

# **The Expansion of Islam 632 C.E. - Present Including Islamic Contributions to Civilization**



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## ISLAM

It is a fact of history that within three centuries, after Prophet Muhammad started preaching Islam in Mecca, Islam spread over the area of three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. There are many reasons why people have been, from past to the present, embracing Islam. Muhammad Asad, a Jewish convert to Islam, said:

"Islam appears to me like a perfect work of architecture. All its parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other, nothing lacking, with the result of an absolute balance and solid composure. Everything in the teaching and postulates of Islam is in its proper place" (Islam at the Crossroads, p.5).

Among the reasons for the rapid and peaceful spread of Islam was the simplicity of its doctrine. Islam calls for believing in only One God, worthy of worship. It also repeatedly instructs man to use his powers of intelligence and observation. Within a few years after the dawn of Islam, great civilizations and universities were flourishing under its influence, for according to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), "seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim man and woman."

The zeal for understanding God's creative power, as realized in the universe, led the followers of this religion to new ideas, new realms of knowledge, and great advances in medicine, mathematics, physics, astronomy, geography, architecture, art, literature, and history.

We find that the spread of Islam was not limited to its miraculous early expansion outside of Arabia. During later centuries, the Turks embraced Islam peacefully, as did a large number of the people of the Indian subcontinent, as well as the people of Malaysia and Indonesia.

In Africa, Islam spread during the past two centuries, while under the mighty power of European colonial rulers. Today, Islam continues to grow, not only in Africa, but also in Europe and the Americas as well. Islam is the fastest growing religion now, with a following of about one and a half billion people.

Although in the early years of the expansion of the Islamic state much land came under the rule of the Muslims, conversion to Islam of its inhabitants took several generations. This is because conversion by force is explicitly forbidden in the Qur'an:

**"Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And God heareth and knoweth all things" (Surah 2 Verse 256).**

In more recent times such as in the case of Indonesia, conversions to Islam occurred in the absence of an Islamic state and where the rulers were Dutch Christians. Commentators and historians have to acknowledge the fact of Islam's peaceful spread even if they dislike it. A classic example of such a

grudging acknowledgment is in the book "The Legacy of Islam" edited by Joseph Schacht with C.E. Bosworth (1974) p. 145:

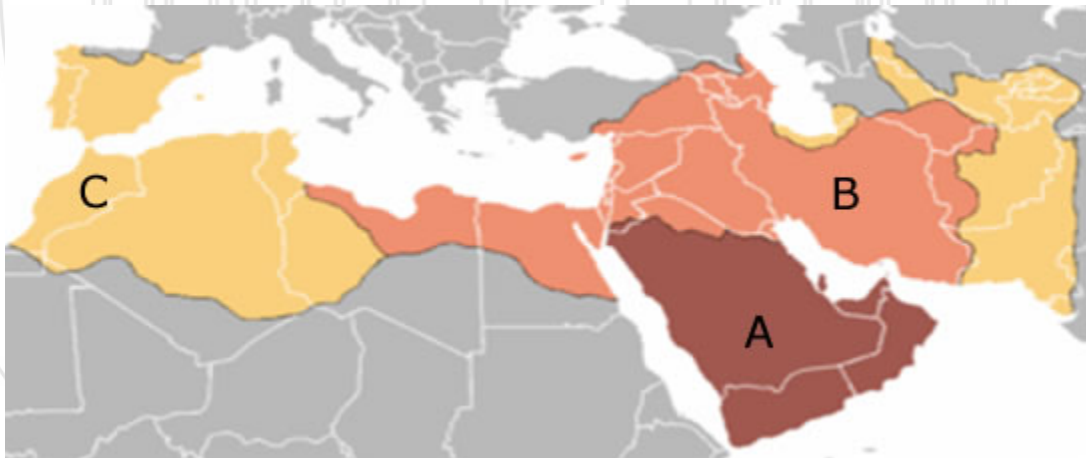
The false allegations that Islam was spread by the sword are just part of unfounded propaganda. To which the best reply is perhaps the Qur'an itself. In particular this verse comes to mind:

**Their intention is to extinguish God's Light (by blowing) with their mouths: But God will complete (the revelation of) His Light, even though the Unbelievers may detest (it). (Surah 61 Verse 8)**

Mahatma Gandhi wrote in Young India – 1920:

'I became more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place in Islam in those days in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the scrupulous regard for his pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and his own mission. These and not the sword carried everything before them and surmounted every trouble.'

