

MUSLIMS IN THE CITY

In the 1950s there were two dwelling houses in the city that were converted to mosques. By 1969 there were a large number of such conversions and work had started on the purpose-built Central Mosque in Balsall Heath. There are now some 67 registered mosques and 73 unregistered, of which several more have been purpose-built and are of some size. The majority are Sunni, and more than 60% of these subscribe to the Deobandi interpretation of Muslim law. There are also two Shia mosques and an Ismaili mosque. In 1974, the Birmingham Council of Mosques was formed as an umbrella organisation to support all aspects of Muslim life and worship.

There are two Islamic colleges at which one can study full time up to a Masters degree. In addition there are six schools for boys or girls, as well as facilities for supporting education in mosques. Of the six Muslim funeral services, some are also associated with mosques. Four Muslim charities operate in the city, of which Islamic Relief was founded in Birmingham and has its main offices here. At present there are about 140,000 Muslims in the city, representing 14.3% of the population.

Further information can be obtained from:

Birmingham Central Mosque,
180 Belgrave Middleway, Birmingham B12 0XS;
Tel. 0121 440 5355.

Email: enquiries@centralmosque.org.uk.

Website: www.centralmosque.org.uk



**Post: Birmingham Council of Faiths,
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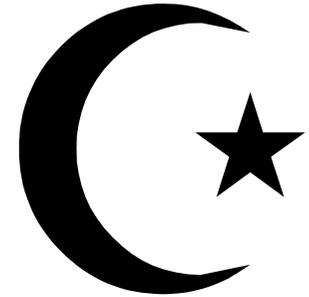
Originally founded in 1974, Birmingham Council of Faiths' objective is to promote knowledge and mutual understanding of the beliefs and practices of the city's many religious faiths.

Its belief is that through greater understanding of each other, a more harmonious and cohesive society can be created.

An additional strategy is to act as an interfaith hub, networking between the diverse faith organisations in the city and to serve as a focal point for information about their activities.

This brochure is one of ten covering the Council's affiliated faiths, which currently include Baha'is, Buddhists, Christians, Confucians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and Zoroastrians

Muslims



one of
Birmingham's
faith
communities

MUSLIM BASICS

The word Islam means peace and also complete submission to the will of God (Allah). A Muslim is one who chooses to follow the code revealed by Him to the Prophet Mohammed, 570-632 CE, who was born at Mecca in Saudi Arabia. These revelations were brought to him over a period of 23 years by the angel Gabriel (Jibrail) and are recorded in the Qur'an. Most Muslims also look to stories from the Prophet's life (*hadith*) to help them follow his example.

Due to persecution, the prophet was forced to flee to Madina in 622 and this event marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar, which follows the lunar year and is therefore approximately eleven days shorter than the standard year. After many trials, he led the believers back in triumph to Mecca in 630 and established their community there. The crescent and star later became a popular (but not universal) symbol of Islam.

Muslims believe in the indivisible oneness of Allah, who is the supreme Lord and Creator of the universe. There were other prophets sent by Allah (including Moses and Jesus) but Mohammed is regarded as the final messenger. The prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) has special importance as the Patriarch common to the Jews and Christians, and the three are therefore referred to as Abrahamic Faiths.

A split occurred early in Islam's religious history between the Sunni majority and the Shia. Since then Shia has divided into several sects. In practice, too, Sunnis follow one or other of various schools that differ in their interpretation of Muslim law.

The ancient faith symbol of the crescent and star is accepted by most Muslims.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Muslims do not see their religious duties as being separate from their daily life in the world. Five obligations on them are known as the Pillars of Islam. 1) The declaration of faith that 'there is no god beside God and Mohammed is his prophet'. 2) Five daily prayers - before dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, night. These may be made in a mosque, at home or wherever convenient, but Friday prayers are encouraged to be done communally. In preparation the face, hands and arms and the feet should be washed. 3) Giving 2.5% of one's savings to the poor and needy. 4) Fasting during Ramadan (the 9th month of the Islamic year). This entails refraining from eating, drinking, smoking or sexual relations during the daylight hours, as well as any negative behaviour. 5) Pilgrimage. Every adult Muslim who is physically and financially able must make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca and try and visit the Prophet's mosque in Madina.

Two main festivals are observed. The five-day Eid-al-Adha celebrates the pilgrimage period. Sometimes animals are sacrificed then and the meat is distributed between the worshippers and the poor. The other festival, Eid-ul-Fitr falls two months and ten days earlier and celebrates the end of the Ramadan fast. It is a holiday marked by embracing and mutual forgiveness. Another important occasion falls within the last ten days of Ramadan and is known as the Night of Power (Laylat al-Qadr). This marks the anniversary of when the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed and it is recommended that Muslims spend all or at least part of that night in prayer. This time is said to be more powerful than a thousand months.

SOCIAL PRACTICE

Wherever they live, the whole community of believers, regardless of denomination or tradition, are regarded as a single people. This perception of their religious and cultural ties helps Muslims overcome differences between themselves and motivates them to care for those less well off than themselves, or who may be the victims of misfortune at home or in whatever country.

Muslim life is governed by the set of principles, referred to as Sharia (the path), which governs such things as marriage, family rights and inheritance. Best known are the dietary rules which lay down what is permitted (*halal*) and what is forbidden. In the latter category there are pork, unslaughtered animals and blood products, as well as intoxicating drinks or drugs. Islam also has several categories in between the extremes of what is forbidden and what is allowed, ranging from strongly recommended to strongly discouraged.

All Muslims, men and women, are commanded to dress modestly but how this is interpreted is a matter of culture of family custom. General guidance suggests that women cover their heads and the whole of their bodies down to the ankles. Men's clothing should not reach below the ankle.

Marriages are traditionally pre-arranged by the parents of bride and groom, but it must be with the consent of the couple. Though some are content to allow this without prior knowledge of their future partner, it is not required and forced marriage is forbidden.

When a Muslim dies it is important that the person be washed by family members of the same sex and wrapped in white cloth. The body should then be buried as soon as possible, preferably within 24 hours.

