

Islam in Brisbane



Dedicated to a better Brisbane

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Introduction

Brisbane is home to people who trace their roots to many different countries, speak many different languages and celebrate life in many different ways.

Brisbane residents watched in horror the images of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001. Afterwards, some people reacted with hostility to our city's Muslim community.

Women wearing headscarves, people with Arabic-sounding names, even people who simply looked like they were from the Middle East were verbally abused and physically assaulted. Stones were thrown at a bus carrying children to an Islamic School in West End. The mosque in Kuraby was burnt down.

Since 2001, controversy over treatment of refugees, fear of terrorism, and war in the Middle East have also contributed to a feeling of uncertainty and fear in Brisbane's Muslim community.

This brochure, written with the Muslim community's help, is part of a strategy by Brisbane City Council to help Muslims feel they are welcome in our city and ensure the wider community is better informed about Islam and Muslim ways of life.

This initiative is part of Council's commitment to nurturing an inclusive Brisbane as part of our *Living in Brisbane 2010* vision.

Acknowledgments

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- ◆ Annette Yunus, Registered Psychologist, Community Settlement Officer/HAC Coordinator, Islamic Women's Association of Queensland

We also thank the people profiled in this booklet.



Jasmina

Jasmina did not know any English when she left Bosnia and arrived in Australia in 1999. Without any language preparation, she completed high school in 18 months. She is now completing an honours degree in German linguistics, sociology and criminology and works with multicultural communities. She enjoys helping people and seeing their lives improve.

“As soon as I say that I am a Muslim, people say “you don’t look like a Muslim!” and I ask, “What’s a Muslim supposed to look like?”

What is Islam?

Muslims believe in one God — Allah. ‘Allah’ is the Arabic word for God. Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews use the same word when speaking of God.

When Muslims speak of Allah, they refer to the God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.

Muslims, Christians and Jews share a common religious heritage that includes the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. All are respected by Muslims as ‘Peoples of the Book’ because they all share the sacred text known to Christians as the Old Testament. All three faiths believe in prophets and angels and worship the same God.

Muslims consider the Prophet Muhammad, born 570 AD, to be the last and greatest prophet. They believe the words of the Qur’an (sometimes spelt Koran), the central text of Islam, were revealed to Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel.

For Muslims, Islam is a religion and a way of life.

Islam has five central obligations known as the Five Pillars. They are:

- ◆ **Shahada** (Declaration of Faith) - “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his final prophet.”
- ◆ **Salah** (Prayer) - formal prayers are said five times a day: at dawn, midday, late-afternoon, sunset and nightfall. The rhythm of prayer in the daily life of Muslims is a constant reminder that there is no life without God.
- ◆ **Sawm** (Fasting) - Muslims fast for self-purification during the holy month of Ramadan. A fasting person rejects worldly comforts and focuses on the presence of God. It also helps to remember poor people.
- ◆ **Zakah** (Giving alms) - Muslims believe that everything belongs to God. All Muslims are required to give a portion of their wealth to charity.
- ◆ **Hajj** (Pilgrimage) - all Muslims should make the pilgrimage to Mecca once in their lives if they are able to do so.

Muslims in different countries share the same faith, but have very different cultures, speak different languages and eat different food. They also interpret and express their faith in different ways. There is no such thing as the Muslim community. Muslims are as diverse as Christians or people of any other religion.

