Malise Ruthven: Islam, A Very Short Introduction

Chapter 1: Islam, Muslims, and Islamism [1]
Islam means ‘self-surrender’ and is etymologically related to salaam, the word for peace (the universal Muslim greeting is “as salaam ‘alaikum” – Peace Be Upon You). Islam can be seen as a religious faith, a political ideology, and a mark of group identity (in that sense ‘Muslim’ is like ‘Jewish’).

Islam as Identity [2]
In one sense, you are a Muslim if you are born to a Muslim father. The Muslims of Bosnia, for example, are not noted for their religious identification. In theory, one can be an atheist Muslim, while one cannot be a Christian atheist.

Islam as Political Ideology [4]
There are a couple of problems with using “fundamentalist” to apply to Muslims who want to establish an Islamic state:
• All Muslims given this label have adopted some modernistic/allegorical interpretations of the Quran
• all Muslims, not just the “fundamentalists” see the Quran as the eternal unmediated word of God
Throughout its history, Islam rectitude has been shown by orthopraxy (practice) more than orthodoxy (doctrine).
Muslims of the militant tendency want, in the terms of Sayyid Abul ‘Ala Maududi (1903-79), to replace the sovereignty of the people through parliamentary legislation with the ‘sovereignty of God’ as revealed through the Shari’a – obedience to the revealed law of Islam. BUT
• no Islamic society has ever been governed exclusively by Islamic law
• the ideology advanced by Maududi and his ilk are really hybrids, mixing Islamic ideas with 20th century ones.

Islam as Faith [6]
The classical authorities distinguished between islam (professed by the Muslim) and iman (faith of a true believer (mumin), part of the umma – worldwide community of believers).
Who counts as a true Muslim?
The Puritanical Kharijis (Seceders) deny grave sinners the right to be called Muslims
The Murji’i'a (opponents of the Seceders) allowed that anyone who proclaimed the shahada, the public declaration of faith enshrined in “there is no god but God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God”.
Abu Hanifa, father of one of the four Sunni legal schools, stated that “those who face in the direction of Makka at prayer are true believers and no act of theirs can remove them from the faith.”
Now the majority of Muslims believe that iman and islam correspond to the inner (or esoteric) and outward (or exoteric) manifestations of the faith.

Conclusion: Islam and Islamism [17]

Chapter 2: The Quran and the Prophet [20]
The Quran (in its original meaning, the Recitation) is the primary text of Islam, understood as the unmediated word of God, whereas the Hadiths (‘traditions’) are other sayings attributed to Muhammad, but of a lesser stature.

The Quran [21]
Occupies for believing Muslims the role Christ does for Christians.
Must not be handled unless one is in a state of ritual purity.
Readings must be preceded by the phrase “I take refuge with God from Satan, the accursed one” and followed by “God Almighty has spoken truly!”
Certain verses are said to have curative powers, for example, the first sura (chapter) for scorpion stings.

The Quran is generally accepted by non-Muslim scholars to be a collection of the divine utterances made by Muhammad in the course of his prophetic ministry from around 610 to his death in 632 CE. Because the original Arabic script lacked the marks that now distinguish consonants clearly from each other, there are competing interpretations, seven of which are seen as equally valid. It consists of 114 suras (chapters) arranged approximately in order of length, longest to shortest, except that the first sura (the Fatiha or opening) is only seven verses, and is repeated during the 5 prayers Muslims perform every day.
The fundamental message of the Fatiha (the ‘Mother of the Book’) is repeated and elaborated throughout, in stories from the Judeo-Christian tradition, featuring Adam, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses and Jesus, along with Arabian prophets and sages like Hud, Salih, and Luqman.

God (or occasionally the Angel Gabriel or other angels), not Muhammad, is speaking through the Quran, as evinced by the fact that many utterances are prefixed by the imperative “Say:” addressed to Muhammad. There is no coherent narrative structure running through the book, although it includes self-contained narratives.

Differences from Christianity: along with Abraham taking Ishmael rather than Isaac, these include the view that Adam repents after the sin and becomes God’s deputy (khalifa), the first prophet in a line ending with Muhammad. Also Jesus, while a prophet born of a virgin, is not the son of God or God. Without a terrestrial incarnation of God, there is no Church on earth, and all one needs to do to be saved is follow God’s commands. Instead of Jesus, Muslims have the Quran, the words of which are divine in themselves.