### **Timeline of Islamic Spread**



### **Age of the Caliphs**

A- Expansion under Muhammad, 622–632/A.H. 1-11

B- Expansion during the Rashidun Caliphate, 632–661/A.H. 11-40

C- Expansion during the Umayyad Caliphate, 661–750/A.H. 40-129

## Prophet Muhammad - A Mercy to Mankind

Despite his position as leader, Prophet Muhammad never behaved as if he was greater or better than other people. He never made people feel small, unwanted or embarrassed. He urged his followers to live kindly and humbly, releasing slaves whenever they could and giving in charity, especially to very poor people, and the orphans, without waiting for any reward. Prophet Muhammad himself was never greedy. He ate very little and only simple foods. He preferred never to fill his stomach. Sometimes, for days on end, he would eat nothing but raw food. He slept on a very simple mattress on the floor and had almost nothing in the way of home comforts or decorations. One day, Hafsah, his wife, tried to make him more comfortable at night by folding his reed mat double - without telling him - to make it softer for him. That night he slept peacefully, but he overslept and missed the pre-dawn prayers. He was so distressed and never slept like that again. Simple living and contentment were the key teachings in the Prophet's life: "When you see a person who has been given more money and beauty than you, look then to those who have been given less." Thinking this way will make us thank Allah for His blessings, rather than feel deprived. People used to ask his wife, Aishah, the daughter of his first and most loyal Companion Abu Bakr, how he lived at home. "Like an ordinary man," she would answer. "He would sweep the house, stitch his own clothes, mend his own sandals, water the camels, milk the goats, help the servants at their work, and eat his meals with them; and he would go to fetch what we needed from the market." He seldom had more than one set of clothes, which he washed himself. He was a home-loving, peace-loving human being. "When you enter a house, ask God to bless it," he would say. He greeted others with the phrase: As-salamu alaykum - which means: "May peace be upon you" - for peace is the most wonderful thing on earth. He was a firm believer in good manners, always greeting people kindly, and showing respect to elders. He once said: "The dearest of you to me are those who have good manners." All his recorded words and actions reveal him as a man of great gentleness, kindness, humility, good humor and excellent common sense, who had a great love for animals and for all people, especially his family. Above all, he was a man who practiced what he preached. His life, both private and public, was a perfect model for his followers.



## Prophet Muhammad's Teachings

### Equality:

Prophet Muhammad (P.) taught equality between all human beings and he clearly denounced the current society which was crushing the human rights to be brought equality in society. He did not differentiate between an Arab, a Persian, a black, or a white person. Prophet Muhammad (P.) preached this verse to his society **"O Mankind! surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other; surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the most pious of you; surely Allah is Knowing, Aware."** (Holy Quran 49:13)

Equality is clearly manifested in Hajj, the yearly Islamic ritual, where people from different parts of the world, different social status, different colors, and different nationalities will meet and wear similar simple cloths and walk around the Ka'bah, in Al-Masjid Al-Haram in Makkah, praising and thanking God for all the blessings He bestowed on them during their life time.

### Women's Right:

Prophet Muhammad (P.) was one of the first people who stood up for women's rights. One of the most positive aspects of Islamic law is the freedom, honor, and prestige it assigns to Muslim women regardless of their race, nationality, or socioeconomic status. Prophet Muhammad (P.) guaranteed human, civil, legal, financial, and political rights to women. Islam considers a woman to be equal to a man as a human being. Islam prohibited violence of any kind towards women and forcing them against their will for anything. He also gave women the right of education by saying "To acquire knowledge is binding upon all Muslims, whether male or female."

### Rights of Neighbor:

Islam has great respect for the mutual rights and duties of neighbors:

- "And (be good) to the neighbor who is your relative and to the neighbor who is not a relative..."(Holy Quran; 4: 36)
- Prophet Muhammad (P.) has said "Gabriel always used to advise me to be generous with the neighbors, till I thought that Allah was going to include the neighbors among the heirs of a Muslim."
- The Holy Prophet (P.) has said: "He who sleeps contentedly while his neighbors sleep hungry did not believe in my message."

## Rights of People at War:

When the Holy Prophet (P.) and his followers were going to go to fight their first battle, the Battle of Badr, he said to his followers about the rights of people at war. Some of these rights are:

### 1- Don't torture with fire:

There is a saying of the Prophet (P.) that "Punishment by fire should not be done by anyone except the master of the fire [God]."

### 2- Don't Punish the Wounded:

"Do not attack a wounded person" thus said the Prophet. This means that the wounded soldiers who are not fit to fight, or not actually fighting, should not be attacked.

### 3- The Prisoner of War should not be slain:

"No prisoner should be put to the sword" a very clear and unequivocal instruction given by the Prophet (P.)

### 4- Do not kill a tied person:

The Prophet has prohibited the killing of anyone who is tied or is in captivity.

5- The Prophet has said a lot of things about the rights of people at war. The Prophet has even said not to attack women, children and those who are not fighting in the war.

## Kindness to Children:

Prophet Muhammad (P.) was very kind to children and loved them very much. One day, he placed his two grandchildren, Al-Hassan and Al-Husayn, on his lap and began kissing and cuddling them. A man who was passing by saw what the Prophet (P.) was doing, and became very surprised. "I have ten children," he said. "And I have not kissed even one of them". The Prophet heard what this hard-hearted man said and became very annoyed. "I do not think this man will attain paradise," he said.

Our Holy Prophet loved children. He used to carry them on his shoulders. The children would become very happy and laugh. The Prophet, too, would become happy at the pure happiness and laughter of the children and a smile would appear on his face. Our Holy Prophet used to give his Salam (greetings) to children and would tell his companions:

"I give my Salam to children and respect them, and Muslims should follow my behavior and always be warm and loving with children."

