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# Expert guide

## group 1 monotheism

**Monotheism (*tawheed*):** the doctrine or belief that there is only one true God, Allah, worthy of our highest veneration and worship.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ never asked people to worship him. He did not even allow anyone to display excessive reverence to him. He would always make a sharp distinction between the Divine and his own human nature. He ﷺ stopped people from standing for him when he entered, and objected to people implicitly equating him and Allah in their sermons, and warned on his deathbed about the actions of past people who had turned the graves of their prophets into shrines. Nothing stood out from his message more than a keenness to protect the purest understanding of monotheism in people's hearts, and to remove any barrier between individuals and their direct and personal connection with God.

Leo Tolstoy (d. 1910) hailed from an aristocratic Russian family and is described by some as one of the greatest novelists of all time. Many have reported his great admiration for Islam, and the statements attributed to him in this regard include the following:

“Muhammad has always been standing higher than Christianity. He does not consider God as a human being and never makes himself equal to God. Muslims worship nothing except God and Muhammad is his Messenger. There is not any mystery and secret in it.”

Elsewhere, he writes, “After I have read the Quran, I realized that all what humanity needs is this heavenly law.” Only in Islam does one find a God who is absolute in His Oneness and perfection, glorified above resembling His creation, and equally compassionate to all of humanity, addressing them all with the same message.

### Group discussion questions

- 1 Briefly summarize your topic, in your group's own words:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2 What is the inherent value of this component from the Prophet's ﷺ message?



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# Expert guide

## group ② predestination

**Predestination (*qadr*):** conviction that everything happens only by His will and decree, and that only He brings events into existence.

Allah (the Most High) says, “No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a register [written record] before We bring it into being. Indeed, that, for Allah, is easy—in order that you not despair over what has eluded you and not exult [in pride] over what He has given you. And Allah does not like the self-deluded and boastful person.”

Herbert Benson, MD, a cofounder of the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine, says, “Faith in God is the best preventative tool for stress and to promote [a] healthy immune system. Believing that one hand is in control of everything eases the mind.” The security he speaks about—when a person believes that just one hand is ultimately in control—is precisely how the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ defined fate: “To believe in predestination, the good of it and the evil of it [all being from Allah].”

With conviction that everything happens only by His will and decree, and that only He brings events into existence, inner peace becomes attainable. The belief that everything is, and forever will be, in God’s hands, and that God has constructed this life with ups and downs for a wisdom only He fully knows, are two powerful resources that make life enduring and enjoyable. These beliefs were consistently taught by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and his followers continue to find contentment in it when faced with poverty, fear, and other challenges.

### Group discussion questions

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# Expert guide

## group 3 prayer

Ritual prayer is the second pillar of Islam after the testimony of faith. Linguistically, it means a connection. It is a chance for people to pull themselves out of the spinning machine of this life to reinforce their relationship with their Creator, to water the tree of their faith and to moisten their souls, which would otherwise be drying out and cracking in the desert of this never-ending pursuit of worldly pleasures.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ required Muslims to pray five times each day. Though some people may consider this a burdensome task, many Muslims—upon actually experiencing the prayer—voluntarily choose to supplement these daily five with even more. The magnetic force of this unique devotional act should be a clear sign of its meaningfulness. The late Pope John Paul II, despite his theological differences with Islam, once expressed this exact sentiment, saying, “The religiosity of Muslims deserves respect. It is impossible not to admire, for example, their fidelity to prayer. The image of believers in Allah who, without caring about time or place, fall to their knees and immerse themselves in prayer remains a model for all those who invoke the true God.”

Without question, the greatest benefit of the prayer is in connecting with God. That connection nurtures a spiritual resilience that helps one endure in fulfilling their purpose in this life and qualifies them for salvation in the hereafter. However, even the physical and mental benefits of the Muslim daily prayer are astounding. And on the mental/psychological front, research suggests that prayer enhances self-control, and offsets the negative health effects of daily stressful experiences. Considering the upsurge in anxiety, depression, drug abuse, and suicide all around us, the hurting world testifies to the renewed relevance of the Muslim daily prayer.

