SUMMARY NOTES ON ISLAM:

I. Life and Times of Muhammad:
   
   A. Born in AD 570 in vicinity of Mecca.
   
   B. Pre-Islamic Context: Indigenous Arabian religion of time was mixture of polytheism and animism.

1. Mecca was center of religion and focal point of pilgrims visiting many idols and shrines.
2. Three sensuous-appearing daughters (al –Lat, al-Manat, and al-Uzza) a statue of God’s (Allah’s)
3. Cube-shaped shrine (called the ka’ba) which means “cube” dedicated to the main god of this shrine, Hubal.
4. Built into the side of the ka’ba was a meteorite that was considered holy because it had fallen from heaven.
5. There are many other temples and holy sites including the sacred well, Zamzam.
6. Religious pilgrimages made Mecca into a prosperous city.
7. Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian merchants and settlements of those groups.
8. Strain of native monotheism survived independently in Arabian culture. A minority of people, known as the hanif or pious ones” devoted themselves exclusively to the worship of one God, Allah.
9. It was this culture in which Muhammad was born.

C. Muhammad:

1. Member of a minor clan of the Quraish tribe
2. Orphaned at an early age
3. Raised by uncle.
4. Little opportunity for schooling, Muhammad subsisted as a camel driver.
5. Eventually Muhammad came into the employment of a wealthy widow, Khadija- fell in love and married.
6. When Muhammad started to receive his visions, Khadija immediately supported him.
7. Muhammad became a wealthy merchant himself and came into increasing contact with the many adherents of monotheistic religions.
8. This contact helped shape his life.
9. It is a mistake to interpret Islam as nothing more than an adaptation of the past religions we studied.
10. Muhammad’s spiritual experience began in AD 620 while meditating in a cave (now called Mountain of Light) overlooking the plain of Arafat outside Mecca.

a. As Muhammad fell into a trance, trembling and sweating, the angel Gabriel spoke to him, “Recite!”

b. At that moment the introspective merchant became the prophet who refused to compromise his convictions and suffered for his steadfastness.

11. Muhammad’s message had two main points:

a. There is only one God to whose will people must submit;

b. There will be a day of judgment when all people will be judged in terms of whether or not they have obeyed God.

12. Within 10 years the followers to his message numbered in the thousands.

13. Nothing ruins the business of idol worship like the claim that there is only one God. Persecutions escalated until in AD 622 Muhammad and his group fled Mecca for Yathrib.

14. Flight from Mecca is called the “hijra” meaning “flight” and it is used as the beginning of the Islamic calendar, for at this point an independent Muslim community, the umma, was born.

15. Islamic dates are reckoned A.H>, anno hegirae.”

16. Khadija died by the time the Muslim community was established. Muhammad found solace with a number of new wives.

17. Muhammad and followers moved to Yathrib (now Medina) where they were received in open arms. Muhammad was put in charge of community with the responsibility to resolve certain disputes.

18. Muhammad made a special pact with the Jewish community in Yathrib recognizing that they were not expected to become Muslims. Unfortunately, the relationship broke down when some Jews attempted to assassinate Muhammad, and he ordered the execution of hundreds of Jews.

19. Eventually Muhammad had so many followers that they were strong enough to capture Mecca.

20. Muhammad remoed all idols from Mecca and cleansed the ka’ba of all statues in a special ceremony. However, he retained Mecca as the center for pilgrimage and maintained some of the external sites, such as the ka’ba and the well Zamzam, as holy places.
21. By the time Muhammad died in AD 632, he was the religious and political head of much of the Arabian peninsula.

II. Central Points:

A. Islam means “submission to God.”

B. Qur’an is the highest authority in Islam
   1. Angel Gabriel divinely revealed the Qur’an to Muhammad.
   2. Qur’an is about as long as New Testament.
   3. Qur’an is divided into 114 chapters (called suras)
   4. Each sura is divided into verses (ayat).
   5. Suras are arranged roughly by length from longer suras to shorter suras—which leads to a kind of a reverse chronological order.
   6. Older suras are relatively short and focus on the basic theological themes of God and judgment;
   7. Later ones contain many detailed instructions for the Islamic community as well as historical and biblical references.
   8. Qur’an begins with al-Fatiha, the opening sura, which is recited at all important prayer times. All but one sura begin with the formula “in the name of Allah, the most gracious and most merciful.”
   10. Qur’an maintains its authoritative character only in Arabic, the language, in which it was revealed.
   11. All translations of necessity involve interpretation (and thus distortion), and so no translated version can be the authentic Qur’an.
   12. Schoolchildren are encouraged to memorize the entire Qur’an in Arabic, even in countries, where Arabic is not the dominant language.
   13. Recitation of the Qur’an is considered an art form, with high acclaim going to those who can do it exceptionally well.
14. Qur’an contains many references to biblical materials:

15. Prophet’s life and informal sayings are ultimately authority in those issues that are left undefined by the Qur’an. These traditions are called “hadiths.” They were vigorously collected and evaluated in the first generations of Islam.

