**What is Islam?**

**A few basic facts about Islam:**

* Islam is the name of the religion; Muslim refers to its followers.
* Worldwide, there are 1.2 billion Muslims. Islam is the dominant religion throughout large portions of Asia and Africa, with the largest Muslim populations living in Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.
* Islam is the third of the three largest monotheistic religions, in addition to Judaism and Christianity. Muslims believe that the Qu'ran is God's word as revealed to the prophet Muhammad (570-632) through the angel Gabriel.
* There are five basic beliefs of Islam.
	+ Belief in one god. (Allah is the Arabic word for god, not believed to be a separate god from the Judeo-Christian version).
	+ Belief in prophethood (Muhammad and the ones before him).
	+ Belief in the justice of God.
	+ Belief in the Imams (or Apostles) of God (Shi'ite belief).
	+ Belief in the Day of Judgment.
* There are five major duties of Muslims.
	+ Pray five times a day - morning, noon, afternoon, sunset and evening (Salat).
	+ Make a pilgrimage to Mecca once in their lifetime if physically/financially able (Hajj).
	+ Fast during the month of Ramadan (Sawm).
	+ Give to the Poor (Zakat).
	+ Declaration of Faith (Shahada)
* According to Islam, there are five major prophets: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad
* Muslims worship God directly. Religious leaders do not have any divine characteristics; people and objects are not "holy." It is, in fact, sacrilegious to worship anything or anyone outside of God.
* Muslims, unlike Christians, do not believe that Jesus was God's son, although they do believe he was a prophet.
* The Qu'ran contains much of the basic information told in the Bible's Old Testament and in the Torah as well as additional information.
* Women dress modestly out of reverence for God, not for men. Muslim women are not more submissive than other women. Some argue that Muslim women, in fact, have been treated better than women in other cultures. For example, women in Islam were given the right to vote about 1,400 years ago, centuries before other women. Of course, like many other cultures, patriarchal culture can corrupt Muslim culture.
* There are two main sects of Islam: Sunni and Shi'ite. One of their main differences is in their beliefs about who were the leaders following the death of Prophet Muhammad and how they became leaders (appointed by God or elected). Also, Muslims in Saudi Arabia and Qatar practice Wahabism, which is an extremist interpretation of Islam founded in the 18th century by Mohamed Ibn Abd-al-Wahab. It is often discounted by Islamic scholars, just as they discount the Taliban.
* Arranged marriages have changed over time. It is rarely the case where the two people involved have absolutely no input in the decision to marry. Muslim women are rarely forced into marriage, even in the most religious of families.
* Muslims follow the lunar calendar, and thus their holidays move approximately 11 days on the Christian calendar. There are two major holidays in Islam: Eid al Adha is at the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca and Eid al Fitr is at the end of Ramadan.
* Islam is very family-oriented. The primary means of transmitting the religion are through the family. Therefore parents, both mothers and fathers, take on a big responsibility when raising children. This family orientation also translates into a community-oriented way of life that can greatly conflict with Western notions of individuality.