

What I'd like to do tonight is to provide you with some very broad overviews of the Islamic tradition and what Muslims believe. Hopefully we'll shatter some stereotypes that might have been caused by something called the media, [laughter] and hopefully you'll leave here with a deeper understanding of what it is that Muslims believe and why their faith tradition is so dear to them.

I thought we might begin with a little bit of math. Just to make the point that Muslims and Christians combined, as of 2012 we're about 54.7% of the global population. Today it's closer to 61% of the total population, and I would suggest that that means that the well-being and future of the world really do depend on the ability of Muslims and Christians to find ways of working together to address global concerns and challenges.

Often times we hear Muslims say, in the news, "Well, you know, Islam is a religion of peace." And then we hear other people say, "Well, no, Islam is really a religion of war." And so when Muslims express that they feel that Islam is a religion of peace, they're trying to tell you something about the Arabic language.

Not to get into too many linguistics here, but Arabic words are formed on the basis of three root letters. And you'll note up here, in the bold print, that the words for Islam—the religion, meaning submission; a Muslim—who would be a person who adheres to the faith of Islam; and the word for peace, Salaam—all share those same three root letters of S, L, M. And so what Muslims are trying to convey is that submission to God is intended to lead to relationships of peace between God and oneself, between God and other people, and ultimately, hopefully, with the whole world. So this idea of submission is supposed to guide your relationships with others.

Muslims believe that a book called the Qur'an is the final, perfect, and complete revelation that God gave to one individual, the prophet Muhammad, directly over a period of 22 years in the Arabic language. [It] may interest you to know that the purpose of the Qur'an was actually to confirm and reaffirm prior revelations, and the Qur'an often talks about the Torah, the Psalms, and the Gospels as genuine revelations that were received from God and given to humanity. The concern was that there seemed to have been perhaps some errors

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and omissions or perhaps misinterpretations that were introduced over time, and this is why God revealed the Qur'an to sort of correct those problems once and for all.

Muslims often say that the Qur'an is inherently pluralist, meaning that it recognizes more than one faith tradition as being true, because there are verses that talk specifically about Jews, Christians, and Sabians, as people who will go to paradise in the afterlife if they live out the teachings of their faith tradition. So it's not a call for them all to convert to Islam, but to be faithful to the faith traditions that they do adhere to.

It also talks about how God could have made everybody exactly the same, but that God likes diversity and that God created diversity with a purpose. And the purpose was so that different tribes and nations and groups of people could come to know one another. In other words, human beings were created with the intent of living in community and building relationships with each other, rather than maintaining separateness.

When Muhammad received the revelation, it was spoken to him through the Angel Gabriel.

