

AMJAD M. HUSSAIN

Islam for new Muslims
AN EDUCATIONAL GUIDE





*IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE
MOST MERCIFUL*

*All praise is to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, and peace
and blessings be upon the Prophet Muhammad, his family
and his companions.*

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ISLAM FOR NEW MUSLIMS AN EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is intended as an introduction to Islam for new Muslims. Although there are many religious educational guides for Muslims, there are very few contemporary books that are specifically for Muslims that have newly embraced Islam. It is a text exclusively written to assist the person who has recently embraced Islam. In other words, it is a book that is directed towards those who have already been convinced of the truth of Islam and, hence, no arguments are presented herein to attempt to convince the reader of the truth of Islam. Its purpose is to educate the reader, i.e. you, regarding the basics of Islam in a clear and understandable manner in order to give you an impression of how a Muslim is expected to live his or her life. The purpose of this is to highlight the fact that once a person embraces Islam there is still a wealth of education and understanding that the new Muslim requires. Primarily, the new Muslim needs to understand the foundations of his or her new faith accurately and comprehensibly; they require guidance concerning the most important practices of their faith, including a good awareness of what deeds he or she must perform and those he or she must avoid as a Muslim. Therefore, this book intends to present to the reader a clear and summarized description of beliefs, acts of worship, a brief account of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him¹), the Qur'an and the Sunnah, religious values and standards of conduct, Muslim family life, the calendar of Islam, some of the virtues of Islam and frequently asked questions regarding Islam. Furthermore, the book will introduce to the reader the general meaning of Islam, what reverting back to Islam entails, the main differences that exist between the faith of Islam and other various religions and contesting some of the most common misconceptions of Islam that are unfortunately being spread far and wide. It is important to note that the reader is reminded and encouraged by the author of this book to seek further knowledge regarding Islam through reading additional books and attending religious circles after reading this book; throughout the book recommendations have been made in the footnotes for further reading for the benefit of the New Muslims regarding certain subjects.

1. The Arabic phrase is *ṣallā Allāh 'alayhi wa-sallam* and in the Qur'an Muslims are asked to pray to God to confer peace and blessings upon the Prophet whenever mentioning his name (see Q. 33:56).

WHAT IS ISLAM?

Today Islam is one of the largest religions in the world claiming, according to a range of estimates, 1.8 billion adherents, more than one fifth of the population of the world. Throughout history Islam has been spread to many nations of the world. In the contemporary world, the Muslims are of many races and include almost all nationalities in the world. They all agree with this simple statement “*La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammadu Rasul Allah*” (There is no god except Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah). This simple statement of belief in One God and believing that Muhammad is His messenger is the starting point of all that is Islam. In Arabic, the word *Islam* derives from the consonantal root that consists of the three letters *s-l-m* and it means both ‘peace’ and ‘submission to the One God’. Muslim theologians have long noted the significance of this double meaning; specifically, when one submits to God, one finds peace. The term *Muslim* is also derived from the same root as *Islam* and signifies, ‘the person who submits to the One God’. The word *Islam* means ‘submission’ or ‘surrender’ and a Muslim is the ‘one who surrenders’ (to the will of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted), not in the sense of defeat or subjugation but in the sense of the total devotion of the heart and the mind to God and to the living of one’s life accordingly. There is no aspect of an individual or social life that Islam does not touch and transform with regards to the human being’s responsibility to Allah. Islam is a faith that encompasses all spheres of life, social and personal. Islam provides a social and religious structure and framework that governs issues such as family life, law and order, ethics, dress and cleanliness, as well as religious rituals and observance. Islam requires all Muslims to have the belief and the responsibility of performing good deeds; all such deeds are defined by Islam. Basically, due to these beliefs and good deeds a certain righteous attitude should develop in a Muslim towards one’s own self, towards other human beings, towards other creatures and towards Allah, may He be glorified and exalted.

It is important for a new Muslim to know and recognize that Islam is the original and the primordial religion. Islam is a religion that did not commence with the revelation of the Qur’an to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), but rather it is the last revelation in a series of revealed forms of faith that began with the very first human being and have continued over time under various names. Moreover, the new Muslim should understand that Allah, may He be glo-





rified and exalted, conferred upon all human beings an innate nature, which in Arabic is known as *fitrah*. This means that we are born with an awareness of His existence, an innate knowledge that there is a non-corporeal transcendent Being, who created us and the whole of universe. It is for this very reason that any human being that embraces Islam is known as a ‘Revert’ and not as a ‘Convert’, because he or she is returning to their innate nature of recognizing and worshipping Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. Thus, Allah,

may He be glorified and exalted, has since the beginning of the creation of the human being, sent us messengers and prophets to inform us and remind us of Him and His will. In all these cases, there is a similar and familiar core message that, ‘there is no god except Allah’ and that no idols, natural forces or any human being should be considered worthy of worship’. The first messenger was Adam (peace be upon him) and others followed him such as Abraham, Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them all). Islam teaches us that there is continuity in the teachings brought to us by the messengers of God throughout history; that it was people themselves who in the course of time altered and distorted the messages left by the messengers of Allah. Therefore Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, continued to send messengers to remind people of the true teachings of their Creator; finally completing this process by sending the Prophet Muhammad as His last Messenger. The Prophet Muhammad left behind him two primary sources of Islam which may guide Muslims in their quest for peace through submission to Allah. The first is the ‘*Qur’an*’, which is the literal word of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. The second is the ‘*Sunnah*’ (‘way of acting’ or ‘custom’) of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), which is preserved in the *Hadith* literature (records of reports concerning the Prophet’s words, tacit approvals or disapprovals and deeds).

