

Section 4

# Religious Orientations within the UAE

GRASP | ABSORB | APPRECIATE

## Section 4: Religious Orientations within the UAE

Through your work on this section you will be gaining the following Abu Dhabi knowledge:

- Religion. General knowledge about religious orientations of the population of the UAE and Abu Dhabi, with special focus on tolerance and the ability to practise your religion

You will also be able to:

LO12 Demonstrate general knowledge and awareness about the religion of Abu Dhabi and explain the Five Pillars of Islam

LO13 Detail the process for preparing for prayers

LO14 Explain the details of Islamic holy days and the holy month of Ramadan and Eid

*“To treat every person, no matter what his creed or race, as a special soul, is a mark of Islam.”<sup>1</sup>*

Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan

### General knowledge and awareness of Islam

The official religion of the UAE is Islam and it is practised by most of its citizens. Part Seven of the UAE Constitution declares Islam as the official state religion.

Central to Islam is that there is only One God and that Muhammad is His Messenger (Peace be Upon Him). Islam is an Arabic word meaning submission or commitment to Allah or God. The true believer is subject at all times to the will of Allah and is a member of the community of the faithful or the *‘ummah’*.

Muhammad (PBUH) was Allah’s chosen Messenger or Prophet, for the delivery of Allah’s Message which was revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) in Arabic over a period of 22 years. Muhammad (PBUH) recited the revelations and they were then memorised by his followers. After Muhammad’s death (PBUH), the revelations were written in a holy book called the *Quran*. Muslims believe the *Quran* is Allah’s direct words, from start to finish. The oldest copy of the *Quran* still in existence comes from the ninth century. It contains 114 chapters which are written in eloquent Arabic dialect.

The characteristics of the Islamic faith are: discipline, moderation, community and tolerance. These are part of everyday life in the UAE:

**Discipline** - Rules outlined in the *Quran* are considered as the laws of God and are supported by the *Sunna*, the sayings and reported actions of Muhammad (PBUH) during his lifetime. This sets out detailed guidelines about how Muslims must lead their lives, such as moderate behaviour, regular prayers, strict diet, cleanliness, and politeness. It also includes rules for the family and society. The entire structure of *Quranic* law is accepted as God’s will and is known as *Shariah*.

**Moderation** - A practising Muslim believes in *wasat*. This is about finding the way between two extremes, in favouring or preferring the middle ground and consensus. This encourages modesty and good relationships.

**Community** - The community should be self-reliant, standing as one, openly committed to the faith. This is demonstrated by the saying of prayers at fixed times and in set ways while facing Mecca (*Al Qibla*). The annual *Hajj* (see Five Pillars of Islam) draws millions of Muslims together to serve and follow God and His Prophet (PBUH) on an equal basis.

**Tolerance** - Throughout the history of Islam, racial prejudice has been absent and religious tolerance has been shown towards Christians and Jews. In the UAE, HH Sheikh Zayed, the Founding Father, set the principles of tolerance and promoted the values of peaceful co-existence. Freedom of religion is guaranteed in the constitution.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://whatson.ae/2017/04/here-are-9-great-quotes-from-sheikh-zayed-the-founder-of-the-uae/>

## The Five Pillars of Islam

Muhammad (PBUH) said that Islam is “*constructed on the Five*” which has come to be known as the Five Pillars of Islam. These are described in the *Quran* and offer a framework for worshipping God and as a sign of commitment to the faith.

### **Shahadah - The daily confession of faith – The First Pillar**

The believer’s open testimony of faith presented in a few words that everyone can understand, regardless of their background:

“I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.” In Arabic: “*Ash-hadu An La Ellaha Ella Allah wa Ash-hadu an Muhamad Rasulu Allah*”

This proclamation is central to Islam. Not only do the words form part of everyday prayers and the call to prayer, but they are also quoted at life’s key events such as birth and death.