16. As sunna (meaning consensus), the hadiths point to Muhammad’s actual life as indications of how Muslims should act. When in doubt, do as Muhammad did. These hadiths can be used to clarify the revelation of the Qur’an and thus their authority comes close to that of the Qur’an. Among the hadiths are various miracle stories, including Muhammad’s ride to Jerusalem and back to Mecca in one night and his ascent to heaven, while in Jerusalem, for receiving a night of revelations.

17. The Shari’a is “Islamic law. Four different schools of Shari’a arose within the context of Sunni Islam between AD 750 and AD 850:

   a. Hanifite School: Loose interpretation of the Qur’an;

   b. Malikite School: Loosely combines Qur’an and hadith;

   c. Shafi’ite School: Formal criteria for adjudicating between Qur’an and hadith;

   d. Hanbalite School: latest and most conservative; it attempts to base itself on rigid interpretations of the Qur’an alone.

   These are not four schools of theology but different ways of interpreting moral and practices.

18. Shia is a fifth school, although in the Shi’a the authority the imam is the final point of reference.

19. Shi’ite Islam rejects many of the hadiths.

C. Mystical Tradition: Sufism: Like the rise of Kabala in Judaism, Islam has also developed a mystical tradition in an attempt to find a spiritual reality beyond laws and commandments.
1. Islamic mystics known as Sufis... A term that originally referred to the woolen garments worn by the mystic practitioners.
2. Sufism arose as a recognizable movement in the 8th century and continues today.
3. Central is their mystical quest for a direct experience with Allah...possibly merging one’s soul with him.
4. Two famous Sufis are Rumi (Persian poet) and al-Ghazali (a scholar who provided a comprehensive theology of Sufi thought)
5. Sufism gave rise to numerous monastic orders.

D. Essential Beliefs:

1. **Oneness of God.** Allah is not a proper noun in Arabic, even as God is not a proper noun in English. It is simply the word for God.
2. The roots of Muhammad’s understanding of Allah lie in original monotheism as preserved in Judaism, Christianity, and in Arabian vestige.
   a. In terms of historical origin, Muslims and Christians worship the same God.
   b. In theological description, Muslims and Christians do not worship the same God when it comes to technical details. For Christians, they worship One God in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (not three substances but one substance in three persons; illustration of a Triangle whereby you have oneness and threeness at the same time).
3. Qur’an conception of Allah is strictly Unitarian: God is seen as one and one only. God is both transcendent and immanent but emphasis is one transcendence.
4. **Angels and Spirits:** Islam recognizes three other archangels and a large hosts of angels. There are many evil spirits (the jinn) that are led by the devil. They are relatively weak entities but can cause trouble by causing physical harm and tempt believer into compromise and disobedience to Allah.
5. **Folk Islam is highly animistic.**
6. **Prophets:** According to Islam, from time to time, God has disclosed his will to the world through prophets.
   a. These prophets are human beings who have won victory in their struggle against sin. God has directed them by his inspiration.
b. A prophet (nabi) is also considered to be an apostle (rasul) if he provides a book for his community to live by.

c. All the prophets preach the same basic message of submission to the one God and impending judgment.

d. No definitive lists of prophets but most of the prophets mentioned in Qur’an (which number 24) include Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, and Jesus.

e. Qur’an refers to three prophets—Hud, Shu’aib, and Salih... they are not biblical but their roots may be in the independent Arabian monotheistic tradition.

7. It is believed that all the prophets taught the same message Muhammad taught but subsequently people tampered with the writings left behind and distorted the truth of the original message (e.g., Christ says He is the Son of God).

8. Muhammad had great respect for the prophet Jesus with the Qur’an affirming virgin birth, many miracles, and ascension. But Islam believes that Jesus was not God and that Jesus did not die on the cross. It is unthinkable to think of any notion of the Trinity or Christ’s being the Son of God and that God would allow one of his messengers to die a death of shame and torture. Muslims also reject Christ’s substitutionary atonement as barbaric and contrary to the nature of God. Some believe that Simon of Cyrene was accidentally crucified in Christ’s stead.

9. **Eschatology:** For some Muslims the line of prophets will be completed only when the Mahdi appears. Shiite Islam expects the last in each specific line of imams (fifth, seventh, or twelfth, depending upon on the school) to return as the Mahdi. Despite occasional calls or identifications of the Mahdi, anyone claiming to be the Mahdi will likely be rejected than accepted.