Muslims in Australia

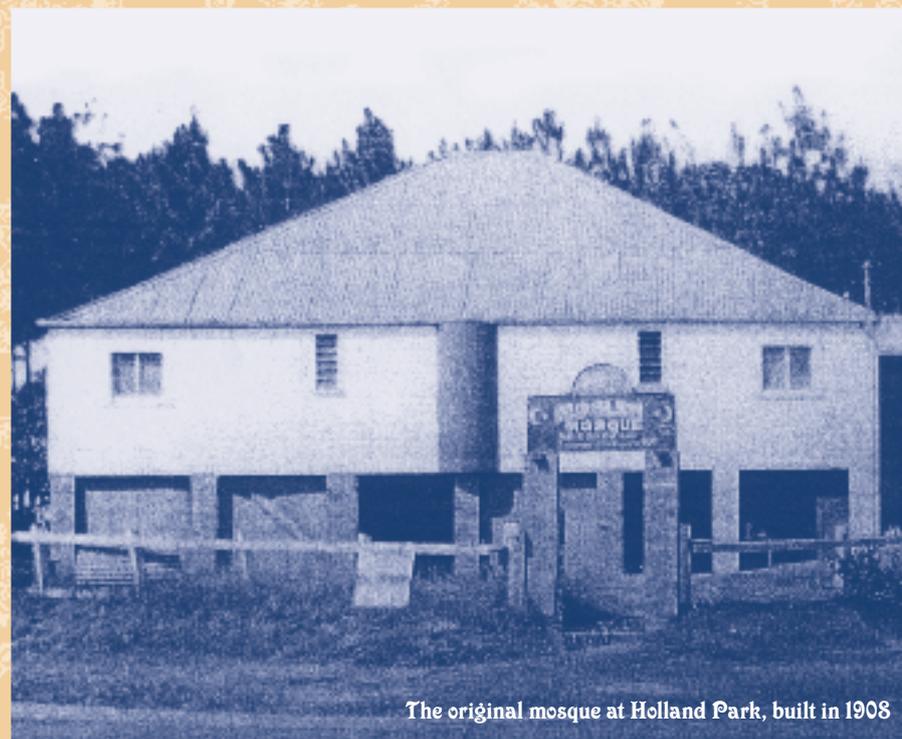
Evidence suggests that Muslims visited Australia as early as the ninth century. Muslims from Indonesia began visiting Australia regularly in the late 1600s, to collect trepang (sea cucumber). This contact is reflected in the culture, art and language of the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land.

During the 1800s, Muslim Afghan cameleers helped open the interior of Australia to Europeans, transporting vital supplies and building materials for miners, graziers, railway development and the inland telegraph. Some of their descendants still live in inland towns.

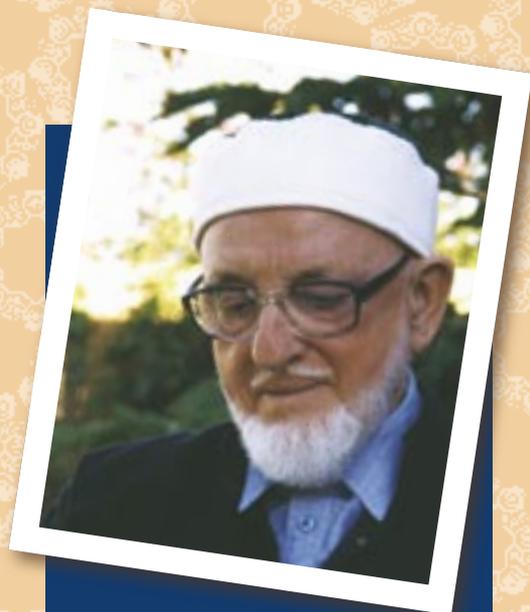
In 1861, a small mosque was built in Marree and in 1885 Australia's first major mosque was built in Adelaide.

Brisbane's first mosque was built in 1908 at Holland Park. The original building was replaced in 1970.

Today, Muslims - many of them fleeing oppressive regimes - continue to come to Australia from many parts of the world, to make a better future for themselves and their families.



The original mosque at Holland Park, built in 1908



Haji Imam Abdul Rane

Haji Rane was born in Brisbane in 1916. His grandfather helped to establish Brisbane's first mosque in 1908. In the 1950s and 60s, Haji Rane was instrumental in the founding of what is now the Islamic Society of Holland Park and helped found the Islamic Societies of West End and Lutwyche. In 1968 he became Brisbane's first imam to be appointed as a registered minister of religion.

For about 40 years Haji Rane served his community as an unpaid imam and social worker. He was kept very busy supporting Brisbane's growing Muslim community including visiting community members in hospital and presiding over weddings and funerals.

He supported his family by working as a fruit seller, a dairy farmer and a night watchman for the Bank of New South Wales (now Westpac). In 1994 Haji Rane received the Queensland Ethnic Community Award in recognition of his work.

"It's a great gift from God for me to be a Muslim."

Quick Facts

- ◆ 281,578 Muslims (1.5 per cent of the population) live in Australia.
- ◆ 14,990 Muslims live in Queensland.
- ◆ 10,463 Muslims live in Brisbane, mostly on the southside.
- ◆ About one-third of all Australian Muslims were born here. The remainder comes from more than 60 different countries.