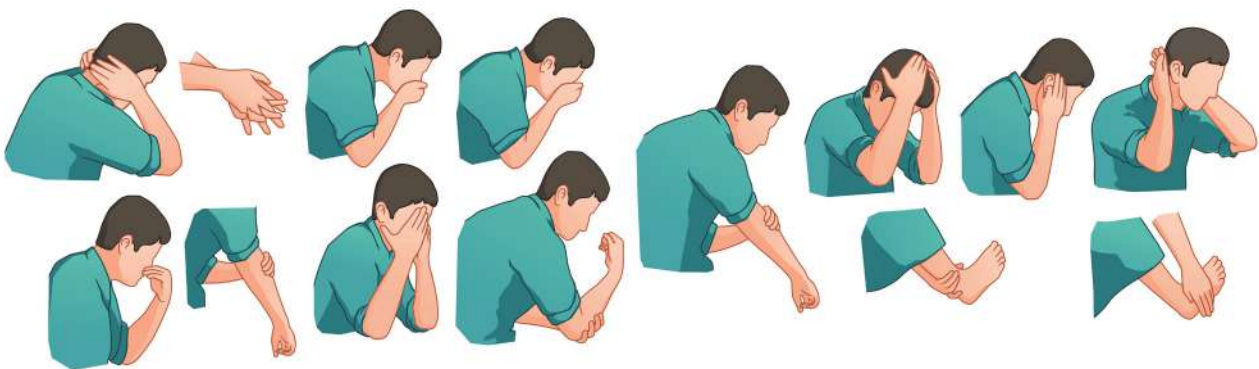
### **Salat - Ritual daily prayer - The Second Pillar**

*Salat* are the ritual prayers that happen on a daily basis and demonstrates the believer’s commitment to the faith. It is believed that an individual’s record of prayer is judged by God on the Day of Judgement and requires a strictly disciplined routine.

Prayers are performed five times a day facing the direction (*Al Qibla*) of the *Ka'bah*, the building in the centre of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. The specific timings are based on the sun movements and so timings vary from winter to summer and day to day. A prayer schedule is displayed at the entry of most mosques. The basis for calculating the due times for prayers is as follows;

- *Salat al-fajr* - Dawn Prayer
- *Salat al-dhuhr* - Noon Prayer
- *Salat al-'asr* - Afternoon Prayer
- *Salat al-maghrib* - Sunset Prayer
- *Salat al-'isha* - Evening/Night Prayer

A believer should do their best to adhere to the prayer schedule, although there are certain situations when exceptions are made and the believer is allowed to delay the time at which they pray. Ablutions, or ritual washing, must be performed before prayers, either before leaving home or at the mosque. It follows a set pattern of eight steps including the hands, mouth, nose, face, arms, ears and feet. The final step is washing the feet. All mosques have small rudimentary washing facilities for this purpose. Cleanliness is an essential pre-requisite to prayer, even in the desert where clean sand can be substituted.



Ritual washing techniques

The prayer sequence consists of 13 separate moves accompanied by a disciplined repetition of set words. At the core of the prayer sequence is the physical act of *Islam*, with seven points of the body resting on the floor: forehead, palms, knees and toes. This procedure was developed by Muhammad (PBUH) during his own ministry and he led the prayers of the faithful himself.

The prayers start with the *Mu'athen* calling *Athan*, for the faithful to congregate at the mosque. The call is always at the due time so that all the mosques in one area generally call *Athan* simultaneously.



### **Zakat - Supporting the needy - The Third Pillar**

The Third Pillar is charitable giving or alms giving. This demonstrates that a believer is giving back to Allah a portion of the wealth He has given to them. This is considered a personal responsibility for Muslims in order to ease hardship for others and eliminate inequality. It is often donated to community work and usually amounts to between 2.5 per cent and 10 per cent of the donor's after-tax income.

### **Sawm - The fast - The Fourth Pillar**

Ramadan refers to the annual month of fasting that takes place and it is the holiest month in the Islamic calendar. It does not have a set date as it starts with the new moon at the end of the previous calendar month of *Sha'ban*.

According to Muslim belief, 'the gates of hell are closed and the gates of heaven are open' during Ramadan. This is when Muhammad (PBUH) received his first revelation and the specific occasion is celebrated as *Lailat al-Qadr* (the Night of Destiny). It signifies the most solemn of occasions for Islam.

