cultures. Yet Muslims all over the world are united through a number of foundational beliefs and practices.

A major belief Islam instills into every aspect of Muslim life is the oneness (*tawhid*) of God. It cannot be overstated that Muslims are strict monotheists. In fact, any Muslim who elevates anything (people, power, greed, status, materials) to the level of God and somehow supplants Him is guilty of the most grievous and unforgivable sin in Islam (*shirk*, the association of anything with God). This was the problem every prophet before Muhammad, and also Muhammad himself, had to deal with. In a sense, Islamic sacred tradition teaches a dispensational history. Each prophet, usually assisted by an angel, appears on a scene of wickedness and idolatrous practices and serves as a restorer, bringing back the true worship of the one God. But the prophets before Muhammad were never entirely successful at ridding their people of idolatry. Muslims believe that victory over idolatry and apostasy will eventually occur, as evidenced by the rapid growth of Islam since Muhammad.

Muslims also believe that the true inner nature of each human being can recognize the oneness of God. However, because of the accumulated layers of pride, greed, or worldly preoccupations, people forget and neglect God. In traditional Christianity, original sin is Adam's disobedience to God's commandment, which is transferred to each person. In Islam, original sin is forgetfulness and neglect. To overcome the consequences of sin, a Christian needs the grace of Christ's Atonement; in Islam, a Muslim needs to remember the oneness of God. To help Muslims remember God, it is common to see the use of a string of prayer beads, containing ninety-nine

beads, each corresponding to one of the ninety-nine names of God. Many Muslims will recite those names on a daily basis. In Islam, recognizing and remembering the oneness of God is of paramount importance.

Islam teaches all Muslims to know and do the will of God. Muslims who want to teach this basic concept to Christians and know something of the Bible commonly refer to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:10, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." In the Book of Mormon, Jacob also teaches the principle of following the will of God: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh" (2 Nephi 10:24). For every Muslim, God's will is made manifest in the Qur'an and in the sayings and acts of Muhammad (*sunna*). Muslims view the Arabic Qur'an much the same way that Christians view Jesus Christ. According to one prominent Muslim scholar, "In Christianity both the spirit and body of Christ are sacred, and he is considered the Word of God. The Qur'an is likewise for Muslims the Word of God (*kalimat Allah*), and both its inner meaning, or spirit, and its body, or outer form, the text in the Arabic language in which it was revealed, are sacred to Muslims."^{vi}6 Muslims consider Muhammad's teachings and example second only to the teachings of the Qur'an, and therefore great strides were made in the early centuries of Islam to collect and document every known report (*hadith*) of Muhammad's words and deeds. Every field of Islamic inquiry—such as theology, philosophy, law, and mysticism—finds its bearings first in the Qur'an and then in the teachings of Muhammad. Although some Muslims have interpreted the Qur'an and Muhammad's teachings as justification for extremism, the majority of Muslims take a much more moderate approach.

While it is true that Muslims believe in the oneness of God, in doing His will, and in the manifestation of these in the Qur'an and in Muhammad's teachings, Islam is still very much focused on what Muslims must *do* with their faith to remember God and do His will. Therefore, drawing from the Qur'an and Muhammad's life, Muslims unanimously accept five mandatory practices: the witness of faith (the *shahada*), prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage. These are commonly referred to as the Five Pillars of Islam.

Shahada. In the witness of faith, one declares the oneness of God and Muhammad's prophethood. One must verbally declare the witness of faith when desiring to become a Muslim. To do this one must sincerely say, usually in the presence of another Muslim, the statement (preferably in Arabic), "I testify that there is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God." Muslims view the first part of this statement as a forceful reminder of the oneness of God and of the ineffectiveness of all other "gods," meaning anything equated at the level of God. The second part focuses on the prominent place Muhammad holds as a prophet and model Muslim. One can find this statement permeating much of Islamic thought and see it written on mosques and books and used in many other ways. This declaration is the Muslim creedal statement and the gateway into Islam.