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# Expert guide

## group 4 fasting

Fasting is another pillar of Islam, practiced by over a billion Muslims worldwide. This restriction of the carnal appetites feeds one's spirituality, reinforces the religious conscience, and cultivates sincerity in one's observance of God—for only God is watchful of you at all times. It also teaches self-restraint in other spheres of life, and thus the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ informed us, “Whoever does not give up foul speech while fasting, [know that] Allah has no need for this person to give up food and drink.” Of course, fasting also allows a Muslim to experience hunger and discomfort, generating empathy for the underprivileged and downtrodden. For that reason, the Prophet Muhammad would outdo himself in generosity during Ramadan, and obligated his followers with a mandatory charity (*sadaqat al-fitr*) at the month's end.

As for the health benefits gained by fasting, they are both physical and psychological. In one study by Mattison and Lane (2003) at the National Institute of Aging in Baltimore, it was found that caloric restriction extended lifespan and reduced the incidence of age-related diseases. And in the famous “Canto and Owen Experiment,” anti-aging researcher Richard Weindruch, PhD at the University of Wisconsin's School of Medicine and Public Health, published a major paper showcasing two rhesus monkeys of similar ages with very different diets. His research yielded a clear message: “caloric restriction” and “fasting” reverse and slow the cellular decline associated with aging. As for the therapeutic effects of fasting on mental health, Dr Yuri Nikolayev of the Fasting Clinic of the Moscow Institute of Psychiatry has tracked the effectiveness of fasting for thousands of schizophrenia patients for whom medications had been ineffective.

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# Expert guide

## group 5 healthy eating

Allah the Most High said, “Oh children of Adam, take your adornment at every place of prostration, and eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess” [al-A’raf, 7:31].

These divine instructions were not left unqualified. Rather, nuanced detail was provided by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ regarding food, drink, and dress. For instance, Muslims are forbidden from eating pork unless a dire necessity compels them, and they are discouraged (not forbidden) from eating beef to avoid medical complications. In one hadith, “I prescribe for you cows’ milk, for they eat from all the herbs, and it contains a cure for every disease.” In another related report, “And stay away from cow meat, for it is [a cause of] disease.” Not only was the kind of food addressed, but the amount as well. The Prophet ﷺ said,

“No human being fills any vessel worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for the son of Adam [to eat] a few mouthfuls, to erect his spine (i.e., sustain him). But if he must [eat more], then let one third be for food, one third for drink, and one third for his air.”

Taking it a brilliant step further, the Prophet ﷺ provided us with a roadmap to eating less. Anas (rA) reports that the Prophet ﷺ forbade them from drinking while standing, and [Anas added:] that eating while standing was even worse. This advice on eating and drinking mindfully is a proven key to avoiding the dangers of overeating and obesity.

### Group discussion questions

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# Expert guide

## group 6 forbidding fornication

**Fornication:** Impermissible sexual relations between two people who are not married.

Sexual permissiveness has certainly been a dark road for the secular modern world. Yet, despite how politicized, you will find experts from across the ideological spectrum still accepting the roles of chastity, abstinence, and marital fidelity in preventing sexually transmitted diseases. These protective values taught by the Prophet Muhammad are associated with low rates of HIV infections in Muslim-majority nations. Allah the Most High said, “And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way” [17:32]. Not only did the Prophet Muhammad bring this verse prohibiting adultery and fornication, but outlined for us a code of conduct to preempt the slippery slope leading to them. Civilizations that did not respect this code always stumbled to points of no return. It begins with extramarital relations, then identifying your existence based on your sexual orientation, followed by acceptance of all forms of sexual expression, even incest, bestiality, and necrophilia. From that vantage point, a newfound appreciation for how this verse begins—“Do not approach fornication”—surfaces, as if it were a vicious blaze that engulfs those who even come close to it.