The religion of Islam may broadly be divided into three aspects: belief, acts of worship and spiritual conduct. This is the division between *īmān* (faith), *islām* (submission through actions²) and *ihsān* (best conduct). An easy way to understand these three terms is to point out that, *īmān* deals with what Muslims believe in, *islām* relates to what activities Muslims perform and *ihsān* concerns itself with an awareness of the divine at all times and an excellence of conduct that the Muslim should instill in himself or herself. These three terms are never seen as entirely

2. It is important to note here that the word *Islam* is used to describe the individual Muslim’s response to God, as well as being the name of the religion itself.

distinct from each other and their interrelationship is indicated in the following Qur'anic phrase, 'those who believe and do good deeds', which refers to the believers. Although the terms are different they are inseparable; *īmān* cannot be distinct from *Islām*, very much like the inside and the outside of a single object are inseparable. One *hadith* that is often quoted to explain this example is, '*Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good but if it is spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart.*'³ This has been interpreted to mean that the body refers to the *Islām* aspect and the heart represents the *īmān* aspect. The third aspect, *ihsān* is also closely connected to the other two parts as the spiritual feature: it brings the additional element of continuous awareness of God's presence to the Muslim's faith and practice.

A constructive way to explain the relationship between the three aspects mentioned above i.e. the practices required of all Muslims (*islām*), the six articles of faith (*īmān*) and spiritual awareness of the Divine (*ihsān*) is to turn to the famous tradition of Gabriel. It is narrated that one day the Angel Gabriel appeared at a gathering attended by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), disguised as a man with a handsome face, black hair and adorning a white robe. This visitor asked the Prophet to inform him about *islām*. The Prophet replied that Islam is what is known as the declaration of faith (*shahāda*); meaning, witnessing that there is no deity but God and that Muhammad is His Messenger, performing the five daily prayers (*salah*), paying prescribed alms (*zakah*), observing the Ramadan fast (*ṣawm*) and making the pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*). These five deeds are known as the five pillars of Islam. Gabriel affirmed that his answer was correct. Gabriel then proceeded to ask the Prophet to tell him about faith (*īmān*). The Prophet answered that faith is to believe in God, His angels, His Books, His prophets, the Day of Judgment and the Divine Decree, both the good of it and the evil of it. Once again, Gabriel affirmed that the Prophet's answer was correct. Then followed the third question, in which Gabriel asked the Prophet regarding *ihsān*. As before, the Prophet confidently replied, "*That you worship Allah as if you are seeing Him, for though you don't see Him, verily, He sees you.*" After hearing this response the Angel Gabriel departed and the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) informed his companions that Gabriel had come to teach them about the religion of Islam.⁴

New Muslims should recognize that *īmān*, *islām* and *ihsān* are the three core aspects of their religion, that work together virtually as one. Furthermore, they are also required to know the articles of faith, or 'creed' ('*aqīda*', pl. '*aqā'id*' which are all mentioned in the Qur'an and the Hadith. In the Qur'an, the first five articles of faith are mentioned explicitly: "*It is righteousness—to believe in Allah and the Last*

3. Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih, Book 2, Hadith 45.

4. Sahih Muslim, Book 1, Hadith 1

*Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers.”*⁵ In another place in the Qur’an, four articles are mentioned sequentially: “*The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith. Each one (of them) believes in Allah, His Angels, His Scriptures and His Messengers.*”⁶ As for the last article of faith, the divine decree is described in the Qur’an as follows: “*Say: Nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us: He is our protector*”, and “*On Allah let the believers put their trust.*”⁷

REVERTING TO ISLAM

Before continuing any further, at this junction the author would firstly like to convey to the reader his heartfelt congratulations on embracing Islam and becoming a Muslim. It is a great blessing from Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, that He has given such individuals the ability and the opportunity to see the truth and the light of Islam. A new Muslim—and, in fact, every Muslim—should always be thankful to Allah and praise Him that He has blessed us with this ever-important knowledge and understanding of His religion. By reverting to Islam, the new Muslim has entered into a new sphere of life that is most likely very different from his or her previous life and how he or she viewed life itself. From this new perspective, the new Muslim will grow in the knowledge and the faith of Islam; he or she will be able to appreciate the blessings and the beauty of the Truth. Insha’Allah, his or her love for Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, and for the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) will reach its zenith.