Prayer. Muslims are commanded to pray five times a day. According to Muslim tradition, when Muhammad was returning from his Ascension to heaven, he saw Moses, who asked him what God had instructed. Muhammad said he was bringing the message to his followers to pray fifty times a day. Moses was astonished at this number and suggested that Muhammad go back to see if God would lessen the requirement. Muhammad went back and forth between Moses and God several times. Each time Moses would say the prayers are too many, and each time God would reduce the prayers by five or ten. Finally, Muhammad returned to Moses having lowered the number of prayers down to five a day. Moses still felt the people could not perform that many prayers, citing his experiences with the rebellious children of Israel. But Muhammad, when he

was told to go back, said that if Moses wanted to go back that would be fine, but Muhammad would not. Muslims commonly teach that the merit of saying five prayers is equal to fifty. One can see this emphasis on prayer in every Muslim country by the vast number of mosques, which provide a place for Muslims to pray (especially for Friday prayer), and in the thousands of tower-like minarets that broadcast the call to prayer from loud speakers. Before a Muslim can pray, a cleansing ritual must be performed, which involves washing the hands, face, and feet with water. Frequent prayer reminds Muslims that they are in a master-servant relationship with God and that they must be clean and accountable to Him.



Worshippers reading the Qur'an in the Great Mosque, Bursa, Turkey; notice the prayer beads in the foreground, used for recitation of prayers and passages from the Qur'an.

Fasting. During one full (lunar) month each year, Ramadan (the traditional month in which Muhammad first received the Qur'an), all able Muslims are expected to fast from dawn until dusk. This means that they abstain from food, drink, smoking, and sexual relations. This is generally a time for Muslims to be introspective and draw closer to God. Generally, children are not required to fast until they reach the age of eight or older. Many Muslim families take the opportunity of Ramadan to focus on areas of their life that need more discipline, such as doing better at prayers, school, and work and being kind to others. At the end of Ramadan, Muslims joyously celebrate *Eid al-Fitr*, the breaking of the fast, in which much food is consumed and gifts are exchanged.

Almsgiving. Like King Benjamin's counsel to take care of the needy (see Mosiah 4:21), Muslims are required to be outgoing in their efforts to take care of the poor and lend support to community needs. Muslims even donate 2.5 percent of their income yearly to assist the less fortunate. These alms are used for building schools and mosques and for lifting up those who are in need. It is not uncommon in Muslim countries to find beggars on the streets gladly receiving

contributions from Muslims who are just as happy to give, knowing that doing so provides them an opportunity to live this important pillar of their faith.

Pilgrimage. Every able Muslim should perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. This is the pinnacle spiritual experience for a Muslim. The *hajj* (pilgrimage) occurs during one month out of the year and lasts over a week. It includes rites and reenactments that commemorate the life of Abraham. Each Muslim dons a white seamless garment, walks around the sacred Ka'ba, stones the devil, and performs the rite of standing where a Muslim imagines himself or herself in the presence of God. Although the *hajj* does not really resemble Latter-day Saint temple practices, for Muslims it is the closest thing in terms of sacredness and spiritual fulfillment. "The *hajj* is the highest act of devotion for a Muslim. It is a time of spiritual reflection, of rededication to Allah and the Islamic faith, . . . and of peace with one's fellow beings."^{vii}7 At the end of the *hajj*, Muslims celebrate *Eid al-Adha*, the feast of the sacrifice, in which Muslims sacrifice and eat a sheep, goat, or cow in memory of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael.

