

Chapter 8 - Islam Transcript

Audio file

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Transcript

Speaker 1

Hello everyone. Welcome to our. Next podcast in world history. My name is Professor Lisa Namikas. And today, we're going to talk about Islam. Islam is the second largest religion in the world with 1.5 billion, with a "B" followers and is growing. There are Muslims in every country of the world, and Christians and Muslims have lived together side by side for centuries. In fact, there are 3.5 million Muslim Americans living in the United States. So let's learn more about Islam and what it means. After a brief introduction with some background terms, we are going to hear from two sets of guests. First, two Muslim students who live in Louisiana and they'll talk to us in Islam. So we'll get a direct perspective. And then we'll hear from Linda Midgett an independent director and producer of a film, same God. She now works at Louisiana Public Broadcasting or LP. We'll introduce each set of guests a bit later. First, I want to say a few words about Islam and just give a few basic definitions so we can understand the religion a little bit and a little bit about what we're going to. So the word Islam means submission to God. And it really creates a sense of unity and a feeling of. Equality among Muslims. Islam originated in Arabia, so that piece of land that's just to the east of where Egypt would be, where North Africa lies and the most important city there for the religion would be Mecca. From Mecca, Mohammed hears the word of God from the Angel of Gabriel who appears before him. Gabriel told Mohammed that there should be no worship of idols, but only of God or Allah. Muhammad understood himself to follow the Abrahamic. Prophets. So he saw. Himself as following Abraham and Ishmael. And then himself. The sacred text of Islam is called the Koran, and it's thought to be the direct word of God to the people. So the Koran. Is believed to be revealed to Mohammed by Gabriel. Over a course. Of about 20 years, and it's that direct word from God. So while the Bible is understood a little bit differently as a collection of stories with larger meanings, the Quran itself is God's word to the people. Quran means recitation and it's often memorized or some and it's some of the most beautiful Arabic ever written. Muslims practice their faith by following five pillars and we're just going to briefly outline these five pillars because they'll come into our discussion a little bit later. Shahada for prayer. Is considered the 1st and most important pillar. And the prayer simply goes. There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his prophet. Now when we look at Islam, we're talking about the religion from a historical perspective. But when many Muslims talk about the pillars or their religion, they're coming from a religious perspective. And so instead of just simply saying Muhammed. They would say Muhammed. Peace be upon. Him. So we'll just. Be aware of. That we're not going to use that peace be upon him this time because we're talking about the religion from, you know, a historical perspective. We have shahada. Or prayer, as our first pillar. Then we have Salat and that refers to the five prayers a day that are required by every Muslim. So those prayers occur. At the typical times of Sunrise, noon, afternoon, sunset and then evening. Another pillar is Ramadan, and that involves honoring Gabriel's message to Mohammed by fasting for a month. And this really helps ensure devotion and sort of commitment to it. The cat, his charitable giving, which is taken very seriously. So once you're established, you know, in your life, you're expected to contribute to the welfare of others. And this is especially serious during Ramadan and then fifth pillar is the Hodge or the pilgrimage to Mecca. That