The aim of fasting is to reduce the believer's dependence on material things such as food and drink. It allows Muslims to feel closer to God, to worship Him in their lives and to state their dependence on Him, atoning for past sins, and to think about the poor and needy.

During the 29 or 30 days of the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn to dusk and then in the evening break their fast with *iftar*. This traditional evening meal is usually eaten communally with friends and family. It is an occasion for great celebration. This is followed before dawn with *sohour* the meal that precedes the start of the fast. During daylight, nothing may pass the lips: no food, no water, no cigarette smoke, nothing whatsoever. Sexual intercourse is also prohibited. There are some exemptions from fasting, during sickness or pregnancy for example. Fasting is necessary for every Muslim once they reach puberty.

## **Hajj - The pilgrimage to Mecca - The Fifth Pillar**

During the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar, Muslims make the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. This is called the *Hajj* in Arabic. Every able-bodied Muslim, male or female, is obliged to make the pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. In the *Hajj*, all the elements of Islam come together during eight days or longer of intense observance and prayer.

The *Hajj* consists of six key stages which must be undertaken by the pilgrims:

**Al-Ehram** - Before arrival at the holy centre of Mecca, the pilgrim must wash away the impurities of the world. Worldly clothes and jewellery are replaced by white cloth and sandals. These demonstrate equality and unity by removing outward signs of class or wealth.

**Tawaf** - Upon entering Mecca, the pilgrim walks seven times around the *Ka'bah*. The circulation is made in a counter-clockwise movement.

**Sa'y** - There follows a rapid walk as a reminder of the desperate search for water by Ismael's mother Hajar on the mountains of Hijaz. The spring of Zamzam which is believed to have sprung from under the Ismael's heels to answer her call, lies beneath the mosque and water from the source is taken home by pilgrims as a blessing for their families.

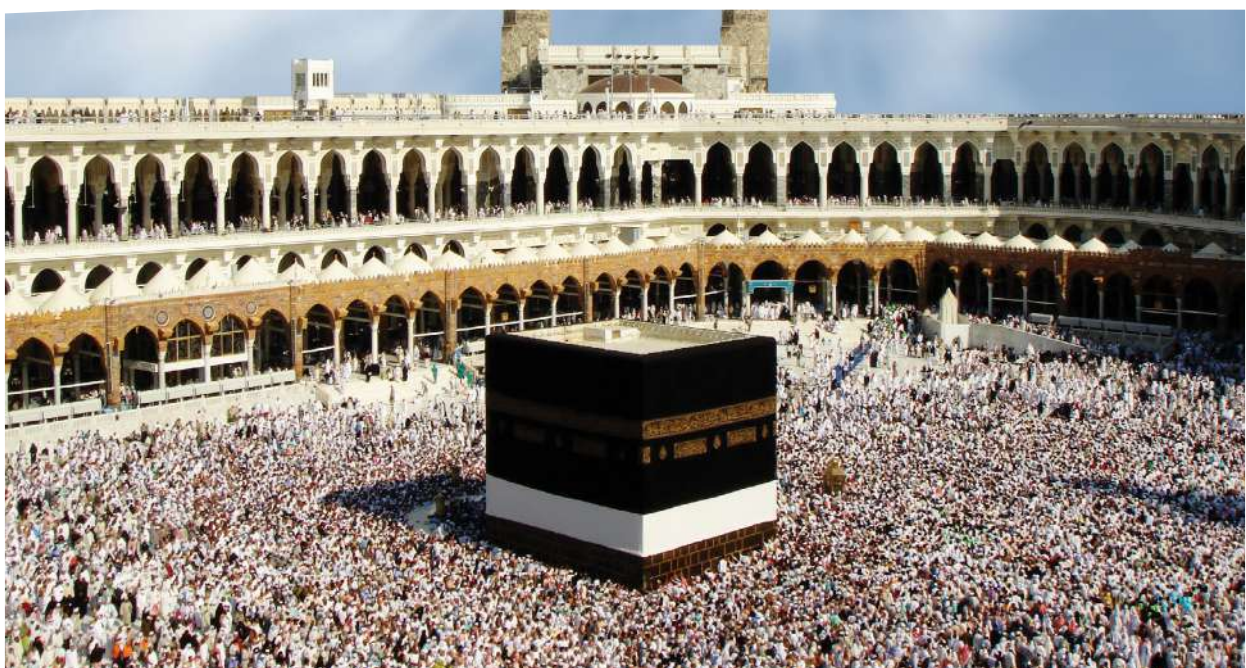
**The Standing** - The pilgrims then gather on the plain of Arafat to say the deepest prayers of the pilgrimage and the final act of the ritual begins. This event, lasting from noon until dusk, takes place on the ground where it is believed all mankind will stand before God on the Day of Judgement.