Attached to the Five Pillars of Islam is the concept of *jihad* ("striving," or "struggle"). This is not properly a pillar, but it is added to the list to remind Muslims that performing the pillars will be a lifelong striving. And it is in this sense that *jihad* is most meaningful to Muslims. It is reported that when the battles between the Muslims and the Meccans had ended, Muhammad said that the "Lesser Jihad" was over and that the "Greater Jihad" had just begun. In other words, the "Greater Jihad" is the struggle to be a good Muslim living a good Muslim life, while the "Lesser Jihad" is taking up arms in defense of Islam. In the words of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "To wake up in the morning with the Name of God on one's lips, to perform the prayers, to live righteously and justly throughout the day, to be kind and generous to people and even animals and plants one encounters during the day, to do one's job well, and to take care of one's family and of one's own health and well-being all require *jihad* on this elemental level."^{viii}8 Again, most of the 1.2 billion Muslims in the world interpret these basic beliefs and practices in a peaceful way. It is the highest of virtues to spread the message of Islam through love and concern for fellow human beings. For Muslims, *jihad* is more or less the equivalent of Latter-day Saints being "anxiously engaged in a good cause" (D&C 58:27). Thus, it is unfortunate that extremists have created the images that many non-Muslims have of *jihad*, eclipsing the true and correct picture of Islam.

Future Challenges and Lessons Learned

Because North Americans are isolated from those parts of the world in which large populations of Muslims are found historically, we are not as well informed about Islam as we would be otherwise. This would be of little concern were it not for the unfortunate aspect of human nature that seeks to stereotype and sometimes even demonize those whom we do not know. One result of this is the way Muslims and Middle Easterners are treated in the popular Western media. In a world that is becoming increasingly aware of cultural and ethnic sensitivities, Middle Easterners and Muslims seem to be the only groups that are fair game for collective maligning and vilifying in television and motion pictures. Our sad experience has been that Latter-day Saints, despite having been taught by revelation that "all are alike unto God" (2 Nephi 26:33), are not immune from this kind of thinking.

Misunderstandings between Muslims and Westerners often come about because of unwillingness to understand another person's point of view. In the modern world, the flashpoints between the two cultures that most frequently come to mind are the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and terrorism. With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian dilemma, Westerners generally view the conflict from the perspective of centuries of brutal European oppression of Jews, culminating in pogroms, deportations, concentration camps, and the gas chambers of Nazi Germany, accompanied by the

quest of the most persecuted minority in history to gather to its historical homeland and create a secure Jewish state there. But people of the Middle East, both Christians and Muslims, see the other side of the issue: innocent Palestinians driven by superior military force from their ancestral lands and homes to make way for the victims of European racism, culminating in continued oppression and generations of children growing up in refugee camps or under military occupation. Those who know the situation well understand that both of these perspectives are historically accurate and that both are extremely troubling to people who care about their fellow humans. Yet Westerners generally turn a blind eye to the one, while people of the Middle East generally turn a blind eye to the other. For its part, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a well-established position of impartiality on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,^{ix9} and Brigham Young University and individual Church members continue to work to build bridges with our friends in both communities. In recent years, the conflict has taken on very strong religious overtones, as Muslims throughout the world have adopted the Palestinian side as a religious cause and have wrapped in the cloak of Islam what was once considered strictly a political struggle. Among Latter-day Saints, it is common to hear that the conflict is the inevitable continuation of a millennia-old rivalry between Isaac and Ishmael. But the truth is that the conflict is only a century old and belongs to modern history. Jews and Muslims have, for the most part, coexisted in peace throughout their common history. And ever since the Middle Ages, Muslim lands have provided a safe haven for Jews fleeing from their ongoing oppression at the hands of Christians.



Selimiye Mosque, Konya, Turkey, 16th century; in the center of the image is the *mihrab* (the niche indicating the direction to Mecca), and to the right is the *minbar* (the stairway and the pulpit used in the Friday sermon).