every Muslim should make once in their lifetime if they can afford it. Muslims value a global sense of community and that is really expressed by UMA or community that Muslims believe that Uma connects them across time and space. Jihad means struggle in the path of God or internal struggle. But sometimes if it's taken a step further it. Can mean holy? War, so it's considered jihad. It's, you know, struggle in the path of God to some people. It's their internal struggles to do better. For others, it's used as. A holy war. So when? You hear the term jihad? Just pay attention to the meaning, because it's not always translated as holy war. Which we might assume from listening to the media. Muslims are divided between Shia and Sunni. There are other divisions. But this is the most in. So the difference between Sunni and Shia really revolves around the succession, not deep theological differences. So who should follow? Mohammed became basic question. The Shia believed anyone related to Mohammed. Will have the right to. Well, the Sunni believed that anyone wise enough. Like his advisors. Really could take over leadership. So the difference is is really over leadership. The majority today are Sunni. They believe anybody wise. Should follow Mohammed. In in leadership roles, about 20% are Shia and they are mostly in was ancient Persia or Iran today. So in my podcast I have been highlighting how Louisiana is connected to the topics that we cover. So we want to emphasize some of the local connections with the global community. We're really all part of this global community, right? And then sometimes when we're sitting, you know, in Louisiana in Baton Rouge, at Baton Rouge Community College or wherever. We are you. Know we we tend. To forget that we really are connected to. This this global. So first we're going to hear from 2 Muslim students, and I was lucky enough to be able to interview two students who live in northern Louisiana. Their names are Salwa and Saif. I asked them questions that Westerners are most often, you know, confused about or too scared to ask, and sometimes just things we don't understand. You know, we can say that's a lot about Islam, really, you know. So I just boil it down to, you know, five or six questions. Salwa and Saif. I just want to remind you are sharing their personal opinion or what they. Were taught since they were young. So in some cases their personal opinion is their own understanding or interpretation. You know of what they've learned. It's a good reflection of Islam, but it might not be the reflection of what. Every Muslim thinks like asking a Christian to speak about their views, you know, and just kind of recognizing that they don't speak for all Christians. Sometimes there are varying opinions. That's all we want to highlight here. Many Muslim women wear a scarf around their head, so the first question I asked Salwa what's why do you wear hijab?

Speaker 3

Hijab it's not just a piece of clothes. We were in our heads. It's part of our identity where hijab must come from within, from accepting and understanding the reason for wearing it. The hijab cannot be forced in some way. Because we don't want to end up doing things that bring shame to the whole dress code, the word change. That means a failure which we were to express our modesty and the Muslim faith, and to reject the social standards and consistently sexual women. It's not only in the Islamic religion because it has been won by politics used in Christian. Islam requires both men and women to practice modesty. If you look at our Muslim dress code, it's similar to the mother Mary and also for Muslim men who keep their beards and wear long. Or dresses, they take Jesus or Muhammad peace upon him as a model to follow.

Speaker 1

What's so important to take from Salwa's answer is that the hijab is not only a reflection of devotion to Islam, but it's also a sign of respect for the woman and her place within Islam. The next question I asked to Saif was. Why do you pray five times a day? And in his answer he refers to Salat or the five prayers.

Speaker 4

So we play most of us play. Five times a day. As it is one of the 5 pillars of this. It's all the foundation of Muslim faith. The five daily prayers are known as and are concentrated to. Be one of. The most important acts of worship in Islam. Now non-muslim will think that is a huge burden since Muslims have to bounce on each prayer within a certain time frame. Some Muslims will even find it a burden themselves, but most Muslims acknowledge that it is one of the commands of God that we must pray to him each and every single. And they and those people do pray, understand that it is not difficult. It turns after a while to become a habit that a Muslim does. And if he or she does not perform, he or she will feel uncomfortable. We as Muslims, think that one of the major reasons that Allah who is God and Muslim. Perspective has commanded us to pray for our benefits. It keeps us connected with God. For example, whenever we wake up in the morning, first thing we do is we pray to him and send him the opportunity that he has blessed us with to wake up on a new day. And a new challenge. And same thing. During lunch we eat lunch and we pray again and thank him for the opportunity and the gifts that. He has blessed us with. And it goes on with that. For the rest of the day. And at the end of the day, we prayed our last prayer and we thank God for the whole day and we never know when we're going to die. So that that prayer we really take measure.

Speaker 1

You know, I thought Saif had such a moving answer to this question. He really emphasizes the gratitude. You know that. The prayer really brings. You're just saying thanks for life. Thanks for everything. It just seemed like a really well put together response. And so we'll just thanks. Thank you for that so much. The next question I asked and Saif answered. Do you have to? Speak Arabic to be Muslim and that he again he offers a great explanation here. He explains that Salat to the ritual prayers and or the ritual prayers and. He also talks about the. Surah or the chapters and the verses. So Salat being the five prayers every day and Surah the verses from the Quran. So let's listen to his answer.

