



# Ahmadiyya

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## WHAT IS AHMADIYYA?

- Ahmadiyya (or Ahmadis, or the Ahmadi) follow the same holy scriptures and teachings as Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. The key difference is they believe the promised messiah was Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) of Qadian, India. He claimed to be the expected reformer of the latter days and the “awaited one” of the world’s religions (the words Messiah and Mahdi are also used). His mission was to revive the peaceful teachings of Islam and “engender in people’s hearts the love of God and the duty to serve mankind”.
- Its roots are in the Punjab and, at the time of the partition of India and Pakistan, most Ahmadis moved to Pakistan. [Ahmadiyya](#) is now established in more than 210 countries worldwide, and since 1984, its global headquarters are in the United Kingdom. The community opened its [Mubarak Mosque](#) in May 2019 in Tilford, Surrey.
- In 1914, the movement split and the smaller Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement for the Propagation of Islam was formed, which believes Ghulam Ahmad was a reformer, but not a prophet.

## WHAT MAKES AHMADIYYA NEWSWORTHY?

- Probably the most important thing for journalists to note about Ahmadiyya is how contested the community is. Members of the community say they are Muslims and characterise their tradition as a reformist movement within Islam. Most Muslims say the Ahmadi are not Muslims, and they may oppose or oppress Ahmadis as heretics or apostates.
- Language is tricky for those writing about the community, because calling them “Ahmadi Muslims” or referring to their opponents as “other Muslims” implies that the Ahmadi are, in fact, Muslims, but this is precisely the theological point that most Muslims dispute.
- Conversely, headlines that ask, “Are Ahmadis really Muslim?” buy into the logic of orthodox Islam, thereby helping to marginalise Ahmadis. There is no clear, easy “neutral” language to use about the community, but word choices suggest picking sides, and this has implications for communities in the orbit of Islam. Some Muslims may use the word “Mirza’i” or “Qadiani” – these refer to the founder (Mirza) and the place of his birth (Qadian), and both are considered derogatory and should not be used.

- There are several points of distinction between these camps, but the most important one, and probably the easiest to understand, is their beliefs about the leader, Ghulam Ahmad. By claiming to be a prophet, he contravened a core belief in Islam, coming from the Qur'an, that Muhammad is the last prophet. The Ahmadiyya make a distinction between prophets who bear the law (of whom Muhammad is the last) and non-legislative prophets, including Ghulam Ahmad. They interpret the Qur'anic text that translates from Arabic as "the seal of the prophets" to mean "the greatest of the prophets", not "the last of the prophets".
- For most Muslims, this is a step too far, whereas for Ahmadis, it gives significance to the reform message of their founder. This dispute has led to plenty of social unrest abroad and in the UK, with religious beliefs justifying discrimination or violence.

## COMMUNITY ORGANISATION

- The community, established by Ahmad in 1889, is led by a system of Khilafat (spiritual leadership). The community's fifth khalifa (caliph) is Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad (born 1950). Ahmadis refer to him as His Holiness Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, or just His Holiness. Masroor Ahmad was elected as the community's fifth caliph in 2003. He is the nephew of the fourth caliph, Mirza Tahir Ahmad. Tahir Ahmad was elected in 1982, and two years later he left Pakistan to Britain after President Zia-ul-Haq outlawed public expression of Ahmadiyya.
- Zia-ul-Haq's law followed a constitutional amendment in 1974 which declared the Ahmadi as non-Muslim. Indonesia passed what is called the "joint decree" in 2008 prohibiting public activities and professions of faith from Ahmadiyya, considering these "deviant from the principal teachings of Islam". Thus, the two countries with the highest Muslim populations, severely restrict this religious community and its practitioners.
- Conflicts are not as open in UK, though one can still find pamphlets and posters attacking Ahmadiyya in certain UK mosques. In April 2019, [OFCOM fined](#) Channel 44, an Urdu-language television station, for comments about Ahmadiyya from a guest. Ofcom found that Channel 44 breached three clauses in its code, covering offensive material, hate speech, and derogatory treatment of religions.
- British Ahmadis will sometimes speak of discrimination in mosques, working in shops and restaurants, and even just walking in the street. The most serious of such events was in March 2019 when Asad Shah was stabbed to death at his shop in Glasgow. Tanveer Ahmed, from Bradford, admitted murder and was jailed for a minimum 27 years.

- Since Shah’s murder, groups have pressured Muslim organisations to oppose the oppression of Ahmadiyya. The Muslim Council of Britain condemned “all forms of intimidation and violence against people of all faiths and none”, but it did not offer to include the Ahmadiyya among the groups it represents. A [statement](#) from the council said: “Muslims should not be forced to class Ahmadis as Muslims if they do not wish to do so, at the same time we call on Muslims to be sensitive, and above all, respect people irrespective of belief or background.”

## AHMADI BELIEFS

- Ahmadis follow the same five pillars of Islam as most Muslims, as well as the Six Articles of Faith and the same holy scripture, the Qur’an. In terms of jurisprudence, they tend to follow the Hanafi school of Islamic law. The founder’s mission was to revive the peaceful teachings of Islam and “engender in people’s hearts the love of God and the duty to serve mankind”. The community currently emphasises peacefulness and a spiritual interpretation of jihad, and they espouse the tagline “Love for all, hatred for none”.

## JALSA SALANA

- Jalsa Salana, the annual gathering of the Ahmadiyya community, is billed as the UK’s largest Muslim convention. In early August 2019, it brought together 35,000 men, women and children at Oakland Farm, East Worldham, Hampshire, to hear speeches from leaders, including the caliph.
- During the three days of the convention, the caliph spoke of the importance of vigilance to overcome “the long shadows of war and conflict that hover above us”. He prayed for worldwide tolerance by all faiths and for the world to unite “to see the best in humanity and use each other’s strengths and skills to build a better world for our children and cultivate lasting peace in society”.

## INFORMATION AND COMMENT:

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