That Western culture and Islam are not inherently incompatible is shown in the fact that Muslims in very large numbers are immigrating to the United States and Canada, attracted by the same blessings that have brought immigrants to these countries for centuries. Many more have immigrated into Western Europe. Even so, there are cultural differences that perhaps will lead to future challenges. For example, Muslims, like Christians, seek an ultimate victory for their religion when all the world will be unified under divine rule and law. But for Latter-day Saints and other Christians, Christ's kingdom "is not of this world" (John 18:36), and His universal reign will be established only when He returns to earth in glory. Muslims, Jews, and Christians share an equal commitment to justice. Most Muslims agree with us that vengeance is to be left to God and that justice will not always be achieved in this life (see Romans 12:19). Yet there are some who feel that believers themselves are responsible to right things that are wrong and to see that justice is done on earth. As a result, some Muslims may find it difficult to function fully in democratic societies according to the norms of those societies. And in extreme cases, the desire to bring about what some consider to be justice has been expressed in acts of violence and terrorism. The idea of a "separation of church and state" is a foreign concept to many Muslims, who believe that God is the only legitimate ruler and that His will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven. The constitutional principle that government may neither establish religion nor impede the free exercise of religion has proven to be the best guarantee of the peaceful coexistence of differing religious communities in one country. But a government that does not acknowledge Islam both as God's true religion and as the law of the land is an anathema to many Muslims, especially in countries with large Muslim populations. Muslims themselves are debating issues regarding religious pluralism and the status of religious minorities in predominantly Muslim lands. And they are also discussing and evaluating the position of women in their societies. Some other cultural differences between Western and Muslim societies perhaps say more about us than they do about Muslims. Many Muslims consider Europeans and North Americans to be decadent and lacking in morals. Their first large-scale exposure to Westerners came when American and European workers arrived to labor in oil fields and construction projects, bringing with them alcohol, crime, and prostitution. People of the Middle East learn about Americans by watching our motion pictures and television shows. They are appalled at the crime, violence, and immorality in our society. In contrast, visitors from the West are surprised at the lack of crime they find in the Middle East and are amazed to see children playing in the streets of big cities after dark and families going shopping or for walks long after American cities are shut down for the night. And contrary to what some Westerners believe, the scarcity of crime is not solely attributable to the severity of punishment; more than anything else, it results from a shared commitment in the Muslim world that crime is wrong.

We can learn much from our Muslim brothers and sisters. Islam has created a society in which modesty is valued, in which divorce and premarital and extramarital sexual relations are much less common than in our culture, and in which the strength of immediate and extended families can be an example even to Latter-day Saints. Muslims develop strong communities with interactive neighborhoods of people who care for each other and watch out for the interests of both neighbors and strangers. Their culture teaches the virtues of generosity and hospitality. One BYU professor learned about Muslim generosity on a trip to Syria in which he and his family were stranded in a disabled car on a desert road. The family was taken into a stranger's home and fed and entertained for hours until new transportation could be arranged. Another BYU professor learned the same lesson with flat tires and no spare on two consecutive days in Jordan. Each of the four times he stood by the road to hail a ride to and from repair shops, it was the very first car

that came by that offered him a ride. Acts of graciousness and service like this, increasingly rare in the West, are typical of the experiences of the many Latter-day Saints who have lived or traveled in the Muslim world.



Men eating from a common platter, Gaza, Palestine; activities such as eating (especially from a common plate), visiting, and drinking tea in coffee houses highlight the emphasis Islam places on community.

Muslims and Latter-day Saints

In the early days of the Church, some critics of Mormonism, claiming that Joseph Smith was a false prophet, saw similarities between him and Muhammad. Their intent was clearly to insult both, but Latter-day Saints, feeling some brotherhood with the disparaged Muslims, found the parallels to be of value.^{x10} In sermons, some Church leaders praised Muhammad and pointed to commonalities between Islam and Mormonism.^{x11} Over the years, Latter-day Saints have continued to notice the positive contributions of Islam. Articles in the *Ensign* have pointed out the kinship we feel with Muslims on many issues.^{x12} In 1978, during the administration of President Spencer W. Kimball, the First Presidency of the Church issued a statement emphasizing God's love for all of humankind. It taught, among other things: "The great religious leaders of the world such as Muhammad, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God's light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals. . . . Our message therefore is one of special love and concern for the eternal welfare of all men and women, regardless of religious belief, race, or nationality, knowing that we are truly brothers and sisters."^{x13}

It must be acknowledged that there are profound, irreconcilable doctrinal differences between Islam and the restored gospel. The fundamental claims of the two religions cannot both be true.

