

Islam: *A Guide for Service Providers Working with* *People with a Disability*

Islam: A Guide for Service Providers Working with People with a Disability aims to enhance the delivery and quality of service to Muslim clients.

This booklet provides basic and general information about the Islamic way of life and is best utilised in conjunction with specifically designed workshops for various service providers. To arrange a workshop/presentation and for more information please email MWSC at info@mwsc.com.au

This information booklet was prepared as part of the Muslim Carers Project, in partnership with the Ethnic Disabilities Advocacy Centre and the Muslim Women's Support Centre of WA (Inc). Carers WA supported the project (December, 2006).



Contents

Section One – The Muslim Faith

- 1.1 Understanding the Faith
- 1.2 Basic Principles and Beliefs
- 1.3 Main Islamic Occasions

Section Two – Interacting with Muslims

- 2.1 Islamic Greetings and Responses
- 2.2 Creating a Receptive Environment
- 2.3 Facilities/Venue Requirements

Section Three - Etiquette

- 3.1 Diet
- 3.2 Clothing Customs

Section Four – Other

- 4.1 Islamic View on Disability
- 4.2 Islam and Health

Section One – The Muslim Faith

1.1 Understanding the faith

Islam means ‘**submission**’ or ‘**surrendering**’ to God. It also means ‘**peace**’. The followers of Islam are called Muslims. Islam is a way of life (*deen*) that impacts every part of life, from eating and sleeping to working and playing. It is not only a personal religion, but also a social one. Therefore, it sometimes becomes hard to distinguish between cultural and religious practices of Muslim people.

Under an Islamic system all people are first and foremost accountable to God. Allah is the Arabic word for God. No distinction is made between countries, nationalities or “social classes”.

Muslims seek to live in accordance with God's laws. By doing so, they strive to obtain nearness to God and victory over temporary trials and temptations in this world. All aspects of their practice including prayer, fasting, charity, and pilgrimage are intended to help meet this goal. Although strict by secular standards, Islam is not an ascetic religion. Islam requires its followers to be active participants in their communities. For a Muslim to work and study are considered acts of worship as these are activities that contribute to the advancement and betterment of society. Even simple actions such as removing a harmful obstacle from a path are considered a rewarding action!

Muslims believe that God is One, indivisible, and also believe in all the prophets that Christians and Jews believe in including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elias, Jonah, John the Baptist, and Jesus (peace be upon them all). Muslims believe that the final Prophet is Muhammad (peace be upon him) to whom the Qur’an was revealed.

It needs to be highlighted that a Muslim’s actions does not necessarily equal Islam. As with all religions, Muslims practice their faith to varying degrees. Some people are very ‘strict’ in their practices whereas others are not. Regardless of a persons degree of ‘Islamic implementation’ all Muslims will unanimously agree on the fundamental principles and beliefs.

1.2 Basic Principles and Beliefs

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him):

Muhammad (PBUH) was born in Makkah in the Year 570. His father died before his birth, and his mother shortly afterwards. His uncle was the one who raised him. As he grew up he became known for his truthfulness, generosity and sincerity, so much so that he was given the nicknames “Al-Amin” (the Trustworthy) and “Al-Saadiq” (the Truthful). At the age of 40 while engaged in a meditative retreat, Muhammad (PBUH) received his first revelation from God through Angel Gabriel. This revelation, which continued for 23 years, is known as the Qur’an.

The Qur'an:

According to Islam, the Qur'an is a record of the exact words revealed by God through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It was memorised by Muhammad (PBUH) and then dictated to his companions, and written down by scribes, who crosschecked it during his lifetime. Not one of its 114 chapters has been changed over the centuries.

The Qur'an is the main source of a Muslims faith and practice. The Qur'an's basic theme is the relationship between God and His creatures, but it also deals with all the subjects that concern us as human beings: wisdom, doctrine, worship, and law.

The *Sunnah* is the practice and example of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This is the second authority for Muslims after the Qur'an. Compilations of *Ahadith* (singular: *Hadith* – a reliably transmitted report of what the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, did or approved of) and his life history form the *Sunnah*. Thus, Muslims follow the Qur'an (the word of God) and the *Sunnah* (the example set by Prophet Muhammad).

