*HRT3M1 – World Religions: Islam*

**Summary of Chapter 8: Islam**

*Introduction*

* Islam = Arabic word, meaning “submitting to God”
* Muslim = A person who “submits to God and finds peace in Him”; someone believes in the teaching of Islam
* Shahadah = Islamic Creed, which states “There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.”
* Belief that God sent a series of revelations through the Archangel Gabriel to Muhammad, the Last Prophet sent to humanity by God
  + Revelation = a clear and vivid experience that teaches a profound spiritual truth
  + These revelations proclaim oneness in God and the need to submit to God through worship and righteous living
* third in succession of 3 great faiths born in the Middle East
* second largest and currently the fastest growing religion in the world
  + 1.2 billion believers worldwide
  + About 650 000 believers in Canada

**Origins**

* There are 3 systems that characterized Arabia in the sixth century prior to the birth of the Islam religion

1. Religious System
   1. Polytheism = belief in a variety of different gods
      1. Actively expressed in the practise of idolatry
      2. Idolatry = worship of different objects (i.e. sculptures, pictures) each representing a specific spiritual quality
      3. Idols: believed to grant favours and success, protection from adversity in battles, disasters and calamities
   2. Ka’bah = a cube shaped building that Abraham built to honor God
2. Social System
   1. Arabia divided into tribes
   2. Nomadic nature of desert life forced tribes to move from place to place to find food and water
   3. Lead to establishment of a tradition of rivalry and violence
   4. Women considered bottom of the social ladder
3. Economic System
   1. Makkan merchants earned their livelihood through trade
      1. Often robbed by tribes
   2. Integral part of tribal honour to seek revenge if member is killed; a face-saving system of private justice
   3. Rich loaned money and life essentials to poor at increasingly high interest
      1. Therefore, impossible for poor to pay off or earn freedom from economic tyranny

**Muhammad**

* Central figure in Islam
* Received direct revelations from God through Angel Gabriel
* Person to lead Arabia away from idolatry to belief of oneness of God (monotheism)
* Born in 570 CE into tribe of Quraysh (most respectable tribe in Makkah)
* Lost both parents at young age and was cared for by grandfather and uncle
* Became a successful businessman
* Saw idolatry as poison that was inhibiting the spiritual growth of humanity, rooted in superstition and amorality
* Began to seek isolation for quiet reflection, contemplation and meditation
* At age 20, met Khadijah, a wealthy widow, and were eventually married for 25 years

*Revelation*

* In 610 CE, during Ramadan, Angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad while on retreat
* Received revelations over next 23 years
  + These revelations formed the sacred text of Islam called the Qur’an
* Began to preach against idolatry
  + Leaders of the community felt threatened and sought to kill him
* Continue with his mission for 9 hard years
* “Year of Sorrow” = 619CE, when wife and uncle both died
* Hijrah = “migration”, refers to Muhammad’s emigration north to Yathrib/Madinah (Medina) to avoid threats on his life
* Believed to have gone through an experience known as “Night Journey” or “Ascension”
  + Mi’raj = Ascension
    - Went through 7 heavens, meeting different prophets and other Biblical characters on the way; ending with at the Throne of God

*Muhammad in Madinah (Medina)*

* 622 CE
  + Moved to Yathrib/Madinah
  + Created an organized government and political system based on Islam religion
  + City becomes known as Madinah al-Nabi, “City of the Prophet”
* Muslim calendar starts with hijrah (migration)
* Built up large community of Muslim over short period of time
* The Quraysh tribe of Makkah feels increasingly threatened
  + Led to a battle
  + Or more commonly known as Jihad = translated to mean “holy war” but actually means “striving”
* 3 major battles:

1. Badr – Muhammad’s army defeats army from Makkah
2. Uhud – Makkah is victorious
3. Battle of the Trench – Muhammad orders his men to build a trench around the city of Madinah of which the Makkan were thwarted by the trench and hot desert climate

* 630 CE “Conquest of Makkah” – Muhammad led 10 000 into Makkah
* 632 CE Last pilgrimage to Makkah, accompanied by 140 000 Muslims, where he delivered the “Farewell Sermon”
  + Offered forgiveness
  + Summarized core elements of Islamic teaching
* Upon his return to Madinah, he fell ill and died at age 63

**Beliefs**

* Regarded as a charitable act to guide other to the Truth and dispel ignorance
* Not called on to compel others to believe the same beliefs
* Just to align oneself with the will of God
  + To “surrender”
* Shahadah = Islam creed
  + Organizing principle around which all other beliefs are formed

*God*

* Believe proper name to be **Allah**
* Believe that God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent
* Not only a belief in one God but also a practise – spiritual and temporal
* Humans as limited beings
  + God as ever-present, compassionate guide to knowledge and fulfillment

*Two Distinctive Features of Islam*

* Balance between body and soul – enjoyment of all things that God has created joins everyone together
* Universality of the call – all believers as brothers and equals without distinction
  + Only superiority recognized is a personal one, based on greater fear of God and greater piety

*The Day of Judgement*

* Belief that everyone on earth as a soul that lives on earth for one lifetime and upon death of the body, it moves on to an afterlife
* Motto: “Well-being in this world and well-being in the Hereafter.”
* Believe that when a soul passes into the afterlife, God will reconfigure the physical body so he/she can stand before him on the Day of Judgement
  + Soul is sent to Paradise or to Hell
* Paradise = an eternal abode of beauty and majesty
  + A just reward if one lives a righteous life as a believer in one God
* Hell = an abode of great torment and anguish
  + If one chooses to life an evil life, against the will of God without repentance
* God will judge people’s actions by their intentions and motives

**Practises, Rituals, Festivals and Symbols**

*Practises and Rituals*

* Five Pillars of Islam (as established in the Qur’an)
  + The First Pillar: Shahadah = Declaration of Faith
    - Consists of two declarations:
      * “There is no god but God”
      * “Muhammad is the Messanger of God”
  + The Second Pillar: Salat = Mandatory prayer five times a day
    - Takes place before dawn, mid-day, late afternoon, after sunset, and after dark
    - Involves recitation of prayer as well as a series of movements
    - Wudu = ritual cleansing required prior to salat prayers
    - Ghusl = cleansing of the entire body
  + The Third Pillar: Zakat = Mandatory almsgiving
    - “zakat” = to purify or increase
    - Paying alms is compliance to a divine injunction gladly performed by sincere Muslims for the sake of and in the name of God
  + The Fourth Pillar: Sawm = Mandatory fasting
    - For the entire month of Ramadan, Muslims are forbidden to eat, drink, smoke, or have sexual relations from dawn to dusk
    - Fast as an act of worship where the Muslim community dedicates a month to consider the benevolence of God by abstaining from some of the pleasures of life in order to develop spiritual purity
  + The Fifth Pillar: Hajj = Mandatory pilgrimage to Makkah
    - Taken by any Muslim in the world, regardless of sex, who has the health and means to take the pilgrimage, in Saudi Arabia