Prophet Muhammad (P.) used to speak about children – boys and girls – and say: **"O Muslims, O father and mother, O my followers, be kind and compassionate towards children, for someone who is not kind to children has no place amongst the Muslims."**

Our Holy Prophet was kind to children and became happy at their pure and innocent laughter.

## INFLUENCE OF ISLAM ON THE WORLD

During the Middle Ages the Islamic World had a very significant impact upon Europe, which in turn cleared the way for the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution. In the Medieval age, Islam and Muslims influenced Europe in a number of different ways. One of the most important of these subjects was Science.

Ever since Islam was born, Muslims had made immense leaps forward in the area of Science. Cities like Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo and Cordoba were the centers of civilization. These cities were flourishing and Muslim scientists made tremendous progress in applied as well as theoretical Science and Technology. In Europe, however, the situation was much different. Europe was in the Dark Ages. It had no infrastructure or central government. To the Muslims, Europe was backward, unorganized, carried no strategic importance and was essentially irrelevant. This considering the time period was in fact true. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church, which at the time was the strongest institution in Europe, successfully convinced Christian Europe that the Muslims were infidels. This caused Europeans to think that Muslims were culturally inferior to Europe and thus Europe was unable to benefit from the new scientific discoveries being made in the Islamic lands before the 1100's. By doing this Europe kept itself in the Dark Ages while from China to Spain Islamic Civilization prospered. During the Crusades there was limited contact between Muslims and Christians and not much was transferred. As A. Lewis explains, "The Crusaders were men of action, not men of learning". The real exchange of ideas led to the Scientific Revolution and to the renaissance occurred in Muslim Spain.

Cordoba was the capital of Muslim Spain. It soon became the center for all light and learning for the entire Europe. Scholars and students from various parts of the world and Europe came to Cordoba to study. The contrast in intellectual activity is demonstrated best by one example: 'In the ninth century, the library of the monastery of St. Gall was the largest in Europe. It boasted 36 volumes. At the same time, that of Cordoba contained over 500,000!'

The idea of the college was a concept which was borrowed from Muslims. The first colleges appeared in the Muslim world in the late 600's and early 700's. In Europe, some of the earliest colleges are those under the University of Paris and Oxford they were founded around the thirteenth century. These early European colleges were also funded by trusts similar to the Islamic ones and legal historians have traced them back to the Islamic system. The internal organization of these European colleges was strikingly similar to the Islamic ones, for example the idea of Graduate (Sahib) and undergraduate (mutafaqqih) is derived directly from Islamic terms.

In the field of Mathematics the number Zero (0) and the decimal system was introduced to Europe, which became the basis for the Scientific Revolution. The Arabic numerals were also transferred to Europe, this made mathematical tasks much easier, problems that took days to solve could now be solved in minutes. The works of Al-Khwarizmi (Algorismus) were translated into Latin. Algorismus, from whom the mathematical term algorism was derived, wrote Sindhind, a compilation of astronomical tables. He, more importantly, laid the ground work for algebra and found methods to deal with complex mathematical problems, such as square roots and complex fractions. He conducted numerous experiments, measured the height of the earth's atmosphere and discovered the principle of the magnifying lens. Many of his books were translated into European languages. Trigonometric work by Alkirmani of Toledo was translated into Latin (from which we get the sine and cosine functions) along with the Greek knowledge of Geometry by Euclid. Along with mathematics, masses of other knowledge in the field of physical science were transferred.

Islamic contributions to Science were now rapidly being translated and transferred from Spain to the rest of Europe. Ibnul Hairham's works on Optics, (in which he deals with 50 Optical questions put to Muslim Scholars by the Franks), was translated widely. The Muslims discovered the Principle of Pendulum, which was used to measure time. Many of the principles of Isaac Newton were derived from former Islamic scientific contributions. In the field of Chemistry numerous Islamic works were translated into Latin. One of the fields of study in this area was alchemy. The Muslims by exploring various elements developed a good understanding of the constitution of matter. Jabir ibn-Hayyan (Geber) was the leading chemist in the Muslim world; some scholars link the introduction of the 'scientific method' back to him. A great number of terms used in Chemistry such as alcohol, alembic, alkali and elixir are of Islamic origin.

Medicine was a key science explored by Muslims. Al-Rhazes is one of the most famous Doctors and writers of Islamic History. Every major city had an hospital, the hospital at Cairo had over 8000 beds, with separate wards for fevers, ophthalmic, dysentery and surgical cases. He discovered the origin of smallpox and showed that one could only acquire it once in one's life, thus showing the existence of the immune system and how it worked. Muslim doctors were also aware of the contagious qualities of diseases. Hundreds of medical works were translated into Latin.

All of this knowledge transferred from the Muslims to the Europeans was the vital raw material for the Scientific Revolution. Muslims not only passed on Greek classical works but also introduced new scientific theories, without which the European Renaissance could not have occurred. Thus even though many of the Islamic contributions go unacknowledged, they played an integral role in the European transformation.



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