Sira (Biography) [28]
Although Muhammad is mentioned by name a few times in the Quran, it includes no details of his life. His first biography was written by Ibn Ishaq, who died in 767 CE, 135 years after the prophet’s death. There are others, including material by Tabari (d. 923) which includes the Satanic Verses episode (where one of the recitations revealed contained positive references to three Makkan goddesses, al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat) not found in other sources.

Muhammad was born around 570 CE in Makka, a member of the Quraish tribe, whose job it was to be guardians of the sanctuary that included the Ka’ba, the square temple towards which all Muslims orient themselves in prayer, and which was supposedly built by Abraham (or Ibrahim) to mark the spot where the almost-sacrifice of Ishmael (or Isma’il) took place. Muhammad was orphaned at 6 and brought up by his grandfather then his maternal uncle Abu Talib. As a young man he entered the service of a wealthy widow, Khadija, who later became his first wife, and bore him seven children (some of whom died). At the age of about 40 Muhammad began taking regular retreats to a cave near Mt. Hira, where, after a period of meditation, he received his first revelation (described in the 53rd sura of the Quran). At first Muhammad reported his visions to few people: among those to whom he did, who accepted them, were Khadija (sometimes called the first Muslim) and Abu Talib’s son (and hero to the Shi’a) ‘Ali. When Muhammad did go public, he attracted followers and enemies, the latter in particular (according to Ibn Ishaq) when he disparaged the pagan deities (western scholars suggest he himself practiced some pagan rituals early on, in keeping with the
Satanic Verses episode). The leader of the Quraishi opposition was Abu Lahab. Originally Muhammad was protected by his uncle, but he died the same year as Khadija, depriving Muhammad of two crucial supporters. However, his fame led him to be recruited by visitors from Yahtrîb (later named al Madîna, City of the Prophet), an oasis about 275 miles NE of Makka, to act as mediator among tribal clans, including the Aws and the Khazzraj and the Jews, who owned the best date palm farms, but had no military, and were allied to both rival clans. Muhammad went there in 622 (which marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar) enacted a document regulating the political relationship among these groups decreeing that they form a single community (umma), within which Jews (and even, at this early stage, pagans) would have religious freedom, provided they did not side with the community’s enemies. (Muhammad’s relationship with the Jews deteriorated later, as his political power grew and as the Quran developed as a scriptural alternative to the Torah. Eventually, Muhammad and followers take Makka by force in 630 CE. He enters the Ka’ba and destroys all but two (Jesus and Mary) of the icons within, including those of the three pagan goddesses of the Satanic Verses. In that year, two, most of the tribes in the Arabian peninsula submit to the Muslim Umma, now the most powerful force there. The remaining pagans are allowed 4 months to make up their minds to submit or be killed with impunity. The system of aligning the lunar months with the solar year is abolished, severing the connection between religious rituals and the seasons. Now the pilgrimage (Hajj) and the Feast of Sacrifice (‘Umra) – formerly separate pagan festivals in spring and autumn – are compounded, and will regress through the seasons, forming a complete cycle approximately every 33 years.

Muhammad returns to Madîna, falls ill, and dies in the arms of his favorite (and final of at least 9, possibly 13) wife, ‘Aisha.

Hadith ‘Traditions’ [39]

Hadiths are discrete anecdotes about Muhammad’s sayings and doings, originally passed down orally. Different versions of the same stories were recorded, sources cited, making a kind of patchwork. Because much depended on the reliability of the sources, the hadith transcribers investigated the character of their sources, and hadiths were graded by reliability into ‘sound’ (sahih), ‘good’ (hasan) or ‘weak’ (da’if). Six collections achieved canonical status, two of which, the sahihain (‘two sound ones’) of al-Bukhari (d. 870) and Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (d. 875) considered second only to the Quran in importance.

Given the long oral period before transcription, the reliability of hadiths has been called into question. Contemporary western scholars suggest that the reported chains of transmitters (isnads) had a tendency to “grow backwards” – that is, be created after the fact to make it seem like the stories had roots in antiquity.

The Elaboration of Muhammad’s Image [43]

While Christians are enjoined to imitate Christ in his gospel of love, Muslims should go much further in imitating Muhammad, right down to sitting down to put on trousers, putting one’s right shoe on first, and avoiding foods he disliked, including garlic, mangoes and melons. While he should not be represented in sculpture or art (lest the artist be seen to appropriate God’s creative power) his actions are described in great detail. Some of these include legendary status, including the miraculous splitting of the moon and feeding of 1,000 people from a single sheep. Muhammad is also the ‘seal’ of the prophets – the last one. No mystic thereafter can claim to have direct revelation without great challenge.