“And in their wealth there is acknowledged right for the needy and destitute.”

(Qur'an 51:12)

Sunni and Shia Islam

The two main streams of Islam are Sunni and Shia. They are the results of a disagreement over the line of succession following the death of the Prophet Muhammad.

Both Sunnis and Shias agree on the Five Pillars of Islam. Shia Islam has a formal clergy and a hierarchy of spiritual leadership up to the Supreme Imam. The late Ayatollah Khomeini was a Supreme Imam. Sunnis have no formal clergy but do have scholars and jurists. Sunnis and Shias also have slightly different ways of praying.

Most Brisbane Muslims and all of the city's major mosques are Sunni.

Muslims and social responsibility

Muslims are required to take special care of their families, give alms to the poor, treat all people fairly, not be overly extravagant and care for the natural environment.

“He is not a believer who eats his fill while his neighbour remains hungry by his side.”

(From the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad)

Muslim teaching also encourages Muslims to make a positive contribution to the society where they live.

The Islamic Women's Association of Queensland in Sunnybank Hills helps immigrants and refugees to settle in the community and provides general welfare and disability services. The group aims to provide assistance to anyone in need regardless of their religion.



Muslim contributions to science, mathematics, astronomy and medicine

**“...my Lord! Increase me in knowledge”
(Qur’an 20:114).**

Islam was crucial in helping to establish medicine as a science. Muslim physicians, particularly in the Middle Ages, made great contributions to medical knowledge especially in pathology, surgery, ophthalmology, anatomy, pharmacology and in the organisation of hospitals and training of doctors. Their writings were used as authoritative references throughout Europe for hundreds of years.

“The search for knowledge is a sacred duty imposed upon every Muslim.”

(From the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad)

The explorations of Muslim mariners and merchants paved the way for others to follow. Later journeys would not have been possible without Muslim innovations in map-making, astronomy, navigation and shipbuilding.

Muslim mathematicians played key roles in the development of mathematics, particularly algebra, trigonometry, algorithms and even the numbers we use today, which are known as Arabic numerals.

Although Muhammad was illiterate, the Qur’an as it was revealed to him, is rich in poetry and complex grammatical structures. The Qur’an is the classical text of the Arabic language.



Galila

As a Muslim woman in Australia in the 1980s, Galila found it difficult to obtain work in her profession, despite being a qualified agricultural and drafting engineer. She began to volunteer in the community, which sparked a dream of setting up a community welfare organisation run by Muslim women.

Galila founded the Islamic Women’s Association of Queensland and worked voluntarily for 10 years before becoming a paid staff member. She has recently been acknowledged as one of Queensland’s most significant volunteers by Multicultural Affairs Queensland.

Galila is married with three adult children.

“Religion is an individual decision. No one forced me to wear what I wear or to practise Islam. Islam is a peaceful religion.”



Rubana and Ismail

Rubana, Ismail and their two daughters, Ruhee and Nooree, have lived in Brisbane for 14 years. They are originally from South Africa via Ireland where they lived for 12 years. Although they have demanding jobs (Rubana is an anaesthetist and Ismail is a chartered accountant) they both make time to be involved in community activities and the mosque in Kuraby.

Rubana is on the management committee of the Islamic Women's Association and Ismail is involved in inter-faith forums. A modern and deeply religious family, all the members take turns at cooking and Ismail explains that "Rubana is the boss".

"After a while you stop seeing the person's face and colour. It's the person inside that matters."

Rubana

Separating fact from fiction

Myth: Islam is a minority religion

With 1.3 billion followers worldwide or one-fifth of the world's population, Muslims are second only to Christians in numbers. Muslims are a minority in Australia with 280,000 people or 1.5 per cent of the population.

Myth: All Arabs are Muslim and all Muslims are Arabs

Although Islam began in the Middle East, not all Arabs are Muslims. Only 15 per cent of the world's Muslims are Arabs. There are Arabs who are Christians, Jews and atheists.

Many parts of Asia and most of Africa are Muslim. There are large Muslim minorities in Europe, North and South America and in countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. More than 50 million Muslims live in China. In fact, there are more Indian Muslims and more Indonesian Muslims than there are Arab Muslims. The world's largest Muslim country is Indonesia.