Speaker 4

Now for a person who is going to perform Salah, let me first say what Salah and Salat is now. Salah is one of the five pillars that I've talked about before. I mean, one of the five prayers that I've talked about, Muslims call it Salah and SalaT is in the Quran is consists of small or very large. That have been revealed to our Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. For a person who's going to perform Salah, one must memorize. The Arabic slot. So when one is going to pray, one of the five obligated prayers to memorize a small saw, one is obligated to memorize a small saw, which is consisted of a few. Words, but other than that, one can pray any time to God with it, with his or her own language, and ask God for whatever he or she wants, even though. The plan has. Been translated and one can read it in his own language, but it is for non Arabs to understand and. It's not necessarily for memorization. It is a symbol of unity for all Muslims to pray in one language. One might say, why don't every Muslim pray in his own way and God will listen? We Muslims pray in unity first of all, and we must put in a little hard effort to memorize some or a portion of the plan. Some Muslims memorized the whole on, and some Muslims just memorize of youth verses, and each person with their own ability and their own effort.

Speaker 1

The next question I asked was whether or not it was true that Muslims believe in Jesus and Saif had a great answer here about the Abrahamic lineages that I mentioned at the beginning, so I'll just let him explain that.

Speaker 4

Yeah, that's true. Basically for Muslims, we believe that from Adam, up to Muhammad, peace be upon all of them. Jesus, Abraham, Moses, Israel, all of those prophets. We believe that they were Islam. Which is surrendering themselves to God. Islam is the word itself. Surrendering yourself to God. And this book we have right now is basically telling us all the stories of all of those prophets and their tribes, and we take those stories as a lesson for us to follow.

Speaker 1

Thank you so much Sayed for that. The next question I asked was about Ramadan. Basically what is Ramadan and Salma started out here and she explained that Ramadan, the month of fasting, but really becomes one of goodness in her own words. Here she is.

Speaker 3

Grandmother is prescribed in the holy food. And this month, we don't consume any food or drink. We began fasting from sunrise. We purify ourselves in our actions. We try to stay away from bad habits and to get close to God or Allah at the highest level. Ramadan teaches us how to become patient and share what we have with those who are in need. Ramadan is meant to feel others' hunger and feel for those people who don't even have access for food or clean water. It drives us to donate and show more compassion to those who are suffering from hunger.

Speaker 1

Many cultures have taboos against eating certain things, and you know, if you're getting together with somebody from a new culture, it is a good idea to ask if there's anything that they would eat or not eat, you know, especially if you're going out, you know, for a meal or to a restaurant. And so for Muslims, they don't eat pork. Salwa will answer you know why? Why not referring to two different groups of food, either halal food, the blessed food that is OK to eat for a Muslim or the Haram food which is not blessed. So Salwa, again we'll talk about why pork is not even.

Speaker 3

You know a pork or drink alcohol because Allah prohibited them in the Holywood. In Islam we have halal and Haram. Halal is permissible. On the other hand Haram refers to things that God prohibits them because they are powerful for us. If someone drinks too much alcohol, they become drunk and they may end up doing things unconsciously and also will a part. Because they have unclean habits above all we. Just follow God's commitment.

Speaker 4

What it means exactly is a peaceful way to killing the animal and we as Muslims believe that all animals should die in a peaceful way respectively, and should never be harmed.

Speaker 1

The last question I asked regarded the position of men and women, and I asked Saif if men and women were equal in Islam. In all cultures, men and women have different roles, and it's fair to say that you know these strict equality between men and women anywhere in the world would be hard to. Find and sometimes I just wanted to remind us that it's easier to find the inequalities in societies other than our own. So we oftentimes just assume that women in Islam really are. An extreme disadvantage, so that may be true in some cultures, but remember there are many different cultures where people practice Islam and that's not true. So Saif will respond to the discussion whether men and women are equal.