Chapter 3: Divine Unicity [49]

Tawhid [49]
The word does not occur in the Quran, but its concept – unicity of God – is evinced throughout, especially in the credal formula *there is no god but God*. It is a direct challenge to Arabian paganism, Zoroastrian dualism, and the Christian doctrine of God incarnated in Jesus.

The First Sectarian Divisions [51]
Ironically, terrestrial unity amongst Muslims lasted barely longer than the life of Muhammad. After his death a dispute arose about succession, with 'Ali (his son-in-law as well as his uncle's son) passed over three times. When he was finally appointed, his leadership is contested, and he is eventually killed by one of a group of his former followers who left (the khawarij or seceders), this event marking the beginning of Shi'ism. 'Ali's two son's took different paths, both of which have been emulated by the Shi'a since: Hasan, the eldest, compromised with those who resisted 'Ali's leadership, while the younger Hussein revolts and is killed at Karbala, now in Iraq, and the site of one of the holiest of Shi'ite shrines.

What began as a power struggle developed into an ideological dispute as the issue of leadership is perceived as necessary to salvation. In 749, a Shi'i-inspired movement leads to the formation of a new dynasty, moving the capital from Syria to Iraq. However, the new ruler (caliph) is still not a descendent of 'Ali. The Shi'a leader, the Imam Ja'far, follows Hasan's strategy and coexists with the new ruler, but the Imams remain a threat to the Caliphs, and (so Shi'a legend has it) are murdered each in their turn until the Twelfth Imam, Muhammad al Muntazar (The Awaited One) disappears altogether. He will return at the end of time as the Messiah (al-Mahdi) to bring peace to a strife-torn world. Thenceforth Shi'a communities formed at the fringes of the Muslim world, waiting for the return, oscillating between the strategies of Hasan and Hussein.

Other Branches of Shi'ism [53]
The followers of the Twelfth Imam, who now number about 80 million (including Iranians) are known as Imamis or Ithna'asharis ('Twelvers'). A minority sect claims allegiance to Isma'il, eldest son of Ja'far, and are thus known as Isma'ilis or 'Seveners'. Their descendents include two prosperous modern groups from India – the Musta'lian Bohras, and the Nizari Isma'ilis, who believe that their current Imam, known by his Persian title of Aga Khan (and one of the richest people in the world) is the 49th Imam in direct line of descent from 'Ali.

Other Shi'a sects include:
- The Zaidis of Yemen recognize Zaid ibn 'Ali (grandson of Hussein) as the fifth Imam over his brother.
- The Druzes of Lebanon
- The 'Alawis of Syria
- The Babis of Iran (which gave birth to the separate religion of Bahaism)

All Shi'a recognize the death of Hussein in the massacre of Karbala as the defining myth, re-enacted on its anniversary with processions of bloody flagellants who inflict wounds on themselves as self-punishment for betraying the Prophet's grandson. The Shi'a Imams are the nearest equivalent in Islam to the Christian priesthood, a class missing from Sunni Islam.

Tawhid in Early Islamic Thought [57]
There are related philosophical disputes in early Islamic thought about free will, the justice of God, the status of the Quran as created or uncreated and anthropomorphism, all of which must be interpreted in the light of Tawhid – the essential oneness of God.

In the Quran God curses Abu Lahab (Muhammad's chief rival amongst the Quraishi) and predicts for him a roasting in hell. But this appears to take away from Abu Lahab's freedom, and predestine him, which seems unjust (if he is not free in his
actions, why roast him for them?) Debating this reveals two different views of the status of the Quran:

**The created Quran:** on this view (attributed to the Shi’a, but certainly to a group of Sunni theologians called the Mu’tazila), there is a distinction between the personal attributes of God and God’s actions. The latter, which includes his speech, which includes the Quran, are created by God. On this view, then, Abu Lahab’s fate is just a prediction, not a promise – Abu Lahab still can embrace God and save himself.

However, traditionalists (the Sunni) do not distinguish God’s actions from God’s essence, and espouse the view of the uncreated Quran – the Quran as existing forever because it is an aspect of God. However, the Mu’tazila see this as shirk (the opposite of tawhid – ‘associationism’ or ‘idolatry’) because it suggests that there is something besides God, that is, the object of God’s eternally existing actions (as all actions must have objects). They also see insist that some passages of the Quran that appear to anthropomorphize God, by referring to his eyes or his foot, must not be taken literally, because it associates earthly features with the transcendent otherness that is God.