One of the main challenges that new Muslims come across when they embrace Islam is the question of whether they are obliged to change their individual names. Primarily, the answer is that it is not necessary to change your name after becoming a Muslim. Any name that has a good meaning is acceptable and adaptable in Islam. Notwithstanding, if the new Muslim prefers to give himself or herself an already known Muslim name to support their new Muslim identity then it is completely the wish, the happiness and the of the individual. It is important to note here that according to the *Sunnah* it is recommended to change your original name if it has an undignified or unbecoming meaning. It is reported in a hadith that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, “*You will be called on the Day of Resurrection by your names and the names of your fathers, so have good names.*”⁸ During the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) he did not require people to

5. Q. 2:177. English translation of the Qur’an.

6. Q. 2:285.

7. Q. 11:51.

8. Sunan Abu Dawud. Book 43, Hadith 176

change their names when they accepted Islam by his hand. He only recommended changing those names that carried erroneous meanings, or such names that had connotations of ideas and concepts rejected by Islam.

It is important for the new Muslim to know that in Islam there is a belief based upon the Qur'an and Hadith, that all human beings are created with an innate nature that has an inarticulate disposition, or awareness of God (*fitrah*). In the Qur'an, Allah has said, *"When your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, 'Am I not your Lord?' and they replied, Yes, We bear witness".* So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, *"We were not aware of this" ...*⁹ The covenant that Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, took from the progeny of Adam in the previous life has not been erased from our essence and the children of Adam are always in some sense aware of the existence of their Creator. It is this *fitrah* (natural inclination/innate human nature) which instilled in our souls and hearts drives us to believe in Allah and creates the longing in us to know Him. In fact, at one point it may reach a level of such urgency that it pushes and compels us to acknowledge that the Creator, may He be glorified and exalted, is the only perfect Lord, Who bestows His blessings upon us and upon all other created beings. This means that the *fitrah* is based upon an event in the 'Domain of the Spirits' (*Alam al-Arwa*) where all human beings agreed to a covenant with God on the Day of *Alastu*. Therefore, when an individual embraces Islam, he or she is simply returning to their innate nature; they have simply been reminded of the Covenant they took with God before they were born into this world. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is known to have stated, *"Every child is born on the fitrah and it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian..."*¹⁰



As a final point in this section, the new Muslim should know that when he or she embraced Islam, Allah forgave all his or her previous sins and wrong deeds. It is reported that a man called Amr came to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and said, "Give me your right hand so that I may give you my pledge of loyalty". The Prophet stretched out his right hand but Amr withdrew his hand. The Prophet said; "What has happened to you, O Amr?" He replied; "I intend to lay down a condition". The Prophet asked him what condition he intended

9. Q. 7:172

10. Muwatta Malik, Book 16, Hadith 53



to lay down. Amr said: “That Allah forgives my sins.” The Prophet told him, “*Didn’t you know that converting to Islam erases all previous sins?*”¹¹ After embracing Islam, the new Muslim will be recompensed for his or her good and bad deeds according to the following saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), “*If a person accepts Islam, such that his Islam is good, Allah will decree reward for every good deed that he did before, and every bad deed that he did before will be erased. Then*

after that will come the reckoning; each good deed will be rewarded ten times up to seven hundred times. And each bad deed will be recorded as it is, unless Allah, the Mighty and Sublime, forgives it.”¹²

In addition to all issues mentioned above, the new revert to Islam will no doubt come across many concerns and inquiries relating to the commencement of his or her life as a new Muslim, such as, the status of the marriage that took place before Islam, family relations and so on. These cases will be dealt with, topic by topic, in the individual chapters of this book. Before we commence our journey towards the main chapters of the book, the reader will briefly be informed about the main difference that exists between Islam and other faiths; in addition he or she will be notified about the most common misconceptions that exist in the present era regarding Islam.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ISLAM AND OTHER FAITHS

Firstly, it is important to note that Islam is the only major religion that has been specifically named by a revealed scripture. Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, states in the Qur’an, “This day I have perfected for you your religion, and have bestowed upon you My bounty in full measure, and have been pleased to assign for you Islam as your religion.”¹³ All the other well-known religions were named by the followers themselves, either after an individual figure due to a historical context, or due to a geographical setting. For instance, no term such as, ‘Judaism’ is found in the Hebrew Bible. In the Hebrew Bible Jewish people are sometimes called Hebrews and the Children of Israel/Israelites (*b’nei yisrael*). The Children