Speaker 4

In the religion of Islam, men and women are considered equal in terms of their spiritual worth and value in the sight of God, both men and women have the same obligations and responsibilities towards God and are equal accountable for their actions. However, it's important to note. That men and women are not identical in Islam. And there are some differences in responsibilities. For example, men and women may have differences in roles regarding dress and behavior in certain situations, and there are also differences in their inheritance law, marriage laws. And other areas. Of Islamic law in general, the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him in faces that it's important of treating men and women with kindness, respect and equality. And there are many examples of women who played important roles in the early Islamic history. However, like in many other societies, there have been many instances where women rights have been neglected or suppressed. But this is not a reflection of Islam teaching. It is always the. People who corrupt in this world. But I would like to add to. That with listen was the first religion to equalize the women with the men. Before that, during the time of the Prophet, peace be upon him in the Middle East, people used to treat women like slaves and they would treat them for goats and other stuff. But when Islam came, it was made fun of just because of how women would be equal and honored. Movement in Muslim cultures, if we follow the commands or the Quran by following its rules, we would be in so much better position. But because also the Assam also honors the women in multiple verses in Iran, which puts her in a better position, there was. Ahadi Ahadi Ahadith is saying that the Prophet that has told before and he the person came up to him and told him what should I do to go to heaven and what should I do and then the prophet peace be upon. Him told him your. And then he said, who's next? He said your mother. And then he said, who else? He said your. Mother and then, he said. He said your father. And by this saying this, this is a popular, really popular saying in Islam which. Honors the women. And there's also a lot a lot of multiple things, but this is one of the major things that the Prophet has that.

Speaker 1

In a follow-up question, I asked Saif if it was true that Muslim men can have. Four or more?

Speaker 4

Not really, but I would during the time of the Prophet peace be upon him. People would marry up to 100 lives and more. And if you would look at the history before the Islamic kings and rulers would be up to 100. And more but. Islam when Islam came, it doesn't give you the. Option to marry up to four. It limits you to four, so even when one person marries a second wife, not a fourth, a second wife, one has to equal exactly equal. If one buys a woman a car, he has to buy the other. Woman a car. And if one does

not equally treat them the same, we believe that it is a big consequence for that, and one could go to a bad place. In in the hereafter.

Speaker 1

Thank you, Salwa and Saif for the opportunity to talk with you.

Speaker 5

And I really.

Speaker 1

Felt that it was so valuable to hear. About Islam from a Muslim point of view. And so I think we. Were really enriched by the discussion and again I just want to thank our two students for coming forward and. Helping us with this podcast and learning more about Islam. I'd like to talk a little bit about the experience that the experience of discrimination that Muslims face in the United States, especially since 911 and the attacks on the Twin Towers. Extremists are only small portion of any main group and just as the existing plain Christian beliefs, fundamentalists and terrorists in Islam often have their own interpretation that differs from the mainstream. So it's not rational that many people are frightened of Muslims because they wrongly connect beliefs of a few extremists with the whole group. Fear is really irrational and you know, it's largely because we don't know enough about Islam itself. Today, I'm going to introduce to you, Linda Midgett, currently executive producer at Louisiana Public Broadcasting. She is an independent filmmaker and director of the film, same God same God is a documentary that explores faith, race, Islamophobia and basic freedoms, including religious freedoms, for everyone in the United States. The film premiered in the year 20. Remember the events in the country at the time in 2015, Donald Trump had just announced his campaign for the presidency. He immediately called for a wall to be built and called Mexicans rapists. Shortly after that, he called for a ban on all Muslims entering the United States, and later we know that became a reality for a short time. Meanwhile, a Black Lives Matter protester was beaten up at one of his rallies, so it's fair to say that the divisions of the country had been ripped wide open. Same God tells the story of Doctor Larisha Hawkins, a black female professor at a Christian college, Wheaton College in Illinois, which is a suburb of Chicago. To show her solidarity with Muslims during Advent. Of the year 2015. Doctor Larisha Hawkins wore a hijab and said that Muslims and Christians worshipped the same God. Firestorm followed in the film. Same God follows this firestorm, so I had a chance to talk with Linda Midgett, the director of same God. Those delighted to be able to have this opportunity. I asked her if she could tell us a little bit about how she met Professor Larisha Hawkins.

Speaker 5

I actually reached out to Doctor Hawkins. When this really global controversy broke out? So this was December 2015 that she had worn the hijab and made the Facebook post saying that she was wearing this during Advent, which is the Christmas season in solidarity with Muslims and so. It had caused really a firestorm. And it was all over. The news and I took particular interest in it because I am an alumna of Wheaton. So I was following the story just out of personal interest, but as the story developed, I realized that what was happening was really important. And I thought a real sort of sign at the times, if you will. And so I reached out to her and I just sent her an e-mail at her Wheaton address. And she was so. Inundated with media and with the controversy that she did not even see it, but she had a very close

friend who was checking her e-mail for her. And so I talked to that friend and introduced myself and gave some samples of my work and said, you know, would Doctor Hawkins be willing to participate in a documentary about this? And so that's how our relationship started.