Myth: Islam advocates terrorism

There have been many public statements and comments in the media linking Islam to terrorism. While some terrorist acts have been committed by Muslims, people professing other religions including Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism have also committed terrorist acts.

There are extremists in every religion and some of them attempt to use their religion as justification for horrific acts.

"Even if you stretch out your hand against me to kill me, I shall not stretch out my hand against you to kill you. I fear Allah, the Lord of the World."

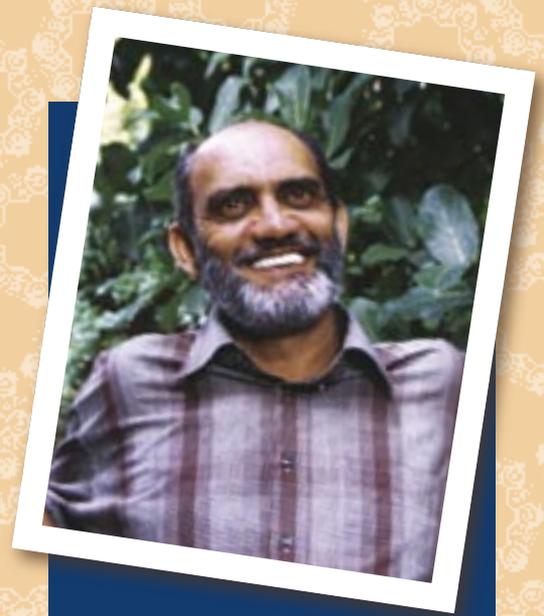
(Qur'an 5: 28)

Terrorist acts committed by Muslims have been widely condemned in the Muslim world. For example, Shaykh Abdul-Azeez Aal ash-Shaykh, the Mufti of Saudi Arabia, described the 9/11 attack in New York as, "a strike of oppression, injustice and tyranny, not in agreement with the Shari'ah [law] of Islam". The (former) Imam of Kuraby Mosque, Imam Yusuf Peer stated that, "Muslims and their leaders in Brisbane totally condemn the terrorist attacks ... Islam is a religion of peace, tolerance, patience, and forgiveness".

**"If anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people."
(Qur'an 5:32)**

Myth: Jihad means Holy War

Islamic tradition does not have a notion of holy war. Jihad simply means to strive hard or struggle in pursuit of a just cause. According to the Prophet Muhammad the highest form of jihad is the struggle waged to cleanse oneself of the vices of the heart. Holy war is not an expression used in the Qur'an or by Muslim theologians. In Islamic theology, war is never holy - it is either justified or unjustified.



Mahmood

Mahmood's love of farming and cattle began in South Africa, where he was born. He came to Australia in 1995 and now owns a cattle property in the Brisbane Valley, as well as a successful over-fifties village of 160 homes. Mahmood is married with two adult sons and is an active member of his local Muslim community.

"I am happy being a Muslim in Australia. I enjoy being in Australia absolutely and have had no negative experiences here."

"God is gentle and loves gentleness in all things."

(From the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad)



Rashida

After following in the footsteps of many Catholic schoolgirls in Brisbane by attending All Hallows College, Rashida took a less common path. At the age of 19, after much study and reflection, she converted to Islam.

She has since gained a degree in Linguistic Codes with a special interest in Philosophies of Mathematics. She has travelled and worked in community development, both in Australia and overseas. She now works in the area of cross-cultural mediation, and is beginning a study of Islamic Law.

“Islam opened the door for my personal and daily life to be intimately embedded in the spiritual. As an idealistic young woman I was profoundly affected by being offered this opportunity. From then on my life opened. I was very blessed to meet people knowledgeable in faith and life.”

“You have nothing to fear; Islam has wells of compassion.” (George Negus, quoted in *The Big Issue*, No 194, page 15)

Myth: Islam is intolerant by nature

In almost every religion, there are examples of extremism, intolerance and cruelty.

- ◆ Christians in the Middle Ages embarked on witch-hunts, the Inquisition and anti-Semitism.
- ◆ Jews and Palestinians (Muslim and non-Muslim) have been killing each other in Israel and the Occupied Territories.
- ◆ In Ireland, Catholics and Protestants have feuded for centuries.
- ◆ Modern India has a history of religious violence involving Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims.