A former Mu’tazili, Abu’l Hasan al-Ash’ari (d. 935) laid out a compromise: the Quran was uncreated and God has foreknowledge of human action but humans have free will because of the doctrine of acquisition: God creates the power for people to ‘acquire’ actions created by him at the instant of action. For Ash’aris, ultimately God is inaccessible to human reason, and he can both have legs and not have legs and we must accept this _bila kaif_, “without asking how.”

**The Sunni Consensus** [59]  
After the failure of the caliphate (the union of political and spiritual power), religious authority was in the hands of the ‘ulama, a class of religious scholars whose authority was based solely on their knowledge of scripture. The Sunni ‘ulama are like protestant preachers in that

- there’s no clear ‘pecking order’ among them
- virtually anyone can become one, so among Sunnis any qualified [Islamic] lawyer can decide whether something is against Islamic law, so there can be as many versions of “orthopraxy” as there are jurists [60]
- without leadership, interpretation returns to the text, so there is a tendency towards conservatism

**Theosophical Speculations** [60]  
Speculation about God, influenced by the Greek Philosophers (particularly the Neoplatonists) was encouraged under the Isma’ili Imams, who valued reason below only God. This led to a kind of elitism about interpreting the Quran: the literal meanings were known to the many, but the inner (esoteric) meanings were known only to the few. For example, heaven and hell were not really actual places, but states of being. This differential understanding was shared by the great Spanish Philosopher Averroës (Ibn Rushd, 1126-98).

**Sufism** [62]  
The mystically inclined Sufi (named after the coarse shirts of wool (souf) worn by some early examples, also rejected literal readings and close observance of the Quran. One of the earliest Sufis was Rabi’a al-Adawiya, a poet from Basra, who refused to marry, and ran through the streets with a torch in one hand and a jug of water in the other, saying

> I am going to light fire in Paradise and pour water onto Hell, so that both veils may be taken away from those who journey towards God [that] they may look towards their Sustainer without any object of hope or motive of fear. [63]

This symbolizes a key notion of Sufism, that love of God should be pure and disinterested (note: NOT the same as Uninterested). 

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Despite occasional persecution (e.g., the crucifixion of the famous mystic al-Hallaj (857-922)), perhaps brought on by apparently blatant shock tactics (making the forbidden wine instead the symbol of piety, and flirting with homoeroticism) ‘drunken’ or ecstatic Sufism has existed alongside legalistic Islam through the ages. Perhaps the greatest Sufi philosopher was Ibn ‘Arabi (1165-1240) who was accused of pantheism because of his statement that “nothing exists except Allah.”

Chapter 4: The Shari’a and its Consequences [73]
There is no Incarnated God to match Jesus in Islam, and God has not revealed himself or his nature, but only his law – the Shari’a. This means much more than law in the narrow legal sense, including all rules for rituals, customs and manners. It is there both for the good of society and for helping humans achieve salvation.

The juristic literature through which the Shari’a is elaborated is known as fiqh ('knowledge'/'understanding' or more narrowly, 'jurisprudence'). The four roots of fiqh, are listed below in order of importance.

The Four Roots of Islamic Law [75]
1. Quran [75]
   Only about 10% of the Quran can be read as requirements of law (including family law (marriage, divorce, inheritance) and rules about witnesses and commercial regulations), and there are apparent contradictions.
2. Sunna [76]
   This is the vast body of hadiths, many of them of questionable origin, and containing many contrary claims.
3. Ijma’ ('consensus') [77]
   The jurist Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Shaibani (749-805) declared that “whatever the Muslims see as good is good with God, and whatever the Muslims see as bad is bad with God.” This allows that circumcision (male and female) is required, even though it has no sanction other than Arab custom.
4. Qiyas (analogical reasoning)[79]
   For example, are alcoholic drinks forbidden? While some jurists say only the fermented products of the date-palm and vine are forbidden, others argue that all alcoholic drinks share the same effect which is the reason for date-palm wine to be forbidden (see “Wine or Whisky” on p. 80).

Ijtihad: The Struggle for Truth [81]
Ijtihad shares the same root as jihad, and means the struggle to fathom the law as revealed by God and Muhammad. The Shari’a is divine, co-eternal with God. Fiqh is a human creation. The faqih – one who practices fiqh – must, through ijtihad reach conclusions about the Shari’a. The schools of Sunni legal thought are named after their founders:

- Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi’i [767-820]
  Rural Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, coastlands of Yemen, Indonesia
- Abu Hanifa (699-767) – the HANIFI school, more liberal than the one below dominant in the Balkans, Transcaucasia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Central Asian republics, China
- Malik ibn Anas al-Asbahi (713-795) – the MALIKI school dominant in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya
- Ahman Ibn Hanbal (780-855) – a traditionist who eschewed ijma’ wherever possible.