**Mina** - The pilgrims proceed to Mina to throw pebbles against the stone pillars representing *Shaytan*, an evil spiritual being who can tempt believers into wrongdoing. This is in memory of Ibrahim's escape from the devil and a representation of the believer's lifelong battle against their sins.

**Sacrifice** - Finally, there is the symbol of sacrifice, repeating the sacrifice of the ram by Ibrahim. The symbol is usually a donation of food for the poor.

The pilgrim or *Hajj*, is honoured in the Islamic community, recognising the expression of devotion to God.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Ibrahim is acknowledged by the *Quran* as the father of prophets, just as he is regarded as the source of Judaism and therefore of Christianity. There are many stories about his life and the events are told in many areas of worship.



The Great Mosque of Mecca

## UAE National Tolerance Programme

In June 2016, the UAE Government introduced the National Tolerance Programme to support the values of tolerance and co-existence and to reject attitudes of discrimination. This programme is based on the seven key pillars of UAE life:

- Islam
- The UAE Constitution
- HH Sheikh Zayed's legacy and ethics of the UAE
- International conventions
- Archaeology and history
- Humanity
- Common values

Federal and local entities will collaborate under five main themes:

- Government's role as an incubator of tolerance
- The role of family in nation building
- Promoting tolerance among youth
- Enriching the scientific and cultural content
- Integrating international efforts to promote tolerance

A Council of Tolerance develops policies to promote tolerance locally, regionally and internationally. The programme includes a number of initiatives such as Tolerance Week, The UAE Tolerance Centre and The Tolerance Responsibility Programme.

In February 2016, HE Sheikha Lubna bint Khalid bin Sultan Al Qasimi was appointed Minister of State for Tolerance.

## Islamic calendar

The Islamic calendar is used in many Muslim countries at the same time as using the Gregorian calendar. It is used to set the proper days on which to observe Islamic holidays, festivals and events such as the holy month of Ramadan and the *Hajj* holidays. The first year was the Islamic year beginning in AD622 when the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) travelled from Mecca to Medina. This is called the *Hijra*. Each numbered year is designated either H for Hijra or AH for the Latin *anno hegirae* (in the year of the *Hijra*). The Islamic calendar or *hijra* calendar is a lunar calendar consisting of twelve months in a year of 354 or 355 days.

The twelve *Hijra* months are named as follows in Arabic:

1. *Muharram*
2. *Safar*
3. *Rabi'I* or *Rabi' al-awwal*
4. *Rabi'II* or *Rabi' al-Thani* or *Rabi' al-Akhir*
5. *Jumada I* or *Jumada al-Oola*
6. *Jumada II* or *Jumada al-Thani* or *Jumada al-Akhir*
7. *Rajab*
8. *Sha'aban*
9. *Ramadan*
10. *Shawwal*
11. *Dhu al-Qidah*
12. *Dhu al-Hijjah*

## Islamic holy days

The Islamic holy day is Friday. The saying of prayers is a vital part of every holy celebration and on Friday the *Jum'ah* Prayer takes place, usually in the mosque just after noon. *Khutbah* (the sermon) is delivered by the *Khateeb* who in most cases also serves as the Imam. Attendance is required by all adult males who are legal residents of the locality. Any Muslim can join the prayer. The main responsibility of the Imam of a mosque is to deliver the *khutba* during Friday prayers. However, any chosen male member of the community can lead prayers.