The religious intolerance shown by groups such as the Taliban in Afghanistan is not typical of Islam. Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim country, has a constitution that guarantees religious freedom and there are many examples of Muslim countries protecting people of other religions. A community of Spanish-speaking Jews still exists in Turkey today after seeking asylum from the persecution they faced under the Spanish Inquisition. During the time of the crusades, the Christian crusaders treated Jews and Orthodox Christians so badly they often looked to Muslim forces for liberation. By and large, Muslims and followers of other religions live peacefully together without any conflict.

“Let there be no compulsion in religion.”

(Qur’an 2:256)

“And one of His signs is the creation of the heaven and earth and the diversity of your languages and colours; surely there are signs in this for the learned.” (Qur’an 30:22)

Jesus holds a special place in Islam and is considered an important prophet. As with other prophets, whenever his name is written or spoken, it is followed by the words “Peace be upon him” as a sign of respect.

Myth: Islam denies human rights

“O believers, be you securers of justice, witness for God. Let not detestation for a people move you not to be equitable; be equitable — that is nearer to God-fearing.” (Qur’an 5:8)

The Qur’an and Hadith explain that, in Islam, human rights are granted by God to all people and cannot be changed by rulers or political processes.

“Those who do not judge by what God has sent down are the disbelievers.” (Qur’an 5:44)

The Qur’an states that all people deserve respect and have the right to seek justice. It also espouses freedom and, while not directly condemning slavery, it strongly encourages Muslims to free slaves as there were many slaves in Arabia when Islam began.

Muslim human rights activists, motivated by both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and their Islamic faith, campaign for human rights throughout the world, in Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

“Allah loves those who deal with equity.”

(Qur’an 60:8)



Muamer

When Muamer and his family left Bosnia in 1993, they came to Brisbane because Muamer’s aunt had been living here for 30 years. Muamer went to Milpera High School for four months to learn English before going on to Oxley Secondary College. He now works for State Government Security and, although he is too busy to play basketball or soccer, Muamer regularly visits the gym to keep fit.

“I’m not that religious. I love what I am and I try to live a good life.”

Two of the world's largest Muslim countries have elected female leaders. Benazir Bhutto was twice elected prime minister of Pakistan and Megawati Sukarnoputri was elected president of Indonesia in 2001. In the late 1990s, the Turkish Prime Minister, Tansu Ciller, was a female. Some Muslim countries including Bangladesh, Morocco and Egypt reserve seats in parliament for women.

Myth: In Islam women don't have rights

Under Islamic Law, women have the right to own and inherit property. They can operate a business and fully control their own wealth. They should receive equal pay to men for equal work. They cannot be married against their will, can keep their own name after marriage and can have their marriage dissolved if there is mistreatment. Islamic Law recognised these rights over 1400 years ago, well before they were introduced in countries dominated by Christianity.

“Whosoever does a good deed, male or female - those shall enter Paradise, therein provided without reckoning.” (Qur'an 40:40)

Various practices and laws in some Islamic countries contravene women's rights, as is also the case in some non-Islamic countries. Many of these violations have a cultural or social basis and do not stem from Islam. As with all religions, Islam is sometimes invoked to justify unjust and often un-Islamic practices.

There is a growing Islamic women's movement that challenges oppressive interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith and is calling for social reform.

The veil is often seen as a symbol of the oppression of women under Islam. However, most Muslim women wear a head covering by choice and only a minority of Islamic states force women to wear a head covering.

“...We created you from a single soul, male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Truly, the most honoured of you in God's sight is the greatest of you in piety...”

(Qur'an 49:13)

“Nowhere in the Qur’an does it say that all men are superior to, preferred to, or better than all women. God’s expressed preference for certain individuals in the Qur’an is based upon their faith, not their gender.”

(John L. Esposito, one of the most influential Islamic Scholars in the USA, in What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam (2002))

Many westerners believe female genital mutilation and honour killings of women are typical of the oppression of women in Islam. In fact, they are cultural practices that predate the religion, only practised in particular regions and are strongly opposed by most Muslims around the world. In Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim country, honour killings are unknown. Female genital mutilation is practised by several ethnic groups around the world particularly in parts of Africa, but is not specific to any religious group.