11. Sahih Muslim, Book 1, Hadith 228

12. Sunan an-Nasa’i, Book 47, Hadith 14

13. Q. 5:6

of Israel began to be referred to as Judeans (*Yehudim*) based upon the name Judah (*Yehuda*), son of the Prophet Jacob (peace be upon him) and, subsequently, based upon the historical fact that since the sixth century before common era their nation was known as the kingdom of Judea (*Yehuda*). Much later these terms entered the English language as 'Judaism'. The name of the religion of Christianity originated in the Greek language from the word '*Christos*', the equivalent for the Hebrew term '*Masiah*' (Messiah), the entitlement of the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him). Earlier sources indicate that the early followers of the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) were known simply as members of the 'Way'. Only when this religion was spread outside the Hebrew speaking community, amongst the Greek speaking communities, did the followers begin to use the term Christianity for their faith. Originally in the Indian subcontinent, 'Hinduism' was referred to by the adherents of this tradition as '*vaidika dharma*', specifically named after their scriptures the '*Vedas*'. The term, 'Hinduism' is in fact a very recently coined umbrella term, invented by the British during the 19th century, after the Indus River in India, to refer to the religious traditions of the majority of the Indian people. Finally, Buddhism as a faith was specifically named as '*Dharma of Buddha*' by Buddha Siddhartha Gautama's followers after his death. All the above examples of the names of the different religions highlight that only Islam has a divine endorsement for being the religion specifically chosen by Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, for all of humankind. In fact, during the early 19th century it was common for missionaries and Orientalists to refer to Islam as *Mohamedanism* and to Muslims as *Mohamedans*. They tried to allocate a name to it in much the same manner as the other main world religions had received their names. However, this is very unacceptable to the divine faith of Islam named by God himself.¹⁴

The other main difference between Islam and other religions is that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was sent by Allah for all of humankind. Whereas the Orthodox Jews consider themselves to be a chosen race and believe that their message is meant exclusively for themselves. Thus, many orthodox Jews do not believe in proselytizing their faith. The New Testament also makes it clear that Jesus' mission was to the Tribes of Israel, however, it is evident that later Christians made it an obligation upon themselves to propagate their faith to all of humankind. The Hindus believe that all people should follow their *dharma* of their birth i.e. the religion you are born into; due to this belief they do not believe in any kind of proselytizing. Buddhism on the other hand, preaches a way of life where the existence of God is not important; instead, they focus only on the human being's release from this world. In contrast to the above mentioned examples, Allah has decreed that Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is His final

14. Amjad M. Hussain, *The Study of Religions: An Introductions*, İstanbul: IFAV, 2015.

messenger and has been sent to all humankind. Allah says, “*Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the seal of the Prophets. And Allah is Ever All-Aware of everything*”¹⁵ Obviously, there are many other differences between Islam and the other world religions but at this point two main concepts need to be well-defined for the new Muslim.¹⁶ Primarily, that Islam is the only sanctioned divine religion; secondly, that submission to Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, can only be achieved through the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), who is the last Messenger of Allah. Let us now focus on the most common contemporary misconceptions regarding Islam.

DEBUNKING COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS OF ISLAM

In this section the author will attempt to address some of the main misconceptions regarding Islam. Firstly, there is the misconception that is widely propagated that all Muslims are Arabs. However, the Arabs make up only 15% of the world’s Muslim population. As a matter of fact the Middle East comes in third, after Asia coming in at first (69%) and Africa (27%) coming in at second, with nations that have the most Muslim populations. The second major misconception is that Muslims do not accept Jesus. Therefore, many people are astonished to discover that according to Muslim belief, Jesus is one of the greatest messengers of God. Moreover, it is not possible to be a Muslim without believing in the virgin birth and the many miracles of Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus is mentioned numerous times in many verses of the Qur’an and is often used as an example of good virtue and character. The main difference between Christianity and Islam is that Muslims do not believe that Jesus is the son of God.

A further misconception concerning Islam is that it is intolerant towards other religions. ‘Kill the infidel’ is the phrase many people believe is the ideology that Muslims have towards the non-Muslims. In contrast, the truth is that Islam has always held other faiths in great respect and allowed their followers the freedom to practice their religion in peace. In the Qur’an, it is stated: “*Allah does not forbid you, with regards to those who fight you not for religion nor drive you away out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them, for Allah loves those who are just.*”¹⁷ There are numerous historical examples of Muslim tolerance towards other faiths, such as, when Caliph Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) granted freedom to all religious communities in Jerusalem and said that the inhabitants of

15. Q. 33:40

16. For further reading on this subject please see Amjad M. Hussain, *The Study of Religions: An Introductions*, Istanbul: IFAV, 2015.

17. Q. 60:8

his city were safe and that their places of worship would never be taken away from them. He also set up courts that were designated to the non-Muslim minorities.

A further common contemporary misconception based upon the above mentioned issue is that Islam promotes violence and terrorism. On the contrary, the truth is that Islam prohibits terrorism; killing an innocent person is considered a great crime in Islam. In the Qur'an it is stated, *"For this reason, We made it a law for the children of Israel that the killing of a person for reasons other than legal retaliation or for stopping corruption in the land is as great a sin as murdering all of humankind. However, to save a life would be as great a virtue as to save all of humankind..."*¹⁸ In relation to this topic and the views regarding it, many people may have heard of the Arabic term, 'Jihad', which is misinterpreted to mean 'holy war' when in actuality it means 'to strive, to apply oneself, to struggle, and to persevere'. Jihad can be personal or it can be a community of persons struggling against oppression. In essence, it means to be closer to Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, in lifestyle and community. This type of struggle (*jihad*) is to ensure that a peaceful and equitable community continues to exist. Defensive means are acceptable to safeguard the wellbeing of the community; however, offensive aggression is strictly prohibited. It is famously reported that Muhammad returned from a battle and said, *"We have returned from the lesser jihad (going into battle) to the greater jihad (the struggle of the soul)."* This means that a Muslim's struggle against his or her self is far more important than the *jihad* of going into war. It is important to also know that martyrdom in Islam is not only when a person dies at war. A person who dies while performing the pilgrimage to Mecca, a woman who dies while giving birth, or even a person who drowns are all considered martyrs.

