

# Ummah: The Muslim Nation

**Description:** The concept and importance of the '*Ummah*' the extended Muslim "family" of fellow brothers and sisters is discussed in this lesson.

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## Objectives

- To understand how people define 'we' and the Muslim 'we'.
- To understand the basis of Muslim unity and that cultural variety is accommodated within Islam.
- To learn how you can contribute to uniting and strengthening the *Ummah*.

## Arabic Terms

- *As-Salamu Alaikum* - peace and blessings be on you.
- *Dawah* - sometimes spelt *Da'wah*. It means to call or invite others to Islam.
- *Hajj* - A pilgrimage to Mecca where the pilgrim performs a set of rituals. The *Hajj* is one of the five pillars of Islam, which every adult Muslim must undertake at least once in their life if they can afford it and are physically able.
- *Kafir* - (plural: *kuffar*) disbeliever.
- *Salah* - the Arabic word to denote a direct connection between the believer and Allah. More specifically, in Islam it refers to the formal five daily prayers and is the most important form of worship.
- *Shahadah* - Testimony of Faith.
- *Ummah* - Refers to the whole Muslim community, irrespective of color, race, language or nationality.

People who share a particular worldview, always group themselves together and define themselves as 'we.' One of the main factors that brings them together is either the color of their skin or their race. For racists, their 'we' refers to being white, black, Indian, Arab, or Chinese; for some, their 'we' hinges on social status, economic status, caste, or profession. Others may use it to relate to notions of financial status or material growth according to the nation they belong to whether it is described as developed, developing, under-developed, or least-developed. In some cases, people derive their identity mainly from devotion to an individual. For Christians, for example, it is belief and love of Christ that brings them together.



## Ummah of Invitation & Ummah of Response

The word *Ummah* can be translated as “a nation” or “a community”. It refers to two categories of people: The “*Ummah* of Invitation (*Dawah*)” and the “*Ummah* of Response.”

The *Ummah* of Invitation includes all humanity, Muslims and non-Muslims. All of them deserve to hear the truth and receive invitation to it.

The other *Ummah* - the “*Ummah* of Response” - is comprised only of Muslims.[\[1\]](#)

Allah sent his Prophet Muhammad to the *Ummah* according to the first meaning, but Allah will only reward the *Ummah* according to the second meaning - those who accepted the call of Prophet Muhammad.

## The ‘Muslim We’

Who then are the Muslim people? They are a people who are struggling to surrender to Allah. Their real identity is based on their faith in Allah. This bond of faith is the most important basis for binding people together in harmony and for achieving the highest values for which the human being was created.

For Muslims, their ‘we’ is not tied to any racial, class, regional, economic, or linguistic identity. The reason for this is that such identities do not provide any guidance to what is good and true on the one hand and what is false and misleading on the other.

The Quran declares that “the believers are but a single brotherhood” (Quran 49:10). In the Quran, this community of believers is called the *Ummah*, a word that comes from the Arabic root word for “nation.” The followers of Islam are not identified as Arabs, Turks, Persians, Semites, Berbers, Kurds, Uighurs, poor, rich, oppressed, whites, blacks, Asians, Easterners, or Westerners. None of this can truly define ‘we’ of the Muslims who belong to the *Ummah* or the universal community of 1.6 billion believers who count among their ‘extended’ family members their brothers and sisters in faith.

The mutual bonds are very strong in the Muslim community, forming a 'nation' that our Prophet Muhammad described as 'one body.' If one part of the body falls ill, the rest also suffers. In another imagery, he described the community as building blocks of a building, supporting each other as they work together cooperatively toward a common goal.

The *Ummah* cannot accept in its fold any person who professes a belief that goes against the basic teachings of Islam. However, you need to be very careful in labeling someone a *kafir* or an unbeliever and putting them outside the pale of Islam. You cannot label as an unbeliever any Muslim who professes the *Shahadah*, acts accordingly, and performs the obligatory duties of Islam.

The ideological bonds that unite the *Ummah* together have served to keep Muslim history on course despite many intellectual and military challenges in the past and at present. These elements have also given Muslim civilization and culture unity and stability.

## Unity and Variety

At the same time, there is an extraordinary richness and variety in Muslim cultures due to the fact that Islam's moral and legal code assumes that everything is allowed unless it is prohibited, and not vice versa. Local customs which do not contradict any principle or law of Islam have been incorporated with ease in the cultures of Muslim peoples.

In this manner, Islam has discouraged what is unacceptable and preserved the good aspects of multi-ethnic cultures. It has not sought to impose a total and dull uniformity. While it established Islamic institutions like *salah* and promoted the use of Arabic, it did not seek to obliterate local languages, dress, cuisine, artistic expression, or architecture.

The institutions of Islam serve to strengthen the feeling of equality and brotherhood among believers. Daily prayers in the mosque and the *Hajj* pilgrimage all demonstrate the universal Islamic community or *Ummah*.

It is because of this simple unity that a Muslim can travel to another part of the Muslim world and feel at home among local Muslims despite differences in dress, language, cuisine, and economic conditions. He would exchange the same greetings of peace (*As-Salamu Alaikum*), he could easily pray *salah* in congregation, and he would receive a warm welcome accorded to a fellow brother in faith. As a Muslim, you belong to this *Ummah* by virtue of your faith in Allah and your profession of the *Shahadah*.

## Every Muslim's Duty

Every Muslim has a duty to work for the unity and strength of the Muslim *Ummah*. As an individual you can work for the strength and unity of the *Ummah* by:

- acquiring and propagating the knowledge of Islam.
- reforming yourself in order to achieve a sound body, a good character, an honest livelihood, and organized use of your time and resources.

- developing a caring attitude for others and not discriminating against them based on their skin color, the language they speak, or their accents.
- by working with groups that promote the interests of Muslims and of humanity.

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Endnotes:

[1] The word *Ummah* defined under 'Arabic Terms' above is based on this meaning. And this is the meaning usually referred to when this word is used.

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