“I shall not lose sight of the labour of any of you who labours in My way be it man or woman; each of you is equal to the other.”
(Qur’an 3:195)

Myth: Muslim men can choose to have many wives

Islam is strongly against polygyny (commonly mis-labelled as “polygamy”) in all but the most exceptional circumstances. In the time of Muhammad (570-632AD), after a number of battles, there were very few men alive but many women. In that situation, polygyny was allowed, provided the man was able to treat his wives equally and provide for his children. However, the Qur’an states that a man is never able to be fair and just to multiple wives. Examples of polygyny also exist in the biblical Old Testament.

Elvan

As a chemical engineer, Elvan worked with the CSIRO in Sydney for 10 years before moving to Brisbane to pursue further studies. She now lectures and has her own business.

“I wear Western clothes and consider myself to be a good Muslim. There are millions of people in Turkey like me. When I came to Australia, everyone was saying “Wow! You’re an engineer. That’s great!” I wondered why everyone was so surprised because female engineers are very common in Turkey. My mother is actually a professor of engineering.”



Definitions

The following definitions have been compiled from the internet and through consultations with members of the Muslim communities in Brisbane.

More definitions are available at www.islamicity.com/islamicglossary

Asalamu Alikum: "Peace be upon you." A standard greeting between Muslims.

Burqa (Afghanistan): A garment that entirely conceals a woman's body including her head and eyes.

Fatwah: Legal ruling made by a qualified scholar in Islamic Law (Shari'ah), usually regarding an unprecedented situation or event.

Hadith: Any saying or action attributed to the Prophet Muhammad.

Hajj: The pilgrimage to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Muhammad.

Halal: Lawful or permitted in Islam. Animals must be killed in a specific way in order to be halal, meaning fit for consumption by Muslims.

Haram: Impure or harmful and therefore prohibited, for example, pork, drugs, alcohol and gambling.

Hijab: The head covering that some Muslim women wear. In the region where Islam began, men also traditionally wore a head covering due to the intensity of the sun.

Imam: A congregational prayer leader. For Shiites, an Imam is an authority on Islamic theology and law.

Mullah: A Muslim social or religious leader, usually holding an official post.

Mufti: A qualified jurist who interprets Muslim religious law.

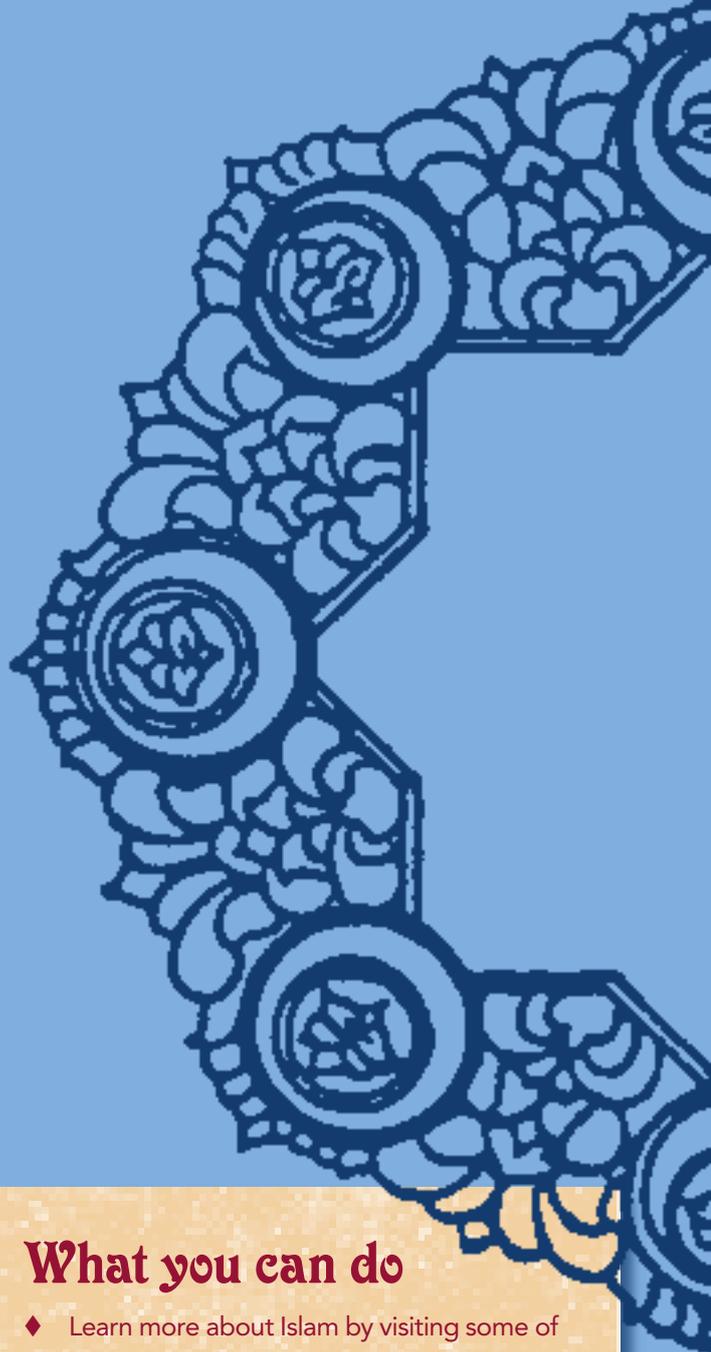
Qur'an (also spelt Quran, Quraan or Koran): The most holy book of Islam as revealed to Muhammad.