Another misconception based upon the misunderstanding mentioned above, is the notion that Islam was spread by the sword. There is no record in history that shows people being forced at the point of the sword to convert to Islam. In fact, Muslim history has shown that once under Muslim rule, people of different faiths were allowed the freedom to profess, manifest, and practice their faith. For instance, it is a historical fact that while most of Persia became Muslim in a much shorter period after the conquest of the Muslims, most of the citizens of conquered eastern Byzantium (i.e. Middle East) did not begin to embrace Islam until the eighth century. According to the book *Late Antiquity, A Guide to the Post-Classical*



18. Q. 5:32

World, the Muslim population in the new Islamic realm (up to approximately 800 CE) was counted as a minority, around 5% of the whole. Accordingly, a Muslim population majority in the Middle East is considered to have occurred around the late ninth century.¹⁹ Similarly, the Muslims who spread Islam to the West, including Spain and Morocco, and all the way to India and China in the East, were too small and insignificant in their numbers to impose Islam on the large number of people in these regions.

Perhaps one of the most popular contemporary misconceptions in relation to Islam is that it guides its followers to oppress women, whereas, in actuality nothing can be further from the truth because Islam promotes women's rights. For instance, in the Qur'an Allah grants women freedoms that previous civilizations did not offer, such as, the right to inherit property, the opportunity to conduct business and to have access to knowledge. Despite such an emphasis on the rights and freedom of women in Islam, the oppression that many women face in Muslim countries today is an unfortunate result of degenerate and backward cultural traditions as opposed to the teachings of Islam. In the Muslim world today, the unfair persecution of women, the denial or violation of their basic rights, including their right to inherit property, is all too familiar to overlook. It should be noted that during pre-Islamic Arabia, women were considered as the property of men, and therefore, denied independence and freedom. The birth of a daughter in a family was considered humiliating and the practice of female infanticide was rampant. The verses in the Qur'an condemned such practices as female infanticide, and gave women rights considered inalienable. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is reported to have said, "*Indeed women are the partners of men*"²⁰ underscoring the equality of the two before Allah, especially in terms of rights and obligations. Thus, while there are cultures in the Muslim world that still implement harsh and unjust judgments against women, such practices are not inherent to Islam nor are they a part of the diverse Muslim culture that can trace its roots back fourteen centuries to the earliest Muslims in Arabia i.e. Mecca and Medina.

19. Bowersock, Brown and Grabar (eds.), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Post-Classical World*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press), 1999, p. 517.

20. Al-Tirmidhi, Book 1, Hadith 112.



THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM: THE SIX ARTICLES OF FAITH

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM: THE SIX ARTICLES OF FAITH

The six articles of faith mentioned in the Hadith of Gabriel are divided into three categories. The first category is *tawhīd* (meaning the oneness and uniqueness of God), which specifically refers to the first article of faith i.e. belief in Allah; it also refers to the last article of faith i.e. the divine decree. The second category is known as *risāla* or *nubuwwa* (meaning the message or prophecy); it consists of three of the articles of faith i.e. the belief in the angels, the prophets and messengers and the revealed scriptures of God. The third and last category is variously referred to as *al-Ākhira*, *al-Qiyāma* or *al-Ma'ād* (the Hereafter, the Judgment Day and the Return); it includes the belief in Paradise, Hell and Judgment Day. These six articles of faith are known in Arabic as, '*al-Imān al-Mufasssal*' (detailed expression of faith) which states, "I believe in God, in His angels, in His scriptures, in His messengers, in the Last Day (Day of Judgment) and in the resurrection after death, and the firm believe that whatever happens of good or bad is decided by God Almighty."

In many texts the basic beliefs are stated as six, just as it is in this book, where belief in the 'Day of Judgment' is included in the belief concerning 'Resurrection after Death'. It is important at this juncture for the new Muslim to know that the six articles of faith simply represent the main foundations of belief in Islam, which divide into many further branches. This can be compared to the five pillars of Islam, which are not the only obligatory actions in Islam, but rather they are a representation of the main foundations of Islam's obligatory acts of worship. Let us now proceed further to each one of the articles of faith.²¹

ALLAH

Allah is an Arabic term, which means the One God. By definition every Muslim believes in Allah, who is known to be the Creator and the Sustainer of all things that exist. Islam holds that Allah transcends the possession of any physical attributes, nor is He bound by any of the limitations of human beings or of anything else. He has no parents, no children, no associates and no partners. God is, however, described by His "ninety nine names", such as, the Creator, the Sustainer,

