



Exploring Islam

Faith, language and a place to belong

An introduction for anyone curious about Islam, with Latin communities in mind.

ENGLISH EDITION
Latin Muslim Association

A place to begin

You can be Latin and Muslim. Being Latin describes heritage and cultural identity; being Muslim describes faith. Exploring Islam does not require you to erase your family history or become Arab. There is room to value your language, family ties and heritage while learning about faith.

This booklet is for anyone curious about Islam, especially readers with connections to Latin America. You may have a faith already, have no religion, or simply want to understand a friend or relative. You do not need any previous knowledge.

We begin with what Muslims believe, then look at worship, character, Jesus and Mary, and questions about language and belonging. Islam has a worldwide community, with many languages and cultures. This is an introduction, rather than a guide to every belief or practice.

Take your time. Read in any order, follow the references, and write down the questions you would like to explore.

Sources: Qur'an 49:13; 30:22.

One God

At the heart of Islam is belief in one God: the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. Muslims worship God alone. The Qur'an describes God as one, without offspring or parent, and unlike anything else (112:1–4).

Allah is the Arabic word for God, or Dios in Spanish. It is not the name of a separate Muslim deity. Arabic-speaking Christians also use Allah when speaking of God. Sharing a word does not mean that every religion understands God in exactly the same way.

The Arabic word ilah means a god or deity. A common explanation connects Allah with al-ilah, “the God”. This is a useful introduction to the language; the word’s derivation is discussed by scholars.

Muslims understand life as a responsibility before God. Belief includes the angels, revealed scriptures, God’s messengers, the Last Day and divine decree. Faith calls a person towards worship, gratitude, repentance and care for others.

Sources: Qur'an 112; 2:285; Sahih Muslim 8a. See language sources, p. 11.

Prophets and revelation

Muslims believe that God sent messengers to guide humanity. The Qur'an names figures familiar to Jewish and Christian readers, including Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Their shared call, in Islamic belief, is to worship God and live responsibly.

Muhammad is regarded by Muslims as God's final prophet, a human messenger rather than a divine being. Muslims learn from his teaching and example, known as the Sunnah. Reports of his words and actions are called hadith; their reliability and interpretation require careful scholarship.

The Qur'an is Islam's central scripture. Muslims believe it is God's revelation to Muhammad in Arabic. It speaks about God, worship, moral responsibility, earlier prophets and the life to come.

A translation helps a reader explore the Qur'an's meaning, but translations involve interpretation. Read passages in context and compare explanations when a verse raises questions. You can begin in English or Spanish; you do not have to understand Arabic before you start learning.

Sources: Qur'an 16:36; 2:136; 33:40; 18:110; 12:2.

Faith in daily life

Five practices are often called the pillars of Islam. They give a simple starting point for understanding Muslim worship.

Shahadah: testimony of faith. Affirming that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah, and that Muhammad is His messenger.

Salah: prayer. The five daily prayers create regular moments for worship and remembrance of God. They include recitation, standing, bowing and prostration.

Zakah: obligatory giving. Those whose qualifying wealth meets the conditions give a prescribed share to eligible recipients. Voluntary charity is encouraged as well.

Sawm: fasting in Ramadan. Muslims who are required and able to fast abstain from food, drink and sexual relations from dawn to sunset. Exemptions and alternative duties depend on circumstances.

Hajj: pilgrimage. The pilgrimage to Mecca is required once in a lifetime for Muslims who are physically and financially able. It takes place at a set time of year.

These practices are learned step by step. Individual circumstances and detailed rulings are best discussed with a knowledgeable teacher.

Sources: Sahih al-Bukhari 8; Qur'an 2:183–185; 9:60; 3:97.

Worship and character

Islam connects worship with how people treat one another. The Qur'an describes goodness through faith, generosity, keeping promises and patience in difficulty (2:177). Religious practice calls for an honest and compassionate life.

That includes speaking truthfully, dealing fairly, caring for parents and relatives, respecting neighbours, and supporting people in need. The Qur'an calls believers to uphold justice even when it is against their own interests or those of their family (4:135).

Muslims, like everyone else, fall short. A person's behaviour should not automatically be taken as a complete picture of their religion. Islam teaches people to recognise wrongdoing, seek forgiveness and try to put things right.

Learning about Islam can begin with ordinary questions: How do I treat people when I disagree? Am I trustworthy with money and promises? Who around me needs help? Worship and character belong in the same conversation.

Sources: Qur'an 2:177; 4:36; 4:135; 39:53.

Mary and Jesus in Islam

Mary, known as Maryam, is deeply honoured in Islam. The Qur'an describes her as chosen and purified (3:42), and its nineteenth chapter carries her name. It recounts the announcement of Jesus' birth and her response (19:16–21).

