

What does Islam teach about Allah?

Ben: Hello and welcome to the Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies podcast. I'm Ben Hurst, a presenter and journalist, and host for this series where we'll be going over the key beliefs and practices for your GCSE on Islam. In this episode we're tackling what Islam teaches about Allah. We'll cover Allah's influence on Muslim life, worship, worldview and values.

And I'm joined by the fantastic broadcaster Mehreen Baig. Hi Mehreen! Mehreen, can you tell us about yourself?

Mehreen: Hi Ben! Yeah, I grew up in a Muslim household, and I am a practising Muslim. My day job is working on documentaries often covering topics around British Asian and Muslim communities, but I also used to be a teacher. So, working with GCSE students and breaking things down for them, helping them grow in confidence, is my favourite thing to do and I'm very excited about this series.

Ben: I think that makes you perfect for the being my co-host. Now, it might be a good idea to grab a pen and paper (or open the notes app on your phone) for making notes as you're listening.

Mehreen: And then we'll round off with a quick quiz.

Ben: Remember you can find a full range of podcasts covering loads of GCSE subjects, like Physics, as well as Religious Studies - just go to BBC Sounds and search for Bitesize GCSE.

Mehreen: Let's dive in!

Ben: Before we look at the question ‘What does Islam teach about Allah?’ let’s start with some background information on Islam and a few key phrases that might be useful for this series.

Mehreen: Yes, of course. Did you know that as of 2020 Islam is the world’s fastest-growing religion and is the second-largest religion in the world after Christianity with over 2 billion followers.

Ben: That’s good context. And what exactly does the word Islam mean?

Mehreen: It literally means ‘submission to the will of Allah’. For me, submission is about freely choosing to devote your heart and mind to Allah (Subhanahu Wa Ta’ala) because of the love you have for Him and the trust you have in His wisdom and trying to shape your whole life around that commitment.

Ben: And you used the phrase Subhanahu Wa Ta’ala there - what does that mean?

Mehreen: Subhanahu Wa Ta’ala means “Glory be to Him, and He is Most High” - Muslims often say it after mentioning Allah’s name to show reverence.

Ben: And what about the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam?

Mehreen: There are other important holy books recognised in Islam, but the Qur’an is the main source of wisdom in Islam. This is because most Muslims believe the Qur’an is unique: it’s seen as the unchanged, direct word of Allah, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) gradually over 23 years.

Ben: Like many other religions, Islam has different branches, or groups, that share the same core faith but have some differences in belief and practice. Is that right Mehreen?

Mehreen: That’s right. In this series we’ll mainly discuss Sunni Muslims, who make up the majority, and Shi’a Muslims, who are the next largest group.

Ben: Let's talk about the beliefs for Sunni and Shi'a Muslims in context of what Islam teaches about the nature of Allah.

Mehreen: Absolutely.

Ben: The main beliefs for Sunni and Shia Muslims are set out in different ways, aren't they?

Mehreen: Exactly. For Sunni Muslims, the Six Articles of Faith define their core beliefs, while the key principles for Shi'a Muslims are defined through the Five Roots of Usul al-Din.

Ben: Belief itself is central in Islam, isn't it?

Mehreen: Yes! Belief is fundamental. In fact, the most important belief for both denominations is Tawhid.

Ben: Tawhid is a really important word to keep in mind when we ask what Islam teaches about Allah, isn't it? What does Tawhid mean?

Mehreen: Tawhid is the belief that there is only one God.

Ben: Let's dig into Tawhid next.

Mehreen: Tawhid is all about Allah's oneness. Put simply, Islam teaches that there is only one God. The belief that there is only one God is called monotheism, and this shapes every part of Islamic faith and practice.

Ben: So, it's like the starting point for the whole religion?

Mehreen: Yes, the idea of oneness helps Muslims see Allah as the focus of life. Surah 112, verse 1 in the Qur'an puts it simply:

"He is Allah, the One".

Ben: What is the significance of Tawhid to Muslims?

Mehreen: Tawhid highlights three important ideas about Allah: that Allah is the only true God so worship is focused on Him alone; that Allah deserves the highest respect as the ultimate divine being; and that Allah brought the universe into existence and maintains it.

Ben: So, it would be against Islamic beliefs to believe in other gods?

Mehreen: Yes. Worshipping anything alongside Allah is called shirk, and it is viewed as the ultimate sin.

Ben: How does this impact Muslim belief and practice?

Mehreen: Believing in one God gives many Muslims a strong sense of trust in Allah. This encourages humility and modesty, helping people avoid jealousy and arrogance.

Ben: Ok. Are there other key beliefs about Allah's nature that are significant?

Mehreen: Yes, many, but let's focus on five: omnipotence, mercy, immanence, transcendence, and beneficence.

Ben: Omni means all and potent means powerful. So, all powerful?

Mehreen: Correct. All power belongs to Allah.

Ben: How is this belief put into practice?

Mehreen: By praying regularly and trusting Allah, especially during difficult times.

Ben: What's another key belief about Allah?

Mehreen: Allah is merciful. He shows compassion, is kind, and is willing to forgive.

Ben: And that belief influences how Muslims treat others?

Mehreen: Exactly. It encourages kindness and forgiveness.

Ben: What about the other beliefs about Allah's nature?

Mehreen: Immanence means Allah is very near to people. Qur'an 50:16 says:

"We are closer to him than his jugular vein."

Ben: Which encourages compassion towards others?

Mehreen: Absolutely. For example, giving Zakah which means charity.

Ben: And the final two beliefs?

Mehreen: Transcendence means Allah is beyond full human understanding. Beneficence means Allah is deeply loving and generous.

Ben: Allah has many other different characteristics?

Mehreen: Yes, Islam teaches there are 99 names for Allah.

Ben: Three central ideas are: Tawhid, Allah is omnipotent, and Allah is merciful.

Ben: Now let's consider the significance of the Prophet Muhammad.

Mehreen: Muslims believe He was the last prophet sent by Allah, the 'Seal of the Prophets'.

Ben: Why do you say "peace be upon Him" after his name?

Mehreen: It is a sign of respect.

Ben: Is the Prophet Muhammad an integral part of the Muslim faith?

Mehreen: Absolutely. Most Muslims believe the angel Jibril appeared to Him with the first revelation of the Qur'an.

Ben: And most Muslims today try to emulate his life?

Mehreen: Yes. They are encouraged to show qualities he demonstrated – leadership, restraint, courage, honesty, reliability and self-control.

Ben: All important characteristics.

Mehreen: Yes. Many Muslims try to follow His example in practical ways – praying, fasting, and giving to those in need.

Ben: It's time for a quick quiz. Mehreen come on - you can test me!

Mehreen: Alright Ben, this is a quick-fire recap. You ready?

Ben: Let's do it.

Mehreen: Ok. Who is the final Prophet sent by Allah?

Ben: Prophet Muhammad

Mehreen: Nice! Ok. Name one significant belief about Tawhid taught by Islam?

Ben: Allah is the one and only god.

Mehreen: Correct! Name two beliefs in the nature of Allah.

Ben: Allah is omnipotent and Allah is merciful.

Mehreen: Perfect!

Ben: Thanks for listening to this episode of the Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies podcast.

Mehreen: In the next episode we'll be covering the Five Pillars of Islam.

Ben: Don't forget, there are loads of podcasts to help you with your GCSEs. Just search for Bitesize GCSE on BBC Sounds. See you next time!