The four Sunni schools all agreed that the ‘gates of ijtihad’ closed after the third Muslim century, but for the Shi’ites, they remain open, allowing greater flexibility. Every senior Shi’i ulama known by the title of hujjat al-islam ('proof of Islam) or Ayatullah (sign of
God) is a mujtahid – individual interpreter of the law, and every believing Shi'i is supposed to look to one for guidance.

The Shari'a: An all-encompassing Ideal [83]
The Classical lawbooks divide all human behavior into five categories:

1. Required, obligatory (wajib or fard)
   ‘for the neglect of which one should be punished, and for the doing of which one should be rewarded.’ Include both individual duties (fard'ain) and collective (fard kifaya) like participation in the jihad.

2. Proscribed or prohibited (mahzur, haram)
   acts ‘for the performance of which there is punishment, and for the avoidance of which there is reward.’ Include the hudud offenses mentioned in the Quran.

3. Recommended (mandub, masnn, mustahhab, sunna)
   acts ‘for the doing of which there is reward, but for the neglect of which there is no punishment.’
   Include charity and fasts.

4. Discouraged or odious (makruh)
   acts ‘for the doing of which there is no punishment, but for avoiding there is reward.’
   Could include divorce.

5. Permitted but morally indifferent (jaiz, mubah)
   acts ‘for the performance or avoidance of which there is neither punishment nor reward.’

The Shari'a and Muslim Societies [86]
One problem with the Shari'a’s extremely individualistic approach is that it does not recognize the public sphere, does not accord the state a role distinct from religious or private affairs, and this can encourage nepotism and cronyism.

Chapter 5: Women and Family [91]

Historically the patriarchal family and the extended networks of kinship connected with it have proved to be among the most durable social structures in Muslim societies... The role of religion in sustaining these structures is not entirely clear. Islamic law privileges the family over other institutions: the laws of inheritance, favoring males over females, are written in the Quran along with other discriminatory provisions, such as the testamentary inferiority of females in certain proceedings. [But] slavery and concubinage... also the subject of detailed legal provisions and though widely permitted under the Shari'a, both have disappeared (in theory if not always in practice) from Muslim societies. [91]

Patriarchy is neither only Islamic (many non-muslim societies are, of course, patriarchal) nor necessary to Islam (there are Muslim communities in West Africa and south-east Asia where matrilineal systems of ownership and inheritance rule).

Women and the Shari'a [92]
Traditionalists argue that Muhammad greatly improved the lot of women pre-Islam (the jahiliya, “time of ignorance”) – granting women some inheritance, limiting the number of wives allowed to four, and the Quran is directed to both sexes.

BUT: women are allowed only half their brothers’ inheritance, and in court a woman’s testimony counts half a man’s. And to argue that this should change means to assault the idea that the text of the Quran is literal and always true.

Traditionalists can point out that in practice, the rules of the Quran are fairly liberal. While it sets out very nasty punishments for unfaithful wives, it also sets out standards of evidence for proving this that are almost impossible to meet. Furthermore, if a
deserted or widowed woman becomes pregnant, she is protected against accusations that she has been unfaithful by the legal fiction (hila) of the ‘sleeping fetus’ – according to which a pregnancy can be allowed to last up to even 7 years, so the child is seen as that of the missing/dead husband. Another hila is the ‘public bath’ whereby it is allowed that an unmarried woman who becomes pregnant can claim this happened by sitting in a pool of semen at a public bath. (What goes ON at these baths?) HOWEVER, the practice of inheritance is usually worse for women than the theory.

Marriage and Divorce [99]
According to most legal authorities, a woman’s wali (guardian – usually the father) enters into a marriage on her behalf, and thus a virgin can be forced to marry her father’s choice of husband. Only the Shi’ia view the woman as ‘a full legal entity, coequal with her male counterpart.’ But for all Muslims the husband as the right to divorce by talaq (unilateral declaration) – declaring ‘I divorce you’ three times (with a gap of three menstrual cycles between the second and third). Muslim men can marry “people of the book” but Muslim women cannot.

A man’s right to sex is divinely instituted – a wife must accede to her husband’s sexual appetites. In Shi’ism there is even the practice of “Temporary Marriage,” which can last as little as one hour, which allows any man to have sex if he can get a woman (or her guardian) to agree to the contract.