*Eid al-Adha*, the Feast of the Sacrifice, takes place on the tenth day of the Muslim month of *Dhu'l-hajja*. It focuses on Ibrahim's sacrifice of the ram in place of his son, Ismail. This reminds Muslims of the essential message of the *Hajj*; the renewal of faith and the importance of life. The second most popular feast is *Eid al-Fitr*, the Feast of Fast-Breaking. This event falls at the end of the fast of Ramadan. Traditionally, new clothes are worn on this day.

**DID YOU KNOW?** *Shariah* is the name given to a system of laws based on the *Quran* and the *Sunna*. From the belief that the *Quran* is the direct Word of God, it means that the laws to be found in the text are those laid down by God for man. God cannot be excluded from any part of the life of the individual or the laws of society.

## Public holidays

The Abu Dhabi government issues a calendar of holidays with their approximate dates annually, and then makes an announcement closer to the event to confirm the actual date. These are published in national newspapers.

The holy night during the holy month of fasting for Muslims is: *Laylat al-Qadr* when the Prophet (PBUH) had the first verses of the *Quran* revealed to Him; and *Eid al-Fitr* is the holiday at the end of Ramadan.

*Hajj* holidays are: the Day of Arafat when pilgrims at the *Hajj* gather on the plain of Arafat to request God's mercy and *Eid al-Adha* or the Feast of the Sacrifice.

There are dates commemorating other important Islamic events such as:

- Islamic New Year: 1 *Muharram*
- *Al Mawlid an-Nabawi* (Prophet's birthday): 12 *Rabia' Awal*
- *Isra' & Me'raj* (Ascension of the Prophet): 27 *Rajab*

There are also national holidays such as:

- New Year's Day: 1st January
- Commemoration Day: November - in honour of members of the UAE Armed Forces
- UAE National Day: 2nd December - celebrating the anniversary of the founding of UAE

## **The influence of religion on society**

Religion is a very important aspect of UAE and Abu Dhabi society. Islam is the basis of the Emirati culture and it shows in their political system, the way people dress and the lifestyle. There are many mosques across the Emirates, at each street corner, in every compound, from the smallest to the largest. Visitors to the country will see some key aspects of this influence such as:

- As the holy day of Islam is on Friday then the weekends are different from western countries. Friday and Saturday are the weekend and Sunday is a normal working day
- Meat is *halal*, meaning that animals are slaughtered according to the traditional non-stunning rites
- The *Mua'athen* calls the faithful to prayer, five times a day (seven times during Ramadan) and can be heard in most places, relayed by loudspeakers on either side of the minaret
- Practices that are banned by Islam are condemned by law in the UAE
- The rhythm of life and lifestyle change completely during Ramadan with cafes and restaurants closed during the hours of daylight and the working day reduced
- The consumption of alcohol is strictly controlled. Muslims are forbidden to drink alcohol but it is available for non-Muslims in hotel bars and some restaurants

Tourists should be advised to respect the principles of Islam and local customs and traditions when in the UAE so as not to upset their hosts whilst they are guests in the country. Some behaviour can get tourists into trouble with the law – this is covered in more detail in Section 14.



# Knowledge Bank: Religious Orientations within the UAE

## 1. General knowledge and awareness of Islam

- There are four key characteristics of the Islamic faith: discipline, moderation, community and tolerance. These are built into every aspect of life in the UAE.
- The *Quran* lays down the law of God and the Sunna provides the Prophet's (PBUH) teachings. These are obligatory instructions and guidelines that must be obeyed as testament to the faith.
- The UAE National Tolerance Programme launched in 2016 by the UAE Government illustrates the importance of the four characteristics and their place in public as well as private life.

