

Filmtext: Islam – Surrender to God

PRESENTER

Islam is the second largest religion in the world, with over one billion followers. The word Islam means surrender – surrender to the Will of God.

NARRATOR

The followers of Islam are called Muslims, or those who submit to God. The founder of Islam was the Prophet Muhammad. Islam teaches that there is only one God. The belief in the existence of one God is called Monotheism. The Muslims believe that the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, contains the pure words of God, as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

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According to Muslims, Muhammad is the last in a line of prophets – or messengers from God – which consists of, among others, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. So who was Muhammad? And what did he teach?

NARRATOR

Muhammad was born in 570 CE in Mecca, Arabia. Today Mecca is part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Arabia in the 6th century was a loose collection of tribes located mainly in the Hejaz area, an area made hospitable in an otherwise harsh environment by large Oases where water was available. The Quarrysh tribe were the rulers of Mecca. They were successful merchants, and Mecca evolved into a major trade centre. The Meccans were Pagans, and worshipped many idols. Muhammad was orphaned at an early age. He was raised by his Uncle and worked as a merchant. When he was about 40 years old he retreated to the Jabal Nur mountain just outside Mecca to meditate. It was in this cave, during the Islamic month of Ramadan that the Angel Gabriel appeared before Muhammad, commanding him to speak the following verse:

Recite thou, in the name of thy Lord who created
Created man from clots of blood
Recite thou! For thy Lord is the most Beneficent
Who hath taught the use of the pen
Hath taught Man that which he knoweth not.

Over the next few years, Muhammad began preaching the message of God to the people of Mecca. Initially met with disdain, events turned rather more sinister when Muhammad's followers were attacked. What shocked the Meccans more than anything was that Muhammad taught the people to worship one God, called Allah in Arabic, instead of the idols they believed in. It was around this time that Muhammad had a famous vision, which became known as the night journey. Muhammad's vision consisted of him travelling to Jerusalem one night, a city over 1000 miles away. From there he ascended into heaven and spoke to previous prophets, including Moses and Jesus. Because of this Jerusalem is considered to be the third holiest city in the Muslim world, after Mecca and Medina. Whilst there is some debate as to whether this was a vision or an actual occurrence, it is generally agreed that the whole experience had a galvanising effect on Muhammad at a difficult time in his life. It allowed him to draw strength and hope from his conviction that he was indeed a Messenger of God.

The persecution had got so bad in Mecca that Muhammad told his followers to leave the city. Only Muhammad and a couple of his closest companions were left behind. The rulers of Mecca tried to have him assassinated but he had already left the city by the time the Meccans had chance to do so. He travelled with his friend Abu Bakr to Medina, a city further north. This event is called the Hijra or the emigration. It took place in 622 C.E the year which marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

In Medina he was welcomed by the inhabitants and soon he became the leader of the city. There then followed a series of conflicts between Muhammad and the Meccans, which culminated in 630 C.E, when Muhammad and his army rode into Mecca as conquerors. Muhammad declared the city as the holiest of Islamic sites. Two years later, in 632 C.E, Muhammad died and was buried in Medina.

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The world he'd left behind was very different to the one he'd entered. The Arabic tribes who were previously at war with one another were now united under Islam. But the Islamic world was about to become even larger.

NARRATOR

After the death of Muhammad the leadership fell to the caliphs who began extending the Islamic state beyond the confines of Arabia. Less than two centuries later, an Islamic empire stretched from Spain in the west to India in the east. This had a huge cultural effect on the world, with Islam providing a link between Europe and the great societies of the East. Muslims contributed greatly in the fields of science, technology and art. For example they created the first universities. They made great scientific discoveries in medicine and astronomy. Islamic art is illustrated by beautiful works of calligraphy. Ceramic art, particularly pottery is a renowned feature of Islamic culture. Arguably the most famous product of Islamic art is the Persian Carpet, which is highly revered across the world. Carpet making dates back hundreds of years and is a tradition that is deeply ingrained in Islamic society. Islam has also produced some of the finest examples of architecture that the world has ever seen.

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After the death of Muhammad, the Islamic world split into two factions: Sunni and Shia.

NARRATOR

The majority of Muslims are Sunnis. They believe that since Muhammad didn't leave any written record about who should succeed him, the believers were right to elect a caliph to rule them. The caliphs ruled Sunni Islam for centuries, but in 1924 the caliphate was abolished. The second largest branch of Islam is called Shia. The Shias believe that Muhammad had chosen, his son in law, Ali, to be his successor. He became known as The Imam, and was the first in a line of twelve Imams who were regarded as the spiritual successors of Muhammad. Shia Islam is the main religion of Iran. There are also big communities in Southern Iraq. Both the Sunnis and the Shias believe that the Mahdi, or the Guided One, will appear on Earth on Judgement Day alongside Jesus Christ.

PRESENTER

The Qur'an is the most important body of text for any Muslim. We meet Ali, who tells us more about it.