21. For further detailed study on the Muslim Creed see Amjad M. Hussain, *The Muslim Creed: A Contemporary Study of Theology*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 2016 and Abu Jafar al-Tahawi, *The Creed of Imam al-Tahawi*, Hamza Yusuf (tr.), New York: Zaytuna Institute, 2007.

the Merciful, the Light and the Forgiver and so on. Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says in the Qur'an, "*And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, 'We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our God and your God is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam).'*"²² For Muslims, Qur'an is the word of God and in it He repudiates many of the notions about Himself found in other religions. He speaks of Himself as the One, the Unique, the Absolute, the Infinite, the Origin and the End of all things; He is the Creator and the Sustainer; He is the Giver of life and death; thus, all things return to Him. Islam categorically declares God to be far beyond possessing any of the creaturely attributes which may be ascribed to Him nor does Islam consider Him to be bound by any of the limitations of human beings or anything else He has created. Thus, God is One as is stated it in the Qur'an, "*Say, He is God, the One, God the Eternal. He begot no one nor was He begotten. No one is comparable to Him*".²³

In the Qur'an the core experience of Islam is described as comprehending the unity of God (*tawhīd*), where His oneness and His uniqueness are highlighted. It is in the first pillar of Islam that one finds the main belief in Allah; that is the *shahāda*, which is testifying that, 'There is no god (divinity) but God and Muhammad is His messenger.' The first part of the *shahāda* and the first article of faith (to believe in One God) are inextricably linked to each other. To believe in Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, as it is stated in the first article of faith, means to negate any other deity and affirm the belief in the oneness and uniqueness of God. This declaration first removes the notion that anything in creation is worthy of being worshipped and then stresses the existence of God, Who is the only One Who deserves to be worshipped.

The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, should be understood simultaneously. In other words, no one single attribute can be understood separately; all ninety-nine attributes holistically explain the nature of God. God is not just the Most Merciful, the Loving, the Giver of life and the Forgiving; He is also the Just, the Distresser, the Giver of death and the Avenger. It is clear that these names could easily belong to two distinct categories; one is warm and embracing whilst the other one seems to instill a sense

22. Q. 24:46.

23. Q. 112:1-4.





of awe and fear. Yusuf Ali, the celebrated exegete and translator of the Qur'an, explained that the ninety-nine names merge into each other just like the night merges into the day. He wrote, "To some it may appear strange or even irreconcilable that God should be both Merciful and Just; that He should both protect His devotees and yet ask for their self-sacrifice; that he should command them to return good for evil, and yet permit retaliation under certain restrictions. But such thoughts are short-sighted. Do they not see many inconsis-

tencies in all life, all nature, and all creation? Why, even in such simple phenomena as night and day, the one merges into the other, and no one can tell when precisely the one begins and the other ends. Yet we can see in a rough sort of way that the one gives rest and the other activity, that the one reveals the beauties of the starry heavens and the other the splendor of the sun. In countless ways, we can see there the wisdom and the fine artistry of God. And there are subtle nuances and merging in nature that our intelligence can hardly penetrate".²⁴

As mentioned earlier, God in Islam is described in both the Qur'an and Hadith by the utilization of the ninety-nine names, such as, the Most Merciful, the Living, the Guide, the Holy, the Self-subsisting, the Wise, the Sovereign King and the Light. In the Qur'an Muslims are asked to use these names to call upon Him. Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says, "The most beautiful names belong to Allah: so call on him by them."²⁵ These names are also referred to as the attributes of God. These attributes are however understood in an absolute sense, free from human deficiencies and they are understood as being harmonious with the notion of an all-powerful God.²⁶

ANGELS

Muslims have been informed that Angels are created by Allah from light and that they have forms. However, they are not to be confused with the classical western images of angels in human form, with wings and halos, nor should they be misperceived with such notions as ghosts. The angels are creations entirely differ-

24. Q. 7:180, footnote no. 2841.

25. Q. 7:180.

26. For further detailed study on the subject of God please see Amjad M. Hussain, *The Muslim Creed: A Contemporary Study of Theology*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 2016, pp. 43-83.

ent from human beings, and unlike human beings, they have not been bestowed with free will. Angels are there to do the bidding of their Lord and have been assigned differing and widely ranging functions. For example, there is the angel of death, angels who record everything that transpires in a person's life and angels who were responsible for delivering revelations to Prophets.

