

Islam is Arabic for “surrender,” but not in the sense of *sur+render*, “give over,” so it is worth spending time on the etymology. The Arabic word **salaam** is the analogue of Hebrew *shalom* and means “peace, safety, (world-) community”—more like the Russian word *mir* than our own “peace.” Putting an “i” in front makes the first “a” disappear and makes an action-noun from a verb having to do with peace. My best guess at the precise original meaning is “a unilateral action to bring about a state of peace or safety.” Since we’re not talking about bilateral peace negotiations, or the imagery of *Isra-El*, “struggle with God,” this means *surrender*. In the spiritual context the preferred translation is *Submission*. It means surrendering or submitting oneself to the will of God.

A **Muslim** is *one who submits*. In Arabic like Hebrew the consonants determine the root and the vowels inflect the meaning, so this is M + the SLM of Islam.

Allah is etymologically the same as Hebrew **Eloh**, *God*. Muslims emphasize that Allah is the personal name for God, and this is not diminished by the fact that like the Hebrew form (and unlike JHVH, which is read “Adonai” for “my LORD”) this root combines into the small-g “god.” Jesus spoke “Eli/Eloi/Elohi”—my God—from the cross, not JHVH, and Muslims point out that in surviving Aramaic the name is pronounced as Allah. Whereas Hebrew prefers the “royal plural” **Elohim** and uses the “El” syllable in combined forms (as in Gabri-El, “my strength is God,” and Dani-El, “my judge is God”), Arabic accents and combines with the second syllable—indeed, I’ve seen transliterators write the whole Name as ‘Llah. The form ul-Llah means “of God,” as in Abdullah, “servant of God.”

The Muslim creed is **Laa ilaaha ill’ Allah** (accented on second syllables), “No god but God” (Qu. 3:18, Qu. 47:19), followed by **Muhammad-ur rassul ul’Llah**, “Muhammad [is the] messenger of God.” The creed is called the *Shahada*, “witness,” and is prefaced by saying “As-shadu al-...,” “I bear witness that...” It is also called the *Kalimah*. A *shahid* is a martyr—the Greek word too originally meant “witness.” Muslims approve the Hebrew **Sh’ma Yisroel: Adonai elohenu, Adonai echod**, “Hear O Israel, the LORD is God, the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4–5, words echoed by Jesus in Luke 12:29–30), but not the Christian **Jesus is Lord**. Muslims say “Amen,” with a long “e.”

Qur’an is Arabic for “recitation.” The above forms are more accurate than “Moslem” and “Koran.” The ’ is a *sch’wa*, an unvoiced syllable particular to Semitic languages—here one accents and lingers over the second syllable. The Qur’an has 114 chapters called *surahs*, each revealed and *recited* by the **Angel Gabriel** to **Muhammad** at known times from 610 A.D. to 632 A.D. The chapters are in length order (as are Paul’s letters), not revelation order, but their sequence seems purposeful. Whereas Jews and Christians acknowledge imperfections in Scripture (words missing or unintelligible), Muslims attest that every Arabic word in the Qur’an is original and the whole is perfect and complete.

1 The Qur’an and Its Content

The Qur’an references Muslim religious practices as though they are already known and have been followed since the time of Abraham—it is left to ancillary texts called the **Hadith** (*The Sayings of the Prophet*) and the **Sunna** (*The Path*, as defined by early Muslims including a Sunnah of Muhammad himself) to define the particular forms of that worship used today. (This is like the Mass and the Book of Common Prayer not being embedded in the Bible itself). The *Five Pillars* of Islam—Faith, Prayer (at regular times), Zakat (alms), Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca), and observance of Ramadan with fasting—are omnipresent in the Qur’an, but sharp definitions such as Zakat usually being a

2.5% tithe come from the other texts. Similarly the *Shari'ah*, Islamic holy law, derives from the Qur'an, but is supported by interpretations from the other texts like Midrash is to Torah.