The Five Pillars of Islam:

All Muslims have to fulfil the five major requirements known as the 'Five Pillars of Islam'. These form the framework of a Muslims life and they are:

1. Testimony of Faith (*Shahadah*)

All Muslims will declare their faith by proclaiming: 'La illaha illallah Muhamadur rasullullah' - 'There is none worthy of worship except Allah and the Prophet Muhammad is his messenger'. This declaration is called the *Shahadah*.

2. Ritual Prayer (*Salat*)

Salat is the name for the obligatory prayers, which are performed five times a day, which are a direct link between the worshipper and God. The five daily prayers provide a meditative re-direction of person's thoughts. This achieves a renewed sense of purpose, spiritual fulfilment and physical rejuvenation.

These five prayers contain verses from the Qur'an and other phrases praising God said in Arabic, the language of the revelation. Prayers are said at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and nightfall/before retiring to bed.

Although it is preferable to worship together in the mosque, Muslim may pray almost anywhere but they pray in the direction of the *Kaaba* which is a cube shaped building, which God commanded Abraham to build over four thousand years ago. Muslims may pray alone or in a group. There is no clergy in Islam, but a learned person (known as the *Imam*) who knows the Qur'an usually leads prayers.

To find out more about how prayers are performed and how to make ablution see:

<http://www.islamonline.net/english/introducingislam/Worship/Prayers/article04.shtml>

Or contact MWSC on 08 9451 5696.

3. Obligatory Charity Tax (*Zakat*)

It is a religious duty for every Muslim to give a portion of his/her wealth to the needy each year. These alms are called *Zakat* in Arabic, which literally means purification. Paying these alms is a way for people to purify the ethically gained wealth that God has bestowed upon them and it is also a means to distribute wealth throughout the society. It also purifies the soul of the giver, reducing greed and strengthening compassion and generosity.

4. Fasting (*Sawm*)

Every year in the ninth Islamic month called Ramadan, all Muslims fast from first light until sundown, abstaining from food, drink and sexual relations. Since the lunar calendar is 11 days shorter than the solar calendar, the month of Ramadan gradually passes through all seasons of the year. Those who are sick, elderly, or on a journey and women who are pregnant or nursing are permitted to break the fast and make up an equal number of days later in the year. By abstaining from worldly comforts, even for a short time, a fasting person gains true sympathy with those who go hungry as well as gaining growth in ones spiritual life.

5. Pilgrimage (*Hajj*)

The annual pilgrimage to Makkah- called the *Hajj*- is an obligation only for those who are financially and physically able to perform it. Nevertheless, approximately 3 million people go to Makkah each year from every corner of the globe providing a unique opportunity or those of different nations to meet one another. Pilgrims wear special clothes: simple garments which strip away distinctions of class and culture and all stand equal before God. The *Hajj* is the major example of the universal message of Islam and its teachings on equality.

1.3 Main Islamic Occasions

Friday – Just as Christians observe Sundays and Jews observe Saturday as their religious day, for Muslims it is Friday. The noon prayer is a special time where people congregate at the mosque if they are able to and pray together.

Ramadan - Ramadan is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. It is during this month that Muslims observe the Fast of Ramadan. Lasting for the entire month, Muslims fast (through avoidance of food, drink and intimacy) during the daylight hours and in the evening eat small meals and visit with friends and family. It is a time of worship and contemplation. It is a time to strengthen family and community ties. Muslims usually break their fast with some water and dates. During Ramadan, Muslims read the entire Qur'an, and perform special prayers called *Taraweeh* after the daily nighttime prayer.

Eid ul-Fitr - The beginning of the Islamic holiday called Eid ul-Fitr or "feast of fast breaking" marks the completion of the month-long period of fasting during the blessed month of Ramadan. During Eid ul-Fitr Muslims rejoice over a month-long achievement of fasting, which was performed for the sole purpose of pleasing and serving Allah. For a Muslim, Eid is a day of thanksgiving and gratitude, and marks personal triumph over one's desires. On the morning of Eid ul-Fitr, normally before the start of prayer, Muslims are to pay Zakat ul-Fitr (charity) to the needy of the community -- an alms for the month of Ramadan. Eid is a happy time for Muslims. Many decorate their homes to celebrate this blessed holiday and frequently invite and visit friends and loved ones. Big

feasts are made for guests, and Muslims usually prepare trays of delicious sweets to be shared with neighbours and the local community over coffee and tea.