The Arabic word for angel, '*malak*' (which literally means messenger or envoy), is mentioned ninety times in the Qur'an. Some of these verses clearly highlight the role of angels as messengers of God. Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says in the Qur'an, "God chooses messengers from angels and from men."²⁷ One understanding of this verse is that angels are sent as messengers to men, such as, Moses, John the Baptist and Jesus, who are then entrusted with the responsibility to serve as messengers to their fellow human beings. According to the Qur'an, if angels were clearly seen walking upon the earth then all the humans would be forced to believe in this phenomenon on the basis of its empirical proof, but a believer must be given free choice to believe in the unseen, that is the true test of life.²⁸ In the Qur'an, angels such as Gabriel, Michael, *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* are referred to by their individual names. In the Hadith corpus, there are other angels who are mentioned by name, such as, '*Azrā'īl*', the angel of death, *Munkar* and *Nakīr*, who question the dead in their graves; and *Isrāfīl*, who is responsible for blowing the horn on the Day of Judgment.²⁹ In both the Qur'an and Hadith, it is stated that each human being is accompanied by two angels who act as record keepers throughout the person's life, recording individual sins and good deeds.³⁰ This fact is acknowledged within the five daily prayers. All Muslims are required to end their prayers with the greeting, 'Peace be upon you,' while turning to the right and then to the left, acknowledging the existence of the two angels that are present with them.

The angels were created out of light and they occupy a plane of existence near to God that is beyond human perception. Angels are dissimilar to human beings in the sense that they do not eat, drink, procreate or sleep, and are devoid of sin. According to many statements in the Qur'an and *Hadith*, angels are capable of metamorphosis; for example, the angel Gabriel came to Mary in the form of a man to tell her the news of a blessed son, he also approached the Prophet Muhammad in form of a handsome man to teach the Muslims their religion by speaking about *Imān*, *Islam* and *Ihsān*. Thus, angels can take the shape of anything that God wills.

27. Q. 22:75.

28. Q. 6:8–9.

29. Karima Diana Alawi, 'Pillars of Religion and Faith,' in Vincent J. Cornell, ed., *Voices of Islam*, London: Praeger Publishers, 2006, p. 34.

30. Murata and Chittick, *Vision of Islam*, p. 84.

In the Qur'an, the absolute obedience of the angels to God is strongly stressed, as is their lack of free will.

Even though angels are created beings, no source indicates when the angels were created; knowledge about them begins with the account of their witnessing the creation of Adam. As stated in the Qur'an, they were asked to prostrate in front of the first human being to honor him: "*Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: 'I will create a vice-regent on earth.' The angels said, 'Wilt thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy name?' He said: 'I know what ye know not.'*"³¹ Various other historical events mentioned in the Qur'an and *Hadith* involve angels, such as the angels who came to warn Noah about the flood, the angels who visited Abraham in human form to give good news about the birth of his son, the angels who came in the form of young men to deliver Lot from impending danger, the angels *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* who descended upon Babylon, and the angel Gabriel who came to give good news to Mary about the birth of Jesus.³² At the moment of Jesus's conception, God sent angel Gabriel to Mary in the form of a man: "Then We sent to her Our angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects."³³ All previous messengers such as Adam, Abraham, and Noah (peace be upon them) were supported by angels and Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was no exception. One of Prophet Muhammad's first encounters with an angel took place at the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an. At the age of forty, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) walked up to a cave on Mount *Ḥirā'* for his habitual spiritual retreat during the month of Ramadan. Once inside the cave he heard a voice saying, 'Recite!' but Prophet Muhammad responded that he could not. According to the earliest sources, the voice that the Prophet heard belonged to an angel who appeared to him in the form of a man; Muhammad would later come to know this angel by the name of Gabriel. The angel seized Muhammad and again told him to recite, but once again the Prophet replied that he could not. After a third time, the angel recited, "*Proclaim! (or recite!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created—created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood. Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful, He Who taught (the use of) the pen, taught man that which he knew not.*"³⁴ After this encounter, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) relates that the enormity of the first revelation were "as though the words were written on my heart."³⁵ Over the next twenty-three years, Muhammad maintained a personal

31. Q. 2:30.

32. Abdu'l-Hamid Kishk, *The World of the Angels*, London: Dār al-Taḳwa, 1994, pp. 31–41.

33. Q. 14:17.

34. Q. 96:1–5.

35. Quoted by Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based Upon The Earliest Sources*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1991, p. 44.

relationship with the angel Gabriel. At first, this interaction was confined to the revelation of the Qur'an during Muhammad's years in Mecca when he and his community were persecuted by the Meccan Arabs. However, the angel Gabriel also taught Muhammad about many aspects of the religion. After thirteen years of persecution in Mecca, Muhammad and his Companions sought refuge in the city of Yathrib, which was later renamed *al-Madīna al-Nabawīyah* (or more commonly in English, Medina), the city of the Prophet. This period of Muhammad's life featured further encounters with angels, such as further revelations brought by angel Gabriel and angels supporting the believers in the various battles.³⁶



THE REVEALED SCRIPTURES

What are the scriptures that Muslims are asked to believe in? According to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, they are all of the scriptures revealed to Allah's messengers throughout human history before Muhammad. For instance, in the Qur'an it says: "We have sent thee inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the messengers after him. We sent inspiration to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms."³⁷ Twice, the Qur'an refers to an unidentified scripture revealed to the Prophet Abraham—the *Ṣuḥuf Ibrāhīm*, which is sometimes translated as the Scrolls of Abraham.³⁸ However, the four scriptures explicitly named in the Qur'an are the Torah (*Tawrāt*), which was revealed to the Prophet Moses; the Psalms (*Zabūr*), which were revealed to the Prophet David; the Gospel (*Injīl*), which was revealed to the Prophet Jesus; and the Qur'an itself, which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.³⁹ Muslims therefore understand the Qur'an as Allah's final revelation in the same way that they recognize the prophet Muhammad as the Seal of the prophets. This understanding is based on the words of the Qur'an itself: "*Step by step, He has sent the scripture down to you [Muhammad] with the truth, confirming what went before; He sent*

36. For further information on the Angels please see Amjad M. Hussain, *The Muslim Creed: A Contemporary Study of Theology*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 2016, pp. 83-108.

