

The Mosque

The mosque is the place of worship for Muslims. Like the synagogue for Jews and the church for Christians, Muslims gather at the mosque to pray in union. The most important gathering occurs each Friday, the Muslim Sabbath, when a sermon is given by a preacher, or imam. Unlike the priest or rabbi, the imam does not hold special status apart from other followers. Rather, he is elected by merit of his scholarship and dedication to Islam.

Most mosques are quite small, serving local populations. These are called *masjids*. Friday sermons are delivered at a larger, central mosque called a *jami'*. But a Muslim need not be at a mosque to pray. He or she can pray at home or at work. After all, it would be difficult to visit the mosque five times a day.

The Features of a Mosque

Traditional mosques are built around a large dome. The interior is plainly furnished and the floor is covered with prayer rugs. This allows the followers to prostrate themselves in prayer. Most mosques also provide either running water or pools used for ablutions (ritual washing). Interestingly, nomadic Muslims who wander the desert are permitted to wash with sand.

When Muslims pray in a mosque, they face a *mihrab*, a small alcove or niche, marking the direction of Mecca. Another common feature of a mosque is a *minbar*, a pulpit for the imam who preaches the Friday sermon. The minbar vary in size and stature, depending on the mosque.

Although mosques are plainly furnished, the walls and ceilings are often inlaid with beautifully designed inscriptions of the Koran. The designs are done in calligraphy, a prominent Islamic art form.

Another important feature of a mosque is a tall, slender tower called a *minaret* or a *ma'dhana*. Minarets vary in their architecture and size. Each morning, the *adhan*, call to prayer, is chanted from atop the minaret by a person known as a *muezzin*. The call is repeated five times daily. In most large cities, the muezzin's voice comes through a loudspeaker, filtering through the streets.

Extension:

The following is a list of five famous mosques around the world. Using an encyclopedia or other resource book, write a brief report about the history and architecture of one of the mosques.

1. Blue Mosque (Turkey)
2. Masjid-i-Shah (Iran)
3. The Great Mosque (Iraq)
4. Central Mosque (London)
5. Cano Mosque (Nigeria)