Ramadan: The ninth (and holiest) month of the Muslim calendar. It was in this month that the revelation of the Qur'an began. Ramadan involves fasting from sunrise to sunset each day and extra time in prayer.

Shari'ah: The Islamic code of law.

Sunnah: The trodden path, way or example set by the Prophet Muhammad through what he said, did, or approved of.

Taliban: Extremist group of Muslims in Afghanistan. The Taliban have been responsible for many human rights abuses, particularly of women.



What you can do

- ◆ Learn more about Islam by visiting some of the websites suggested on the next page.
- ◆ Read the Qur'an (the most commonly used translation is by Abdullah Yusuf Ali). Borrow a copy from a Council library or read it online at www.islamicity.com/mosque/quran.
- ◆ Visit a mosque.
- ◆ Volunteer at the Brisbane Islamic School. Phone 3391 7861.
- ◆ Pass this brochure on to a friend.
- ◆ Challenge the myths wherever you come across them - among friends or colleagues, in the newspaper or on talkback radio.
- ◆ Order more copies of this brochure from Council on 3403 8888 and take them to your neighbourhood centre, shopping mall, church or sports club.

More information

Books

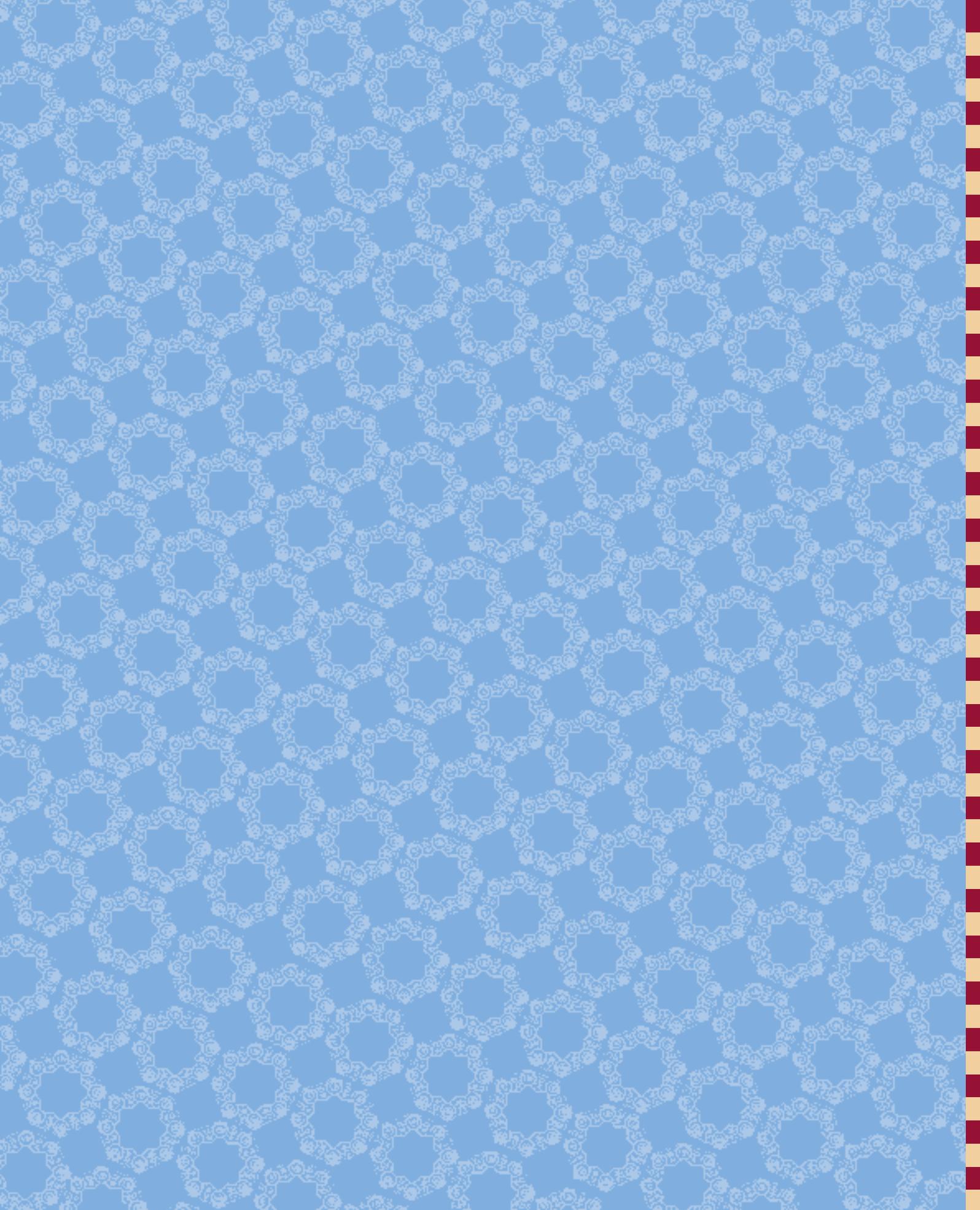
- ◆ Deen, Hanifa (2003) Caravanserai: Journeys Among Australian Muslims, FACP: Fremantle.
- ◆ Negus, George (2003) The World from Islam: Muslims, Mass Destruction and Mutual Ignorance, Harper Collins: Sydney.