Although Muhammad received light from God to teach moral truths to his followers and bring them to a higher understanding, we believe that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10) and that the first principle of the gospel is faith in the atoning power of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God (see Articles of Faith 1:4). And we believe that Joseph Smith and his successors have all been true prophets. We affirm the truthfulness of the message of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, while at the same time we rejoice to see God’s hand at work among honorable people not of our faith. Islam teaches its followers devotion to God, a desire to obey His will, and a commitment to live lives of virtue, honesty, and decency. Faithful Muslims, like faithful Latter-day Saints, believe in “standing for something.” In the spiritually starved world in which we live, it is good to know that in many lands the call goes out publicly five times a day from thousands of minarets, announcing the truth for all to hear: “*Allahhu akbar! Allahhu akbar!*” (“God is great! God is great!”) Latter-day Saints can be thankful that this message is being proclaimed.

Notes

1. Some good sources from a Latter-day Saint perspective include James A. Toronto, “Islam,” in Spencer J. Palmer, Roger R. Keller, Dong Sull Choi, and James A. Toronto, *Religions of the World: A Latter-day Saint View*, rev. ed. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1997), 213–41; the articles in Spencer J. Palmer, ed., *Mormons and Muslims: Spiritual Foundations and Modern Manifestations*, rev. ed. (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2002); Daniel C. Peterson, *Abraham Divided: An LDS Perspective on the Middle East*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Aspen, 1995); *BYU Studies* 40, no. 4 (2001). A good one-volume introduction to Islam is Frederick M. Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1994).
2. The nations with the largest Muslim populations are Indonesia (181 million), Pakistan (141 million), India (124 million), Bangladesh (111 million), Turkey (66 million), Egypt (66 million), Iran (65 million), Nigeria (63 million), and China (38 million) (“Inside Islam,” *National Geographic*, January 2002, 78–80).
3. John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 8.
4. We use here the translation of A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Macmillan, 1955).
5. Similarities to the much-later Dante’s *Inferno* are inescapable, and there are ascension motifs in many religions. Muhammad’s Night Journey and ascension (*mi’raj*) are somewhat similar to visions of the prophets Enoch (see Moses 7:23–69), Moses (see Moses 1:24–40), and Nephi (see 1 Nephi 11–14). Interestingly, Muhammad’s ascension through several degrees of heavens shows (at least in the idea that there is more than one heaven) a resemblance to Joseph Smith’s vision of the three degrees of glory (see Doctrine and Covenants 76).
6. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 23.
7. Toronto, “Islam,” 230.
8. Nasr, *The Heart of Islam*, 258.
9. See Howard W. Hunter, “All Are Alike unto God,” *Ensign*, June 1979, 72–74, especially: “They are both children of promise, and as a church we do not take sides” (74).

10. See the discussion in Arnold H. Green, “The Muhammad–Joseph Smith Comparison: Subjective Metaphor or a Sociology of Prophethood,” in Palmer, *Mormons and Muslims*, 111–33.
11. See George A. Smith, “The History of Mahomedanism,” in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1855–86), 3:28–37; and Parley P. Pratt, “Mahometanism and Christianity,” in *Journal of Discourses*, 3:38–42.
12. See James B. Mayfield, “Ishmael, Our Brother,” *Ensign*, June 1979, 24–32; Joseph B. Platt, “Our Oasis of Faith,” *Ensign*, April 1988, 39–41; James A. Toronto, “A Latter-day Saint Perspective on Muhammad,” *Ensign*, August 2000, 50–58; Orin D. Parker, “A Life among Muslims,” *Ensign*, March 2002, 50–52.
13. Quoted in Carlos E. Asay, “God’s Love for Mankind,” in Palmer, *Mormons and Muslims*, 54–55.



President David O. McKay at age eighty-four at his home in Huntsville, Utah

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Recollections of David O. McKay’s Educational Practices

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To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but also practically. (Thoreau, *Walden*)

By Thoreau’s definition, David O. McKay was certainly a philosopher. He lived according to his own brand of wisdom: his ideas consisted of simple independent thoughts, he had an underlying