Another way in which Islam inhibits this threat is by emphasizing the family system. Fornication is not just an invitation to bodily diseases, but represents a selfish mentality that has no care for the families it destroys, the children that are born deprived of love and care, the millions of late-term abortions, the prison systems that we pay for collectively, and the like. Islam installs safeguards against all this, with chastity and social responsibility being among them. The Prophet ﷺ highlighted these dangers on many occasions; for example, telling the young man who struggled with his lusts, “Would you accept it [i.e., fornication] for your mother, your sister, your daughter...?” The protective values taught by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ are associated with low rates of HIV infections in Muslim-majority nations, and also protects the family structure.

### Group discussion questions

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# Expert guide

## group 7 forbidding interest & usury

**Interest:** A percentage of a loan (or deposit) balance, paid to the lender periodically for the privilege of using their money.

**Usury:** The practice of lending money at unusually high rates of interest.

Jābir b. ‘Abdillāh (rA) said, “The Messenger of Allah ﷺ cursed the consumer of interest, its payer, its documenter, its two witnesses, and said, ‘They are all equal [in sin].’” Past and present, people have downplayed the danger of an interest-bearing transaction, especially when effected by mutual consent. However, the wisdom of the Divine transcends our short-sighted criticism and deems this financial model an enormity. Allah, the Most High, said, “Oh you who have believed, fear Allah and give up what remains [due to you] of interest, if you should be believers. And if you do not, then be informed of a war [against you] from Allah and His messenger. But if you repent, you may have your principal, [thus] you do no wrong, nor are you wronged” [al-Baqarah, 2:278-279].

Nowadays, we observe firsthand how interest-based banking institutions have destroyed nations beyond repair, and individuals as well. The vicious nature of usury is clear; it appears to be an avenue for quick funds, but in reality it buries people further in debt. It also disregards labor, since money is what gives rise to money here, not effort or craftsmanship. In turn, the rich steadily get richer while the poor steadily get poorer—to points of unthinkable devastation. For this reason, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ outlawed profiting [in the worldly sense] from loans.

Engaging in interest and usury have all the ingredients of an economic crisis, and the 2008 financial meltdown is still in recent memory. For this reason, a global trend is emerging in Europe and elsewhere that recognizes how the Islamic financial regulations offer a refreshing alternative and remedy for economic woes.

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# Expert guide

## group 8 penal code

**Penal code:** A code of laws concerning crimes, offenses, and their punishment.

There are only five prescribed punishments that were specifically ordained by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. When looking into a typical book on traditional Islamic Law, the penal code chapter constitutes about 2% of the entire book. Furthermore, examining that 2% reveals why these five penalties are rarely implemented in Muslim societies that implement Shariah (Islamic Law), and why they only work well within a holistic system that fosters the values these penalties aim to protect. However, even these five penalties have a legislative brilliance to them. Why did the Prophet ﷺ prescribe punishments for theft and fornication, but not for eating pork, gambling, and usury? This seems to imply that the penal code is not simply about God avenging Himself against those who trespass His bounds. Indeed, it is more about protecting the individual and society from their own vices.

Theft and fornication offer an immediate gain or pleasure, a strong driving force that some cannot resist without the fear of punishment being significant enough to inhibit that greed or lust. On the other hand, although interest-bearing transactions are more condemnable in Islam than theft or fornication, there is no prescribed punishment for them. This is no inconsistency, but rather an ingenious nuance: a recognition of the fact that interest is a crime that slowly undermines society as a whole, as opposed to theft which people commit compulsively because it offers instant riches. A criminal usually considers the likelihood of getting caught as well as the severity of the penalty if caught. Thus, striking the right balance between these two factors will most effectively minimize crime.