Eid ul-Adha - The Festival of Sacrifice

Eid ul-Adha takes place on the tenth day of the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar and is a time of much celebration. The holiday commemorates Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice everything for God. This celebration coincides with the yearly pilgrimage to Hajj and is where Muslims will organise (if they have the means) for an animal to be sacrificed and the meat is shared amongst family, friends and the poor.

Section Two – Interacting with Muslims

2.1 Islamic greetings and responses

Muslim greetings:

The *Salaam* is a distinctive aspect of a Muslim's social conduct. Greeting someone with *Salaam* is a kind of invocation for his welfare and blessings. It instills brotherly love and strengthens the ties of brotherhood and closeness, and mutual relationships result in a strong and unwavering society. Muslims greet by saying the following:

The Greeting: *As-salaamu Alaikum* – Peace be upon you

The Reply: *Wa-alaykum Salaam* –And may peace be upon you too.

A non-Muslim may greet his/her Muslim friend/client and associates in any way that is considered acceptable and decent in society.

2.2 Creating a receptive environment

Below are a few to keep in mind while seeing Muslim clients:

- Feel free to ask questions if unsure about anything; Muslims would most likely appreciate your interest and care on that matter and feel happy to explain their beliefs.
- Because cleanliness is of utmost importance, Muslims are more receptive to clean environments.
- Do not be offended if a Muslim guest/client refuses something, for e.g. refusing to eat meat if they are unsure if it's *halal* or not.
- Do not be offended if a Muslim doesn't shake your hand (if you are of the opposite sex) or avoids eye contact or keeps to small talk (i.e. doesn't go personal, avoids any unnecessary chatter) this is just for the purpose of modesty.
- Generally Muslims do not celebrate or partake in events such as Christmas, Easter, New Years Eve, Birthday parties, Good Friday etc.
- Religious books (e.g. the Qur'an) should be handled with respect.
- Avoid insulting any of the Prophets or God – Including any physical depictions or pictures.
- Avoid joking about any Islamic practices and beliefs.
- Avoid physical contact with a Muslim member of the opposite gender, where possible.

2.3 Facilities /Venues requirements at conferences or other gatherings

- Prayer room facilities should be available and a prayer timetable (or sunrise and sunset times) made available for your guests/clients
- Muslims pray in the direction of the city of Mecca (in Saudi Arabia) wherever they are. The direction of Mecca is known as the *Qibla* (approximately 295° from North clockwise). It will greatly assist your guests/clients if you show them the direction of the *Qibla*.
- A suitable room for prayer is one, which is clean, private and has no statues or pictures of animate objects.
- Bathroom facilities (i.e. taps) to perform ablution should be available and water for use inside the cubicles (for washing the private parts).

Section Three – Etiquette

3.1 Diet

Halal Food:

Halal - The Arabic word (*Halal*) means lawful. In the Holy Qur'an, Allah commands Muslims and all of mankind to eat of the *Halal* things

Animals such as cows, sheep, goats, deer, moose, chickens, ducks, birds, etc., are *Halal*, but they must be ***Zabihah*** (slaughtered according to Islamic Rites) in order to be suitable for consumption, hence the term *Halal Meat*. The meat should be purchased from a Certified *Halal* Supplier/Butcher, as they hold a special certification, which must meet certain guidelines in order to be certified supplier.

For more information about suppliers of halal food, please visit www.aussiemuslims.net and click on the “community directory” and follow the prompts.

Examples of foods that are already *halal* in their natural state include: Milk (from cows, sheep, camels, and goats), Honey, Fish, Plants which are not intoxicant, Fresh or frozen vegetables, Fresh or dried fruits, legumes and nuts like peanuts, cashew nuts, hazel nuts, walnuts, etc. Grains such as wheat, rice, rye, barley, oat etc.

***Haram* (Forbidden)**

Muslims are forbidden to consume:

- Pork (Swine)
- Blood
- Carnivorous animals
- Almost all reptiles and insects
- The bodies of dead animals
- *Halal* animals that are not slaughtered according to the Islamic Law.
- Wine, Ethyl Alcohol, and Spirits (and other intoxicants).