Muslims believe that Jesus was born to Mary without a father, through God's power. The Qur'an calls him the Messiah and a messenger of God. It describes miracles, including healing, performed by God's permission (3:45–49).

There is meaningful common ground with Christianity, alongside important differences. Muslims honour Jesus as a prophet and Messiah, but do not worship him as God or regard him as God's son. The Qur'an teaches that God raised him and rejects the claim that his opponents killed or crucified him (4:157–158).

These differences deserve clear and respectful discussion. If you come from a Christian background, you can explore Islam's account while asking honest questions about how the traditions differ. Read more in LMA's online introductions to Mary and Jesus.

Sources: Qur'an 3:42–49; 19:16–36; 4:157–171.

Faith, language and belonging

You do not need to become Arab to become Muslim. The Qur'an describes the variety of human languages and colours as signs of God, and peoples and tribes as an opportunity to know one another (30:22; 49:13).

Your language, family history and cultural roots remain part of your life. Religious learning may lead you to reconsider particular habits, such as drinking alcohol or eating pork. It does not require you to dismiss your whole heritage. Questions about specific customs deserve individual, thoughtful answers.

A familiar Spanish word offers a small connection with Arabic: *ojalá*. The Royal Spanish Academy traces it to Andalusí Arabic *wa šá lláh*, glossed as “and God has willed”. Today it expresses a strong wish or hope. Using the word does not imply a religious belief or prove anyone's ancestry.

From 711 to 1492, Muslim-ruled territories existed in parts of the Iberian Peninsula. Their history includes exchange between Muslims, Christians and Jews, as well as inequality, conflict and persecution. It is a shared cultural inheritance to explore honestly; belonging today does not depend on having a particular ancestry.

Sources: Qur'an 30:22; 49:13; 5:90; 2:173. RAE; Gerber; Safran (p. 11).

Questions you may have

Do I have to change my name? Usually, no. Becoming Muslim does not require an Arabic name. A name with a harmful meaning or a religious difficulty can be discussed with a knowledgeable teacher.

Do I need to speak Arabic? No. You can learn about Islam in your own language. Arabic has a special place in the Qur'an and formal prayer, and the recitations needed for prayer can be learned gradually with help.

Do I have to know everything first? No one begins with complete knowledge. Ask questions, seek reliable teaching and take learning seriously without expecting instant perfection.

What does becoming Muslim involve? It involves sincerely accepting Islam's testimony of faith: that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah, and that Muhammad is His messenger. If this is something you are considering, ask for a clear explanation and support for what comes next.

Can I explore without making a commitment? Yes. You can read, ask and reflect. The Qur'an states that there is no compulsion in religion (2:256). A conversation should respect your freedom to decide.

Sources: Sahih Muslim 2139; Sahih al-Bukhari 8; Qur'an 2:256.

Keep exploring

Start with a subject that matters to you: belief in God, prayer, Jesus and Mary, or the relationship between faith and culture. Read a short passage, note what you understand, and ask about what remains unclear.

On LMA's Discover pages you can read more about Latin and Muslim identity, Mary, Jesus and common questions. The resources page is the place to check for new material in English and Spanish.

A few useful words

Islam: submission to God.

Muslim: a person who follows Islam.

Qur'an: Islam's central scripture.

Sunnah: the Prophet's teaching and example.

Hadith: a report of his words or actions.

Mosque: a Muslim place of worship.

Ask LMA a question

Use the contact page to send an enquiry. If you need practical guidance, ask about an appropriate teacher or local community. You do not need to donate to read the resources or ask a question.

Sources: latinmuslimassociation.org.uk/discover/ • [/contact/](http://latinmuslimassociation.org.uk/contact/)

Sources and reading

Qur'an / Corán

References appear beneath each section. Read verses in context; English and Spanish translations are available. [Open source](#)

Hadith / Hadices

Bukhari 8: five pillars. Muslim 8a: faith; Muslim 2139: changing a name with a bad meaning. [Open source](#)

Allah: language / lengua

Society of Saint John Chrysostom (2009): Christian use of Allah. The derivation is an introductory explanation, not a settled linguistic conclusion. [Open source](#)

Ojalá: RAE / ASALE

Diccionario de la lengua española, entry “ojalá”. [Open source](#)

Al-Andalus: Jane S. Gerber

“Ornament of the World” and the Jews of Spain, NEH (2019). [Open source](#)

Al-Andalus: Janina M. Safran

Defining Boundaries in al-Andalus (2013). Publisher summary; the full book was not consulted. [Open source](#)

Your next question is welcome.

Explore Islam at your own pace. Visit LMA's Discover pages or get in touch to ask a question.

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