Chapter 1: **Al-Fatiha**, “The Key” or “The Opening,” is a short prayer. The first words in the Qur'an and the preface to all but Chapter 9 are

Bismi Allahi, Al-Rahman, Al-Rahim
In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Here “Al-” is pronounced “Ar-” and the “h”s are pronounced heavily, with a noticeable “k” in “Rahman.” Many transliterations elide the final i's; I'm following <http://cwis.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/transliteration/001.html> The word “rahman” can be translated as compassionate, gracious, mercy-giving, great, all *in excelsis*, and “Rahman” and “Rahim” are names of God mentioned later in the Qur'an. The whole is (I use the Yusuf Ali translation unless otherwise noted):

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds; Most Gracious, Most Merciful; Master of the Day of Judgment. Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek. Show us the straight way, The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who go not astray.

Chapter 2, **Al-Baqara**, “The Cow” introduces The Book, discusses belief and disbelief, and then begins a review of the Bible from Adam. The chapter title references the idolatry of the Israelites—there is a mention of the Golden Calf in particular—but it is not the main subject. (The Qur'an's chapter titles are mnemonic, not descriptive.) The main theme is God's guidance throughout history—see <http://cwis.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/maududi/> for short introductory commentary on all the chapters. Jews and Christians—the “People of the Book”—are invited to accept this guidance as a *correction* to their deviations from their own Scripture.

Chapter 3, **Al-e-Imran**, “The House of Imran”—the title refers to the ancestors of the Virgin Mary—continues the theme of Chapter 2. The opening leads up to Qu. 3:18, the first part of the Muslim creed. Verse 3:19 follows with “The religion before God is Islam,” which by etymology is not much different from Ps. 51:17f, “The only sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit, (...) a contrite heart.” Verses 33–120 describe Mary and Jesus, and constitute an entreaty to Christians and Jews to accept Islam (as defined in 3:19). The verses 3:83–85

Do they seek for other than the Religion of Allah—while all creatures in the heavens and on earth have, willing or unwilling, bowed to His Will (Accepted Islam), and to Him shall they all be brought back. Say: “We believe in Allah, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in (the Books) given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets, from their Lord: We make no distinction between one and another among them, and to Allah do we bow our will (in Islam).” If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter He will be in the ranks of those who have lost (All spiritual good).

are the main proselytizing verses, *but* note also the earlier 3:55–57:

Behold! Allah said: “O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: Then shall ye all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute. As to those who reject faith, I will punish them with terrible agony in this world and in the Hereafter, nor will they have anyone to help.” As to those who believe and work righteousness, Allah will pay them (in full) their reward; but Allah loveth not those who do wrong.

This leads to a classic semantic problem: does “Islam” here refer to the separate religion known today, or to the act of submission? The Qur’an is clear that the religion is **millat Ibrahim**, *the religion of Abraham*, so I take the reference to be accepting God’s will and kingship in exactly the sense Jesus implores. (I will read the whole section here and in Council.) I also take “...make no distinction...” as being in the same sense as the parable wherein Jesus declares that Moses and the prophets should be sufficient.

Chapter 4, **An-Nisa** (“The Women”) and Chapter 5, **Al-Maeda** (“The Table-Spread”) continue these themes. Note especially Qu. 5:65–69:

If only the People of the Book had believed and been righteous, We should indeed have blotted out their iniquities and admitted them to gardens of bliss. If only they had stood fast by the Law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that was sent to them from their Lord, they would have enjoyed happiness from every side. There is from among them a party on the right course: but many of them follow a course that is evil. O Messenger! proclaim the (message) which hath been sent to thee from thy Lord. If thou didst not, thou wouldst not have fulfilled and proclaimed His mission. And Allah will defend thee from men (who mean mischief). For Allah guideth not those who reject Faith.