Some foods may also contain animal derivatives, which are not *Halal*. Examples include biscuits, ice cream (gelatine and animal fats) and cheese (animal rennet).

If you would like to obtain some simple multicultural recipes please contact MWSC on 08 9451 5696 or email.

3.2 Clothing Customs

Guidelines of proper modesty for males and females (dress and behavior) are based on revelatory sources (the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah) and as such are seen by believing men and women as divinely based guidelines with legitimate aims, and divine wisdom behind them. They are not male imposed or socially imposed restrictions.

Each culture and country where Muslims live will have his or her own clothing style. It should be noted that there is a distinction between religion and culture.

Muslim Women and Clothing:

A Muslim woman is not required to fully cover in the presence of her husband and close family or among females. However, when she goes out or when men other than her husband or close family are present, she is expected to maintain certain requirements for the purpose of her modesty and respect such as:

- Only the face and hands are shown (covering the face and hands is optional according to most scholars).
- Headscarf is obligatory;
- Clothing should be loose and opaque to not reveal the shape of the figure

Muslim Men and Clothing:

Muslim men are required to:

- Fully cover the area between the navel and knees
- Wear clothing loose enough as to not describe what he is covering
- Wear clothing not designed in way to attract attention. Here the basic rule of modesty and avoiding “show off” applies to all believing men and women in Islam.
- In addition men are discouraged from wearing silk and gold.

Section four - Other

4.1 Islamic view on disability:

The word “disability” cannot be found within the Qur'an or Hadiths (*religious texts of Islam*), but the concept of Muslims having inabilities or special needs and how they interacted in society can be found throughout the history of Islam. In particular is the example of Itban bin Malik, a religious leader who was blind (*Bukhari 2:279*).

Disability is seen as neither a blessing nor a curse in Islam. It is the belief of Muslims that everyone was created with different abilities and disabilities with the objective for a Muslim to focus on their abilities and show gratefulness rather than focus on the disability. With this being said a Muslim has the right to improve the situation of their disability through prayer, medical, educational and advocacy resources.

Within Islam there are allocations for Muslims with disabilities and the aged to be exempted from some of the Islamic practices such as prayers, fasting and performing hajj, as mentioned in the Qur'an. "*Allah desireth for you ease, he desireth not hardship for you*". (Al-Baqarah 2:185).

Due to the diversity of medical conditions and disabilities it is a preferred practice to refer to a Muslim religious leader to determine what (if any) exemptions of Islamic practices are placed upon a person with a disability or the aged.

Human life is to be valued within Islam and every Muslim regardless of their abilities or inabilities should be regarded as valued members of the community. Islamic history highlights many examples of people whom, while having some form of a disability, excelled to very high positions and prominent status in society.

The community as a whole is enjoined to be accepting of all people regardless of their disability and Muslims are required to support them in addressing their needs as well as creating an inclusive environment and encouraging full participation of all members of the community.

Caring for a family member with a disability is viewed as being highly rewarding. Generally speaking, Muslim carers prefer to remain with the care recipient at all times and prefer to have activities that involve the whole family. Respite care is often avoided unless absolutely necessary.

4.2 Islam and Health

In Islam the body is a gift from God and needs to be looked after and not abused. Thus keeping the body healthy is part of one's religion. Any illness is to be received with patience and prayers and Muslims are strongly encouraged to seek treatment and care.

Death is seen as part of a journey to meet the Creator. However assisted suicide and euthanasia are not permitted. The deceased should be buried as soon as possible after death. Burial rituals include washing and shrouding the body as well as congregational funeral prayers.

Increased devotion, receiving visitors and condolences, and avoiding decorative clothing and jewellery are observed during mourning. Muslims observe a 3-day mourning period (widows will mourn for a longer period of four months and ten days). It is discouraged for people to erect elaborate markers, or put flowers or other mementos on the grave. Rather, one should humbly remember God and God's Mercy, and pray for the deceased. For assistance with burials contact the Muslim Burial Society of WA: Ismail Fredericks 08 9418 5238 or Adiel Franke 08 9249 3802.



Main References:

- J Lang, Even Angels Ask (1997)
- Z Sardar and Z A Malik, Introducing Muhammad (1994)
- H Abdulati, Islam in Focus (1975)



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