Islam and Sexuality [101]
Muslims are no prudes: there are no monks or nuns, and the Prophet’s sexual prowess is lauded. (He is said to have had possibly 13 wives, and to have had sex with all nine he was concurrently married to in one night.) According to the Tunisian Scholar Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, an orgasm is just a foretaste of what Paradise will be like for all eternity. That said, homosexuality is considered (by all but Sufis) to be a major sin.

Women in Social and Religious Life [103]
There is strict separation between Muslim men and women in the public domain. A woman’s social circle must be confined to her female friends and her mahrams – male relatives that she cannot marry. In all but the most liberal mosques, women must worship separate from the men (usually either in seclusion, or at the back, separated by a curtain).

Islam and Feminism [112]
Muslim feminists argue that it is not Islam that is sexist, but the men who interpret it. However, feminism is typically seen as ‘Western’ and rejected as cultural imperialism. Seeking a way round this, writers like the Moroccan Fatima Mernissi and the Egyptian-born Leila Ahmed have promoted ‘indigenous feminism,’ arguing that the ethical principles of Islam and its commitment to social justice irrespective of sex run counter to the restrictions women are currently under. The important role of early female Muslims, including Muhammad’s first wife Khadija, the first Muslim, and his last, ‘Aisha, who is the source of many hadiths (so much so that in one tradition the Prophet is supposed to have told Muslims that they ‘received half their religion from a woman’).

Muslim women are speaking out: even in conservative Sunni Saudi Arabia, women demonstrated publicly to be allowed to drive.

Chapter 6: The Two Jihads [116]
Jihad (‘struggle’) is a collective obligation for Muslims, distinct from the individual duties such as prayer. In Islam’s period of rapid expansion, it was akin to the Roman principle of just war, making chivalric rules for battle sparing women, children, the sick
and the weak, and protecting the Peoples of the Book. However, the classical doctrine
does divide the world into two camps – the sphere of Islam (dar al-islam) and the
sphere of War (dar al-harb), wherein enemies should convert (polytheists) or submit
(Peoples of the Book). In theory Islam was supposed to sweep the world, but this, like
the second coming of Christ, has been indefinitely postponed.

The Greater Jihad [118]
According to a well-known hadith, Muhammad distinguishes between the war on
polytheists (the lesser jihad) and the ‘greater’ jihad against evil, which can be
interpreted as the struggle every Muslim is in throughout his or her life. This kind of
peaceful conversion has actually been more responsible for the spread of Islam (through
trading routes, for example) than the military campaigns, although Islam has had to
adapt to local customs (as the traveller Muhammad ibn ‘Abdulla ibn Battuta (1304-77)
discovered when he came to the Maldives and was asked to be a judge: despite his
urgings, the women refused to wear any more clothing than a loincloth, yet considered
themselves good Muslims).

Appendix: The Five Pillars of Islam [143]
1. Shahada: declaration of faith according the formula There is no god but God.
Muhammad is the Messenger of God. [Shi’i add: ‘Ali is the the Friend of God]

2. Salat: worship/prayer. Ritual prostration in the direction of the Ka’ba in Makka,
which, for Sunnis, must take 5 times daily (dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and
evening) in a state of ritual purity. Congregational prayer takes place at noon on
Fridays. Women and men worship separately, women behind the men or in a
screened-off section.

3. Zakat: alms-giving/compulsory charity. Tax, payable once a year by all adult
Muslims, assessed at 2.5% of capital assets over and above a minimum known as
the nisab. (For example, the nisab for stock is 5 camels, 30 cows or 40 sheep or
goats.) The recipients should be poor and needy.

4. Sawm: the fast during the daylight hours during the holy month of Ramadan, the
9th month of the lunar calendar, which applies to eating, drinking, sex.

5. Hajj: pilgrimage to Makka – required (at least) once in a lifetime, must take place
during the last ten days of the twelfth lunar month (Dhu’l al-Hijja) reaching its
climax with the Feast of Sacrifice (Id al-Adha). When there, the pilgrims perform
rituals including the Tawaf, the circumambulation of the Ka’ba; the Sa’I (seven-fold
running between the hillocks of Safa and Marwa, now covered in an air-conditioned
gallery); the Standing on the Plain of ’Arafat, a few miles from Makka; the Onrush
through the narrow defile of Muzdalifa; the ‘Stoning’ of three pillars representing
the devil; and the sacrifice of an animal at Mina.