



Islam in Britain

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Population

- More than half of British Muslims have a South Asian heritage
- In the 2011 census, there were 2,706,000 Muslims – 4.8% of the population
- Three quarters of the Muslim population live in four regions: London, West Midlands, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber

Key Beliefs

- Centres on faith in ‘One God’ (Allah, the Arabic word) and in the mission of the Prophet Muhammad
- Maintains Biblical patriarchs as Prophets and sees itself as a continuation and renewal of Judaism and Christianity
- Key ethical teachings consist of devotion to the Creator and human responsibility as caretakers of this world. This is expressed as good conduct
- There are six Islamic articles of faith: belief in a single God, his Angels, his Sacred Books (the Koran, the Gospels, the Hebrew Bible and several more), his Prophets (including Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad), the Day of Resurrection and judgement, and life after death
- The Islamic rituals are centred on the so-called five pillars: belief in a single God and the Prophet Muhammad (shahada), to pray five times daily (salat), fasting (suam) during the month of Ramadan, to give annually 5% of one's income as charity (zakat), and to make the pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime (hajj).
- Sacred Texts: The Koran, considered the revealed word of God and forms the key source for Islamic law and theology. The Hadith are story collections recording the Traditions of the Prophet (Sunna) i.e. the actions, teachings and life story of the Prophet Muhammad. They form a secondary source of Islamic teaching and for understanding the Koran in context.

Branches

- The split between Sunni and Shia Muslims occurred in the 7th century as a result of a leadership dispute. Sunnis opted for an elected caliph on grounds of piety and religious knowledge, while Shia insisted the leader must descend from the Prophet through his daughter Fatima and son-in-law Ali. While sharing the basic tenets of faith, because of this early split the Sunni and Shia Muslims have developed their own distinct traditions in terms of theology and religious law.
- While conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims has occurred, historically they have co-existed and even cooperated. Current conflicts of a sectarian nature find their origins in complex set of political rather than religious causes.
- Sufism is sometimes mistakenly described as a separate sect or movement within Islam that has somehow broken away from the mainstream. This isn't the case. Sufism is best considered as emphasizing the spiritual and experiential dimensions of religious faith, expressed in communal ritual activity, meditation, poetry and the arts.
- The Ahmadis recognise a spiritual Caliphate begun by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908), whom they believe was the promised Messiah. The Ahmadiyya movement's fifth Caliph is based in London.

Mosques

- Although the first mosque in Britain was already established in 1889 in Woking, the establishment of larger numbers of mosques began in the 1960s. There are currently 1,700 mosques in Britain, which might be a converted terrace home, a larger converted church or community hall, or else purpose-built larger mosques with congregations of several thousand.
- Mosque communities are usually formed of three constituent parts. The Imams, or the religious leadership; the committee and managers who are responsible for the running of the mosque, and finally, the congregation.
- A Muslim is likely to worship in more than one mosque, visiting a mosque on a variety of factors but largely convenience.

- Mosques are sites of key rituals. The daily prayers, from early morning to late evening; marriage ceremonies; funeral prayers; and occasional festivals (such as celebrations and prayers associated with the two main religious feasts, Eid al-Fitr, celebrating the end of the Ramadan fast, and Eid al-Adha, commemorating the end of the pilgrimage.) Larger mosques will hold a range of activities including youth groups, open days, and interfaith activities.
- Mosque employees are few. In most mosques, it may be one or two imams, working part time. Larger mosques may have teachers, administrative staff, and outreach officers.

Who Speaks for Islam?

- While there is no clergy or formalised ordination for those offering pastoral care, religious authority is invested on grounds of piety and educational attainment in religious learning. In each case, this religious authority only extends to those who choose to follow him or her. Institutional representation of British Muslims lies with umbrella organisations, such as the Muslim Council of Britain, the Federation of Student Islamic Societies, or important local actors such as the Bradford Council of Mosques. These organisations are more akin to trade unions than the Anglican or Catholic Church.