

Key concepts

- The masjid (mosque) is the building used for worship by Muslims. The word literally means a place of prostration, where prayers take place. Mosques vary in size and have several functions – understanding them, the differences and the definitions of features is the focus of this section.
- In the UK today, masjids have various religious, social and functions. Understanding these and the differences between masjids nowadays and the first mosques.
- With the Hijrah, the move from Makkah to Madinah, the Muslims became free to worship openly and built the first mosques for that purpose, at Quba and Madinah. Muhammad began the practice of Friday prayers (Jummah), in which the community gathered together to hear a sermon (khutbah) and pray in place of the normal midday prayers on Fridays.
- The first mosques were also a place for education of new Muslims, for peace and reconciliation, and for meeting and strengthening the bonds of brotherhood between members of the community (Ummah) of emigrants from Makkah and residents of Madinah.
- Many other functions of the mosque evolved: they were a centre for collecting and reciting the Qur'an, for weddings, funerals, celebrations of Id and some even had overnight facilities for pilgrims along the route to Makkah.

- Features of the mosque such as the minaret tower, for the call to prayer, mimbar for the sermon and the onion dome shape for acoustics may have originated in other cultural traditions and became incorporated into mosque designs.
- In the UK today, mosques are also centres for scholars to meet and decide opinions, host interfaith events and open days, teach the young in madrassah schools and some may even have libraries and social facilities.
- Mosques vary from large, recognisable purpose-built designs, to simple prayer spaces where a congregation (jamaat) can be formed to pray, sometimes in a converted house.
- Different sects and groups have their own mosques, including traditional Sunni, Shi'a and some reformist – where men and women pray in mixed rows.

Key quotes

- 'Wherever the hour of prayer overtakes you, you shall perform it. That place is a masjid.' (Hadith)
- 'There are no priests in Islam. No monopoly of spiritual knowledge or special holiness intervenes between believer and God ... Each Muslim is his or her own priest, no individual being denied the possibility of drawing near to God through his or her own faith.' (Maqsood)
- 'Many problems surrounding the current role of mosques stem from the use of imported Imams and their catastrophic lack of understanding of the cultural and social norms of the host country.' (Maqsood)
- 'The vast majority of mosques currently serve as places of worship, for breaking the fast during Ramadan, and little else. Whilst these services were considered a priority some 20/30 years ago ... mosques must [now] develop to meet the changing needs of the community and its new generations.' (Muslim parliament)

Key words

Hijrah	Masjid	Musalla	Madrassah
Khutba	Id-ul-Fitr	Qiblah	Tajwid

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key questions, arguments, and debates

1. Prostration as the most important purpose of the masjid. Prostration is key to the five daily prayers, and completing them is one of the five pillars, compulsory for all Muslims. However, learning how to pray is a pre-requisite, and being motivated to adhere to this demanding pillar of practice could be achieved through other functions of the mosque. So, this issue hinges around the personal interpretation of what is 'most important' in influencing each Muslim.
2. Whether the masjid today has maintained its original function as that of the first masjid established by Muhammad in Madinah. There are similarities and differences with the first mosque: style of architecture is different; conduct of prayers is similar. Providing support and education is partly similar; providing strength to the community could be said to be a different context but some similarity for Muslims who have migrated to different countries in the present day. A judgment should be made about the extent to which the functions today are similar to the original.