ALI

The Qur'an is the revelation that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. We see it as the word of God directly revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. So basically the Qur'an that we have today is basically the words that were sent down through the Angel Jibra-her, or Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad and these we see as the words of God himself so this is God speaking. It's different to, for example sayings of the Prophet, where these are the words of the Prophet, we see that the Qur'an as being the direct word and revelation from God that was sent down to Prophet Muhammad and thus it makes up this book that we have today.

Inside the Qur'an you have rules and regulations. It sort of provides the basis of our faith. Additionally it gives us a lot of many examples looking at previous prophets that came before Prophet Muhammad. So it would look at prophets such as Prophet Moses, Jesus, Abraham, all these different Prophets of God. So it gives rules and regulations, it gives us stories and it gives us guidance towards our life and is basically the cornerstone of our faith.

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There are five religious duties that each Muslim must perform. They are represented as the Five Pillars of Islam.

NARRATOR

The First Pillar is the Statement of Belief and the second is Daily Prayers. The third is the Fast. The fourth is Alms Giving and the final pillar is the Hajj, or the Pilgrimage.

The First Pillar, called Shahada in Arabic is the Statement of Belief. In order to become a Muslim, one must recite this statement in Arabic. The Shahadah is written on the national flag of Saudi Arabia. It reads: I profess that there is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.

The Second Pillar is Daily Prayers all Muslims pray 5 times a day, and always at specific times. Muslims can pray anywhere, but they are encouraged to pray in Mosques.

ALI

A mosque is basically a place where Muslims congregate for prayers. The Muslims go there for the congregational prayers, which is group prayers, where they all pray together. That's the mosques' basic use.

NARRATOR

Many Mosques have a minaret, a tall thin tower from which the Call to Prayer is broadcast.

ALI

The obligatory prayers are the prayers that is a must on all Muslims. These prayers are done at certain times in the day. Before we really begin the prayers of course what happens is that we usually do certain ablutions. In this we basically wash ourselves in certain ways as prescribed by our religions, for example our face, our arms. So we wash before we actually get into the prayers, where we will be in a state of ritual purity, and at this time we will go and we'll pray our prayers. Now, these prayers are divided throughout the day. The first is at sunrise, the second would be at midday and then after that would be the afternoon prayers, then the sunset prayers and then the night prayers.

NARRATOR

The believers pray in the direction of Mecca. The centre of Islam. The direction to Mecca is indicated by the mihrab, a niche or depression in the wall. Congregational prayers help to remind Muslims that in the eyes of God everyone is equal, regardless of social status. Some mosques, as a gesture of courtesy, have separate prayer areas for women. Idol worship is forbidden in Islam. Therefore there are no statues or paintings of people in a Mosque. Instead it is decorated with quotes from the Qu'ran.

The Third Pillar is Fasting, which Muslims observe during the holy month of Ramadan.

ALI

Ramadan is a month in the Islamic calendar and in it Muslims are obligated to fast. They cannot eat or drink anything whatsoever from sunrise to sunset. It is a very spiritual month. In this month fasting is an obligation on all Muslims. But rather than just knowing that they have to fast, they know why they should fast, what is the benefits for fasting. Thus this slowly increases somebody's faith because they're using reasoning they're using their mind to understand. In my eyes it's a good thing for the soul, for the person. Food and drink is something that we, it's one of our greatest desires, we can't live without eating and drinking, thus putting a limit on this, it sort of changes one's mindset, and makes one think of different things, for example the poor people that live around the world. We don't usually contemplate about this, but when we are really so thirsty and we cannot drink this water – what does that make us think of? It makes us think of these people, thus it really has an effect on one's mind and soul, which I think is one of the foremost reasons for this fasting.

NARRATOR

After sunset Muslims are permitted to eat and drink again. Young children are not expected to fast until they reach adolescence. When Ramadan is over Muslims celebrate with a festival called Eid Al-Fitr, which roughly translates as "Festival of Breaking the Fast."

ALI

Well, at the end of the fasting month there is basically a kind of, like a festival. It goes on for three days and it is a day of celebration. It's good for everybody getting together, speaking to each other, it sort of brings an end to the month. A lot of things happen where we visit different people, so it's a joyous occasion where everybody is celebrating so that would probably be my favourite Muslim holiday.

NARRATOR

The Fourth Pillar is Alms Giving, called Zakat in Arabic. The giving of alms is clearly set out in the Qur'an. It is the giving of a portion of one's possessions to a charitable cause.

The Fifth Pillar is the Hajj. All Muslims are required to undertake a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina once in their lifetime. One of the highlights of the pilgrimage, is to walk seven times around the Kaabah. It is Islam's holiest site, the place where all Muslims turn to while offering their daily prayers.

Islam today is the second largest religion in the world, with over one and a half billion followers. Indonesia is the most populous Muslim country, having over 200 million believers. Islam is the dominant religion throughout the Middle East. Islam is also well established in several western countries. It is also widespread in Africa and in some parts of Asia. For its followers, Islam is a way of life. They believe that they were created with the sole intention of worshipping God and that everything they do is an act of worship for Him. Muslims fear God as much as they believe in his mercy – they surrender themselves willingly to him, which is what the word Islam signifies – Surrender to the Will of God.