Speaker 1

What did Doctor Hawkins mean when she said that Christians and Muslims worship the same God?

Speaker 5

Yeah, you know. It's interesting because a lot of people will assume that those two words same God that it is equating Christianity and Islam. And what's interesting is that Larisha was not she did not make up the idea that worship that Christians and Muslims worship the same. She didn't make this up herself. She was actually quoting Pope Francis because this has long been the stance of the Catholic Church, and obviously the Catholic Church, is not equating Christianity and Islam. So it raises the question, well, what is meant by saying that they worship the same God and quite simply? It is the. It is the idea that if you are a monotheist, if you believe in one God. Well, then, we're all talking about the same God. The referent of that one God is the same whether you're Muslim or Christian, or frankly, even an atheist, right? Is this concept of 1 God and so. I think what Larisha the reason that she quoted that? Was not to conflate the two religions, but it was simply to say we have care about God. We worship God, and this is a commonality and it's some common ground that we can find to relate to each other as human beings. I think that that's very much what she was going after. It was not a theological debate. That was not her intent. It was very much intended to be. A way to simply say, hey, you're human. We both worship the same God, even if our understandings of that God are quite different. Here's something that we can actually connect on in a way that brings more peace to the world.

Speaker 1

And what, in your opinion, motivated Larisha Hawkins herself to show solidarity with Muslims?

Speaker 5

2015 I mean it seems like a long time ago. But this is when I think things really started to change and our country in terms of the polarization and the political rhetoric, was really intensifying. Donald Trump had not been nominated. He did not yet have the Republican nomination for President. He was one of the candidates and so as a candidate just running to get the Republican nominee, he had announced a ban. He announced it if he became president, that he would enact a ban on all Muslims entering the country. And so it was very inflammatory now. That cutter rudder. We're we're also used to at the time it was shocking, right? And hate crimes against Muslims were on the rise, particularly against Muslim women there were a lot of reports of women being attacked who were wearing the hijab and it was becoming sort of an unsafe environment. And I think because Larisha lived at Wheaton College outside of Chicago, but Larisha lived closer to the city. You know, she's in a very urban environment. There's a large Muslim population there, so she, I think was more aware of it than me. Be you might be in what state? Right. And so I think she was just sensitive to that and in no way had any idea that this was going to create this big, huge blow up that happened.

Speaker 1

Today, as we perhaps begin to bridge some of our divisions, what can we understand and learn from Doctor Hawkins experience and the message of the same God?

Speaker 5

Well, you know, Doctor Hawkins talks a lot about the idea of embodied solidarity and embodied solidarity is basically saying I'm in solidarity with these other humans, and it's not about me being like them. It's simply saying I'm a. I'm I'm in solidarity with you, even if I'm different. I can be in solidarity with you, and I think it's a really powerful message and. It's one that I think could be very transformative in especially in these really difficult times where I think we're all weary from how difficult and polarized and really hateful, you know, people can be especially on on social media and to be in solidarity is really to say. I see that you're human and and I can. Be in a space with you that values our shared humanity above. Any differences that we have. I think that that could really transform our relationships if we put that into action in our personal lives.

Speaker 1

Thank you so much for talking with us today, Director Midget

For those of You listening? If you want to learn more about this impactful and inspiring story, please go to the website samegodfilm.com where you can find a trailer. Some interviews and other stories of solidarity. Thank you so much, Professor Midget for your time and the opportunity to learn more about the amazing work of people like you right here in Louisiana connecting us to. Our world, the students. I hope that these two interviews have helped shine a new light on what it means to be Muslim despite differing viewpoints. They come back to the same place. Islam is a religion like any other monotheistic religion, including Christianity. The majority of its people live in peace and they strive to do. Their religion is. Their moral compass, their support and their identity. We are all interconnected, woven from the same cloth and united in our shared humanity. I'll leave you with this challenge to learn more about Islam or any other religion in history to see how much you can improve your understanding of today's world by learning just a little bit more about others.

Speaker 2

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