10. **Future Judgment:** On the appointed day (known only to God), the trumpet will sound and a general resurrection will follow. The living and the dead will appear before God and everyone will be confronted with the deeds done in life. All persons will be given a book in which has been recorded all of their deeds. The wicked will receive their books in their left hands (traditionally the unclean hand) while the righteous will hold their books in their right hands.

11. **Soteriology:** Basis of judgment will be a sincere submission to Allah’s will. Did the person recognize God alone and endeavor to live by Allah’s commands? Merely professing Islam is not enough; in fact some of the severest punishments are reserved
for hypocrites. Allah is considered to be “most gracious” and most merciful.” So, Christians or Jews who sincerely live by all the right obligations may enter heaven. There is even a hadith that says that Muhammad may intercede on behalf of some people.

12. Islam focuses on heaven as a reward and on hell as punishment. In contrast to Christianity, Islam is not a redemptive religion. Whereas the Christian’s faith in Christ provides absolution from all sins, the Muslim’s confession of faith is only the first step in a life that may eventually be rewarded with heaven.

13. Islam does not guarantee certainty of salvation. Claims of assurance are presumptuous because that attitude is seen as dictating what God must do. But God’s mercy gives reason for optimism, but never complete assurance.

14. Heaven and Hell: Depicted in Qur’an as places of physical pleasure and torment. The descriptions are symbolic.

15. Sovereignty-Decree of God: Allah is sovereign; All that Allah wills comes to pass. Whatever Allah does not will does not happen. This is the core belief on the infallible decree of God. But freedom-predestination debate is a continue issue because humans are responsible for their choices in view of future judgment.

16. Five Pillars:

a. Confession (Shahada): There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the apostle of God. In English the idea is “There is no God but Allah.” Strict Monotheism. Also, the Muslim commits to the undivided allegiance to God’s commandments. Thus to confess this statement is to submit to all other teachings of Islam. All that is necessary to become a Muslim is to repeat the confession and mean it. This act does not guarantee salvation but it is the first step on the road to salvation. The shahada is a part of all crucial junctures of life (e.g., newborn baby to the last sounds of a dying person). This confession encompasses all of Muslim’s life.

b. Prayer (Salat):

1. Sunrise
2. Noon
3. Mid-afternoon
4. Sunset
5. One hour after sunset.
6. Some places there is an additional prayer time, set for midmorning, and serves as a time for people to undertake additional devotion for special concerns.

c. Fasting (Sawn):
1. Fast during daylight hours during Ramadan.
2. No form of refreshment may be taken for the entire day, not even a sip of water.
3. All forms of indulgence are forbidden (including sexual relations and various forms of entertainment).

d. Almsgiving (Zakat): Practice regular charity but does not specify formal procedures. 2.5 percent of any net profit (not gross income).

e. Pilgrimage (Hajj): Last month of Islamic calendar is called al-hajj: official period of pilgrimage.
1. Applies to both men and women.
2. May designate someone else do it on your behalf if unable to make it.
3. Powerful emotional impact.
4. Honorary titles given to those who go (e.g., Hajji).
5. First component: Before entering Mecca, Muslims must enter a state of purity. Meth bathe, shave their heads, and don two triangular pieces of linen, their only clothing-which symbolizes ritual cleanliness and equality. Women wear traditional Islamic robe and veil.
6. Second component: First required act of walking around the ka'ba seven times.
7. Third component: running between Marwa and Safa. These two points are part of the structure of the grand mosque now and are connected by a long hallway. The pilgrim emulates the jog between the two sites seven times. Before leaving this area, pilgrim may also have water from Zamzan to drink. See, according to tradition, Abraham expelled Hagar who ran frantically back and forth between two hills.
known as Marwa and Safa until angel provided her with water from the well Zamzam.

8. Fourth Component: Greater Pilgrimage whereby the entire mass moves out of the city of Mecca. On the ninth day of the month of al-hajj, they assemble on the Plain of Arafat at the foot of the Mount of Mercy (where Muhammad delivered his last sermon). From the afternoon prayer until sunset, the pilgrims stand in the presence of Allah-meditating, praying, reading the Qur’an, chanting, and so forth. This “day of “standing” is considered the spiritual high point of the pilgrimage. That evening, the company moves back to the little town of Mina, half way between Mecca and Arafat. All of the pilgrims live in a tent city for about three days. In the evening animals (sheep or goats) are slaughtered as offering s to God and are consumed in joyous feasts. Muslims do not offer these sacrifices as atonement for sin. They are expressions of gratitude, commemorating Abraham’s sacrificing an animal as a substitute for his son Ishmael (Not Isaac, as in the Bible).

9. Sixth Component: Stoning the devil. The pilgrims take turns throwing stones at three pillars representing the devil (Iblis). Each pilgrim is supposed to throw nine rocks at these pillars.

10. Seventh component: Pilgrims moves back to Mecca, walks around the ka’ba one more time, and the pilgrimage is complete.