

# Islam - Beliefs and Teachings - Key Beliefs

There are two main branches of Islam: **Sunni** and **Shi'a**. They share many beliefs, but have some differences.

## 1 Key Beliefs

- Sunnis and Shi'as have three of their key beliefs in common.
- Shi'as still believe in angels and the holy books, they are just not included in their main beliefs.
- Sunnis still believe that Allah (God) is fair and just, but do not include this in their main beliefs.
- Shi'as do not believe in predestination and have different beliefs about who should have led Islam after Muhammad to Sunnis.

- Six Articles of Faith in Sunni Islam:**
1. Belief in the oneness of God (**Tawhid**)
  2. Belief in **angels**
  3. Belief in the **holy books**
  4. Belief in the **prophets** and that Muhammad was the final prophet
  5. Belief in the **Day of Judgement**
  6. Belief in **predestination**

- Five Roots of Usul al-Din in Shi'a Islam:**  
*Usul ad-Din means 'roots of religion' in Arabic.*
1. Belief in the oneness of God (**Tawhid**)
  2. Belief in the **prophets** and that Muhammad was the final prophet
  3. Belief in the **Day of Judgement**
  4. Belief that Allah (God) is just and fair (**Adalat**)
  5. Belief in the **imamate** (twelve leaders known as imams who came after Muhammad)

Believes that Muhammad's friend Abu Bakr should have succeeded Muhammad as leader of Islam (which he did), and that Muslim leadership did not need to follow Muhammad's bloodline. This is the larger branch of Islam.

**Sunni Islam**

Believes that the leadership of Islam should have passed directly from Muhammad to Ali (his cousin and son-in-law), and then through Ali's bloodline. This is the smaller branch of Islam.

**Shi'a Islam**

**Tawhid** has influenced Muslim use of imagery – because Allah is beyond human imagination, most Muslims forbid making images of him. Instead, Muslims may focus on calligraphy or geometric patterns to understand Allah's beauty, etc. without trying to represent him.

*'... We bade the angels bow down to Adam, and they bowed down...'*  
 (Qur'an Surah 7:11)

**Jibril and Mika'il** are two of the most important angels in Islam, but there are many others, including many who Muslims do not know the names of. These include:

- **Israfael** (Raphael) will blow the trumpet on the **Day of Judgement**.
- There is an angel of death who takes people's souls when they die.
- In Muslim tradition two angels sit, one on each shoulder, on each person. **Raqib** sits on the right shoulder and records someone's good actions and **Atid** sits on the left shoulder and records their bad actions – for use at the Day of Judgement.

## 4 Angels

**Nature of Angels:**

- Angels are made of light, by Allah.
- Angels do not need to eat or sleep.
- Angels have no gender.
- Angels do not have free will (unlike humans).
- Angels continually worship Allah.

Belief in angels is called **mala'ikah** in Islam. Angels in Islam play many roles as well as being messengers of Allah.

**Jibril (Gabriel)**  
 → Gave Allah's revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad.

**Mika'il (Michael)**  
 → Sustains humans, e.g. through rainfall, and also rewards good people.

Jibril and Mika'il are believed to have made Muhammad's heart pure during his Night Journey.

Believing in one God (Allah in Arabic) is very important to Muslims; it is central to Islam – it makes it a monotheistic religion.

## 2 Oneness of God Tawhid

*'Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him.'*  
 (Qur'an Surah 112)

**Tawhid** is incorporated into the **Shahadah** – the Muslim statement of faith; one of the **Five Pillars** of Sunni Islam and also important to Shi'as. The Shahadah starts with 'There is no God but Allah'.

Saying or acting as if Allah is not one is called **shirk** – this is a terrible sin in Islam.

- An example of **lesser shirk** (saying Allah is one, but not really believing it) might be treating money as if it should be worshipped.
- An example of **greater shirk** would be worshipping multiple gods (openly denying that Allah is one).

The Qur'an teaches that Allah has no partners, parents or children; he is unique and forever. Muslims believe he created everything.

## 5 Predestination and Human Freedom

→ Sunnis believe that Allah writes their destinies on the 'Preserved Tablet'.  
 → They believe that Allah can know their future, while they are still free, because he is outside of time.

Sunnis believe that their lives are predestined in the sense that they are already known, but that this is compatible with **human freedom** and **free will** because their lives are controlled by them – Allah just knows what choices they will make.

Muslims believe many things about God (Allah) – that he is omnipotent, beneficent, merciful, and fair and just. They also believe that he is both immanent and transcendent.

## 3 Nature of God

Muslims believe that Allah is **beneficent** (loving) and **merciful** – they believe he has shown this by revealing the Qur'an to Muhammad, and showing Muslims how to live good lives so they can please him. Muslims believe that Allah does good in the world, helps those who are suffering and forgives people's sins when they ask.

*'... Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.'*  
 (Qur'an Surah 4:96)

Muslims believe that Allah is **omnipotent** – that he can do anything. This is demonstrated in his creation of the world.

Muslims believe that Allah is **fair and just** (**adalat** in Shi'a Islam). This means he rewards and punishes people appropriately – ultimately all will be judged on the **Day of Judgement**.

Most Muslims believe that Allah is both **immanent** and **transcendent** – he is active in the world, helping humanity, but he is also above the world and human understanding.

Muslims believe in the **Day of Judgement** – that at the end of time all the dead will be **resurrected** from their graves and judged. In the life after death (**Akhirah**) they will go to Heaven/Paradise (**Jannah**) or Hell (**Jahannam**). This judgement is fair, because humans have **free will** and so humans are responsible and accountable for their actions.

## 6 Life after Death Akhirah

**Jannah** is described in the Qur'an as a utopia – great food, beautiful scenery; people will be rewarded and will see Allah.

**Jahannam** is described as a place of physical and spiritual torment. Some Muslims believe that it is possible for people in hell to be forgiven and then go to heaven. Polytheists are generally believed to go to hell – some non-Muslim monotheists may be able to go to heaven.

For Muslims, life after death (**Akhirah**) begins at the **Day of Judgement**, when Allah judges people's souls. Muslims believe that their bodies are **resurrected**.