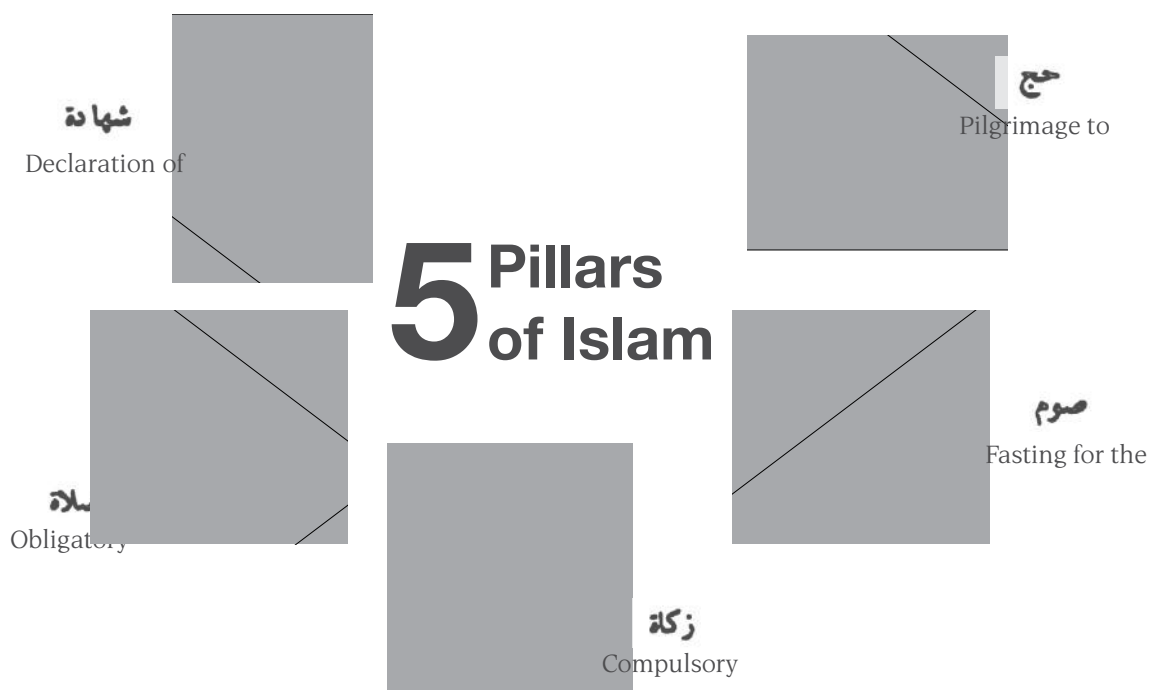
By looking at the following websites, you will understand the importance of discipline, moderation, community and tolerance and its place in the cultural and political system in the UAE:

<https://sites.google.com/site/exploringtheuae/presentation/culture/religions>

<https://government.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/federal-governments-strategies-and-plans/national-tolerance-programme>

## 2. The Five Pillars of Islam

- These are: the declaration of faith, obligatory daily prayer, compulsory giving of charity or alms, fasting during Ramadan and the *Hajj* or pilgrimage to Mecca
- The discipline and rituals that sit behind each of these provide the foundations of the faith. They are fundamental to community, public and private life, social and cultural heritage. You must have a good awareness of the implications of these Five Pillars on every aspect of life in the UAE



There is lots of information available regarding the historical background to each of the Five Pillars. Gathering information and facts on each one separately is useful so that you can answer tourists' general questions effectively. Here are some websites which offer an outline:

<http://www.religionfacts.com/hajj>

### 3. The process for preparing for prayers

- As part of the compulsory daily prayers outlined by the Five Pillars of Islam, a ritual form or set process must be followed
- This starts with the ablutions or washing which follows a set pattern of eight steps

### 4. Islamic holy days and holidays

Islam has fewer holy days and holidays than some religions but the key holidays, such as the holy month of Ramadan and the days of the *Hajj*, are very important and are reflected in all aspects of life. The dates are based on the Islamic calendar and the holy days are officially announced. The feasts celebrate key events in the Prophet's (PBUH) life. Finding out about these events and the symbolism that is applied to each celebration will help you to recount the information to the visitors. The Islamic events considered as holidays in the UAE are:

- Islamic New Year: *1 Muharram*
- *Mawlid an-Nabi* (Prophet's Birthday): *12 Rabi' Awal*
- *Isra' & Mi'raj* (Ascension of the Prophet): *27 Rajab*