Say: “O People of the Book! ye have no ground to stand upon unless ye stand fast by the Law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord.” It is the revelation that cometh to thee from thy Lord, that increaseth in most of them their obstinate rebellion and blasphemy. But sorrow thou not over (these) people without Faith. Those who believe (in the Qur’an), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Sabians and the Christians—any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness—on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

There are of course 109 other chapters, and many other references to Jesus (all positive) and to Mary, including all of 19:1–40. The Qur’an on the whole is about 2/3 the length of the New Testament. Many verses in the Qur’an speak of tolerance for the “People of the Book,” but in Chapter 9 there is:

29. Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya [tax] with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued. 30. The Jews call ‘Uzair a son of Allah, and the Christians call Christ the son of Allah. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. Allah’s curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth! 31. They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of Allah, and (they take as their Lord) Christ the son of Mary; yet they were commanded to worship but One Allah—there is no god but He. Praise and glory to Him: (Far is He) from having the partners they associate

(with Him)... 111. Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the garden (of Paradise): they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him in truth, through the Law, the Gospel, and the Qur'an: and who is more faithful to his covenant than Allah—then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme. 112. Those that turn (to Allah. in repentance; that serve Him, and praise Him; that wander in devotion to the cause of Allah,; that bow down and prostrate themselves in prayer; that enjoin good and forbid evil; and observe the limit set by Allah.- (These do rejoice). So proclaim the glad tidings to the Believers. 113. It is not fitting, for the Prophet and those who believe, that they should pray for forgiveness for Pagans, even though they be of kin, after it is clear to them that they are companions of the Fire.

The original context of this chapter is the Muslim conquest of Arabia in 631 A.D. These are among the verses that prompt Bin Laden and those the hijackers were instructed to read in the “Last Night” letter. Jews take exception with 30, saying they nowhere have record of assertions that Ezra was called “a son of God.” What with the Qur'an recording that this fighting is “through the Gospel,” between 631 and 2001 a misinterpretation is occurring *somewhere*. This is also the chapter that defines the military aspects of *jihad*—see Syed Maududi's commentary at <http://cwis.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/maududi/mau9.html>—other than this, *jihad* merely means “struggle, striving” and applies to personal struggles a Muslim has with life as well.

2 Christian tenets rejected in the Qur'an

- Incarnation: God did not become human in Jesus. Qu. 19 (titled “Mary”), vv. 33–35 and 88–90:

“So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again)!” Such (was) Jesus the son of Mary: (it is) a statement of truth, about which they (vainly) dispute. It is not befitting to (the majesty of) Allah that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him! when He determines a matter, He only says to it, “Be,” and it is. . . . They say: “(Allah) Most Gracious has begotten a son!” Indeed ye have put forth a thing most monstrous! At it the skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin, That they should invoke a son for (Allah) Most Gracious. For it is not consonant with the majesty of (Allah) Most Gracious that He should beget a son. Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to (Allah) Most Gracious as a servant.

- Atonement: why should God need a sacrifice to forgive sins?—such would be a limitation on God's power.
- Original sin: God forgave Adam.
- Trinity: Qu. 4:171 and echoed elsewhere:

O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His messengers. Say not “Trinity”: desist: it will be

better for you: for Allah is one Allah: Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs.

- A wobble on the Crucifixion: Qu. 4:155–157, referring initially to the Jews:

That they said (in boast), “We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah”;— but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not:— Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise;— And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death; and on the Day of Judgment he will be a witness against them;

- Last in this list but perhaps most, Muslims deny that Jesus in John 14–16 was referring to the Holy Spirit and Pentecost in the promise to send “another Comforter.” Qu. 61:6 is the remarkable claim:

And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said: “O Children of Israel! I am the messenger of Allah (sent) to you, confirming the Law (which came) before me, and giving Glad Tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.” But when he came to them with Clear Signs, they said, “this is evident sorcery!”