- ◆ Emerick, Yahiya (2002) The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Islam, Alpha Books: Indianapolis.

Websites

- ◆ **General sites about Islam:** <www.islam.org> <www.shiasearch.com> <<http://muhaddith.com>>
- ◆ **The Prophet Muhammad:** <<http://muhammad.net>>
- ◆ **The Qur'an online:** <www.islamicity.com/mosque/quran>
- ◆ **Women in Islam:** <www.mwlusa.org>
- ◆ **Islam in Australia:** <www.icv.org.au> <www.islam-australia.com.au>

Some Muslim organisations in Brisbane

- ◆ Brisbane Muslim School, Buranda, phone 3391 7861.
- ◆ Darul Uloom Islamic Academy of Brisbane, Buranda, phone 3392 1310.
- ◆ Islamic Council of Queensland, PO Box 204, Sunnybank Hills, Q 4109, phone 3219 4174.
- ◆ Islamic Information Centre of Queensland, Buranda, phone 3391 7867.
- ◆ Islamic Women's Association of Queensland, PO Box 1909, Sunnybank Hills, Q 4109, phone 3272 8545 or 3272 8071.
- ◆ Islamic Association of Kuraby, phone Dr Siki 0419 658 602 or Dr Abdalla 0407 921 978.
- ◆ Islamic Society of Bald Hills, PO Box 5423, Brendale, Q 4500, phone 0410 615 272.
- ◆ Islamic Society of Darra, PO Box 333, Inala Q 4077, phone 3375 7549 or 0413 038 610.
- ◆ Islamic Society of Holland Park, phone 3343 4748.
- ◆ Islamic Society of Lutwyche, 33 Fuller Street, Lutwyche, Q 4030, phone 3205 4300.
- ◆ Islamic Society of West End, PO Box 5349 West End 4101, phone 3846 1573.



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