



Reprinted from Moment Magazine May/June 2017, "Ask the Rabbis" column

"What should your congregants know about the Muslim faith?"

Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer

This question immediately reminds me of the one put to Hillel when asked to summarize all of Judaism while standing on one foot. And he, mind you, was an insider, talking about his own culture and belief system. Are we non-Muslims capable and possessed of enough chutzpah to summarize all of Islam in 200 words or less?!

Well, here are some of the basics. Islam is defined as the acceptance of and obedience to the teachings of God as revealed to the prophet Muhammed. These teachings were revealed to Muhammed over 23 years. Islam acknowledges its roots in Judaism and Christianity and affirms that Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Jesus were also prophets before Muhammed.

Just as our Torah has complementary verses about God as gracious and forgiving and also has lines that depict God as punitive and vindictive, the Quran is of a mixed mind about the Jews. Some lines express tolerance. Others are hostile. We and Moslems alike both make choices about which verses to embrace and which to de-emphasize. To this end, Islam, like Judaism, affirms the idea that human beings have free will to choose right or wrong.

There are Five Essential Pillars of Muslim that also have echoes in our belief-system: *Shahada* (the testimony of faith), *Salat* (ritual prayer five times a day), *Zakat* (support for the needy), *Sawm* (fasting in the month of Ramadan), and *Haj* (pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime). Islam also affirms the idea of a Day of Judgment or Resurrection.

Notably, also like Judaism, the Muslim people are dispersed all over the world – some 1.5 billion living in 56 countries – and they don't all practice alike (there are different sects, e.g. Sunni and Shiite). There are also multiple interpretations of the weight and obligation of Muslim Sharia Law. Most Muslim countries adopt only a few aspects of sharia, while a few countries apply the entire code.

I know I've exceeded my word limit. Now, as Hillel would say, go and study!