“Ahmad” is a form of “Muhammad,” and an Aramaic word corresponding to the Greek *parakletos* (or more exactly *perikletos*, “Praised One”) is pronounced that way. Muslim scholars note that the lone literal inclusion of “Holy Spirit,” in John 14:26, appears in one ancient manuscript with “Holy” missing, thus resembling these chapters’ other references to the “Spirit of Truth” which they equate with Muhammad, and also claim that expectation of Muhammad is reflected in John the Baptist being asked, “Are you the Prophet?” Links for more on this are

http://islamicity.com/Mosque/Muhammad_Bible.HTM [best link]

<http://bible.islamicweb.com/>

http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Park/6443/MIB/ch6_3.html [hugely long]

3 Christian tenets affirmed in the Qur’an

- Paradise and Gehenna (*al-jahannum* in Arabic).
- The Last Judgment—Jesus present (Qu. 4:159) but God as Judge.
- Jesus is the Messiah: “Hadhrrat Isa” = “Christ Jesus.”
- Jesus’ teaching, healing, and message on the whole.
- Jesus as filled with the Holy Spirit: Qu. 5:110.
- The Second Coming of Jesus.
- The Rapture—and the resurrection of the body.
- The Resurrection of Jesus—but see the above on the Crucifixion.
- The Virgin Birth of Jesus—Muslims regard this as beyond dispute, boring to debate...

- The New Covenant—but in the context of Qu. 5:12–19:

Allah did aforetime take a covenant from the Children of Israel, and we appointed twelve captains among them. And Allah said: “I am with you: if ye (but) establish regular prayers, practise regular charity, believe in my messengers, honour and assist them, and loan to Allah a beautiful loan, verily I will wipe out from you your evils, and admit you to gardens with rivers flowing beneath; but if any of you, after this, resisteth faith, he hath truly wandered from the path or rectitude.” But because of their breach of their covenant, We cursed them, and made their hearts grow hard; they change the words from their (right) places and forget a good part of the message that was sent them, nor wilt thou cease to find them—barring a few—ever bent on (new) deceits: but forgive them, and overlook (their misdeeds): for Allah loveth those who are kind.

From those, too, who call themselves Christians, We did take a covenant, but they forgot a good part of the message that was sent them: so we estranged them, with enmity and hatred between the one and the other, to the day of judgment. And soon will Allah show them what it is they have done. O people of the Book! There hath come to you our Messenger, revealing to you much that ye used to hide in the Book, and passing over much (that is now unnecessary): There hath come to you from Allah a (new) light and a perspicuous Book, —Wherewith Allah guideth all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and leadeth them out of darkness, by His will, unto the light,—guideth them to a path that is straight. In blasphemy indeed are those that say that Allah is Christ the son of Mary. Say: “Who then hath the least power against Allah, if His will were to destroy Christ the son of Mary, his mother, and all every - one that is on the earth? For to Allah belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between. He createth what He pleaseth. For Allah hath power over all things.”

(Both) the Jews and the Christians say: “We are sons of Allah, and his beloved.” Say: “Why then doth He punish you for your sins? Nay, ye are but men,—of the men he hath created: He forgiveth whom He pleaseth, and He punisheth whom He pleaseth: and to Allah belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between: and unto Him is the final goal (of all).” O People of the Book! Now hath come unto you, making (things) clear unto you, Our Messenger, after the break in (the series of) our messengers, lest ye should say: “There came unto us no bringer of glad tidings and no warner (from evil)”: But now hath come unto you a bringer of glad tidings and a warner (from evil). And Allah hath power over all things.

There is much more in my reading that I could have copied into this treatment. The following links open up a path to more, and include the best Christian reply site that I have found.

http://islamicity.com/mosque/Islam_Expl.htm	[Islam Explained]
http://islamicity.com/Mosque/Bridge.shtml	[Bridge to Christians]
http://groups.colgate.edu/aarislam/	[Prof. Omid Safi's AAR page]
http://cwis.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/	[best Qur'an page I've found]
http://www.quran.org/	[semi-mirror of that page, but maintained by a "Qur'an Alone" Muslim group regarded as heretical]
http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Park/6443/	[Muslim views on many topics]
http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/	[Muslim students page at USC]
http://www.thetruereligion.org/revelation.htm	[Muslim apologetics]
http://www.answering-islam.org/	[Christian answers]