In summary, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ prescribed just five specific penalties, designed to frighten potential offenders into abstaining from otherwise alluring crimes, though these were rarely implemented. And when they were implemented, they were still far milder than many modern criminal punishments.

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# Expert guide

## group 9 personal hygiene

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “Ten [practices] are from the *fitra* (natural inclinations): trimming the mustache, letting the beard grow, brushing the teeth, rinsing the nose, clipping the nails, washing the finger joints, plucking the armpit hair, shaving pubic hair, and washing oneself with water after using the lavatory.” A sub-narrator added, “And I forgot the tenth, unless it was rinsing the mouth.” When a person reflects on the wisdom of such teachings, sees the effects of their application, and considers the laws of Islam from the perspective of their higher objectives, one cannot help but be stirred both intellectually and spiritually. These ten practices above testify to the Final Prophet being centuries ahead of the most progressive civilizations of his time.

Islam even discourages the consumption of raw onions, promoted rinsing the mouth regularly, and brushing the teeth frequently, from its inception. As the Prophet ﷺ said, “The toothbrush is a purification for the mouth, and a [means of] pleasing the Lord.” He ﷺ taught that these are means of nearness to God, and to comfort the people, as well as the angels who are also bothered by bad odors. With today’s advances in technology, we understand just how useful diluting the sugar in one’s mouth—for instance—can be in preventing rotting teeth and the agony that ensues from gum infection. The Prophet Muhammad also instructed Muslims to rinse their noses as part of their pre-prayer ablution. Researchers today are beginning to discover just how valuable this simple practice can be. One study “concluded that nasal irrigation has an enormous potential of improving the quality of life of millions of patients in a cost-effective way.” Rhinologists refer to it as “nasal irrigation,” commenting that sending small amounts of water all the way through is the proper way to treat and prevent sinusitis, among other things. This is precisely what the Prophet prescribed in his statement, “And be thorough in irrigating the nose, unless you are fasting.” Even in today’s modern world, in which superior hygiene is central to its generally healthier populations, people are still not as hygienically motivated as Muslims have been for nearly 1500 years.

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# Expert guide

## group 10 science & medicine

Science and medicine may very well be the most overlooked teaching of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and yet the greatest debt owed to him: the fact that he taught the world the importance of knowledge. Liberating them from the dungeons of ignorance and superstition, he taught his followers the necessity of investing their lives in education, and as a result they became the forerunners in every field. He validated the intellectual potential of his adherents by saying, “You know better concerning your worldly affairs.” This taught the early Muslims that life experience and expertise ought to be respected and encouraged, not trumped by baseless dogmas. Stemming from that worldview, Islam pioneered the liability of physicians, and its people set the intellectual standards for centuries. This was no coincidence, but rather a byproduct of their Prophet ﷺ saying, “He who practices medicine without being known for [proficiency in] medicine shall be liable.” He also said, “Allah has not sent down a disease except that He sent down for it a cure, regardless of who may know it and who may be ignorant of it.” The Prophet ﷺ was telling people that these cures are discoverable as a way of promoting medical research. Muslims were so advanced in medicine that William Osler, a founder and second president of the Medical Library Association, said, “The Canon of Avicenna (Qanun Ibn Sina) has remained the medical bible in Europe for a longer period than any other work.

Prophet Muhammad also introduced the modern medical quarantine. When ‘Umar (ra), the Prophet’s second successor, reached a place called Sargh during his travels, he was informed that there was a plague in the place he was heading (ash-Sham). ‘Abdurrahman b. ‘Awf (ra), another senior companion of the Prophet, told ‘Umar that the Messenger of Allah had said, “When you hear about its occurrence in a land, do not enter it. And when it happens in a land, do not flee it.” Historians have noted that the Quran not only stimulated historical research, but changed the course of the study of historical writing. The reason is that, suddenly, the actions of individuals (like prophets), the events of the past, and the circumstances of all people of the earth had now become matters of religious importance.

### Group discussion questions

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