37. Q. 4:163.

38. Q. 87:9–19; Q. 53:36–62.

39. Cornell, ed., *Voices of Islam*, p. 36.



down the Torah and the Gospel as a guide for people. He has sent down the distinction [between right and wrong]”⁴⁰ Scripture has traditionally been understood as being the literal word of God. Anything written about a messenger after his death would therefore not qualify as scripture on account of being a human product. This definition of scripture requires that anything considered revelation must strictly come from God Himself; thus, human speech about God or anything simply attributed to Him cannot meet these re-

quirements. Thus, Muslims believe that the original Torah was given to Moses, the original Psalms to David, the original Gospel to Jesus, and the original Qur'an to Muhammad. They believe, however, that the Torah, the Psalms and the Gospel in their original form have been lost as the scriptures were altered and corrupted by human beings over time. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is now the only revealed scripture that has not been changed from its original form. As a consequence of this the 'Word of God' as understood in various denominations of Judaism and Christianity as being indirectly attributed to God or inspired reports of what was witnessed about various figures in the Bible is not considered revelation amongst the vast majority of Muslims. However, if it is directly attributed to God such as when God spoke to Moses, then such communication may be regarded as revelation. Furthermore, for Muslims, the language of scripture must be the same as that in which it was revealed. This means that any translation, being a human product, is not strictly speaking, the Word of God.

In the Qur'an, the communities to whom messengers and revelations were sent prior to the advent of Muhammad's Ummah are described as *Ahl al-Kitāb* (literally, People of the Book); meaning a people who have been given a divine writ or revelation. The scriptures that were revealed prior to the Qur'an are believed to have been sent to particular groups of people and nations. By comparison, the only scripture believed to be universally intended for humanity according to Muslim theologians is the Qur'an. The three scriptures Torah (*Tawrāt*), the Psalms (*Zabūr*), and the Gospel (*Injīl*), are therefore understood as having been specifically addressed to the nation of Israel (or as it later was called, Judea). It is stated in the Qur'an, *"It was We who revealed the law (to Moses): therein was guidance and light. By its standard have been judged the Jews, by the prophets who bowed (as in Islam) to Allah's will, by the rabbis and the doctors of the law: for to them was entrusted*

40. Q. 3:3-4.

the protection of God's book, and they were witnesses thereto [...]"; and *"in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him. We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: guidance and an admonition to those who fear God."*⁴¹

PROPHETS AND MESSENGERS

In the 'Qur'an it is said, *"Truly in the heavens and the earth are signs for the believers. And in your creation and in that which He spreads [over the earth] from among the beasts are signs for a people who are pious. And [in] the alteration of the night and day, and the nourishment that God sends down from the sky, then by which He revives the earth after its death, and [in] the dispensation of the winds are signs for people who discern. These are the signs of Allah. We recite them to you with truth. So in what account after Allah and His signs will they believe?"*⁴³ These kinds of verses (*ayāt*) in the Qur'an, which in Arabic is the same word used for sign (*ayah*) from Allah, remind the reader that every aspect of creation is a message and throughout human history that message has been sustained through the messengers, *"Every nation had a messenger."*⁴⁴ As stated in the introduction to this book, Islam does not view itself as a fifteen hundred year old religion but rather a faith that has been revealed in various forms throughout human history. The word Islam in this sense denotes not only the final form of the religion revealed to Muhammad but also any faith that was revealed before him that subscribed to the ideology of believing in the One and the Unique God. Islam in this sense means submission to God; in the Qur'an the various messengers and their followers before Muhammad, who propagated their faiths are therefore described as *muslimūn* (the ones who submit to the One God).⁴⁵ Islam describes all these faiths as tailored differently for their time and society, nevertheless, all re-iterated the same message of the oneness of God. Whatever form of revelation was sent to the prophets and the messengers throughout human history, was not entirely new. In essence these prophets and messengers constituted, renewed and recalibrated forms of the original divine message, exhorting human beings to reflection, remembrance and a proper understanding of God.

41. Q. 5:44, 46.

42. For more information on the Revealed Scriptures, please see Amjad M. Hussain, *The Muslim Creed: A Contemporary Study of Theology*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 2016, pp. 162-197.

43. Q. 14:3–6

44. Q. 10:47

45. Joseph Lumbard, (2006), *Prophets & Messengers of God*, in Vincent J. Cornell (ed.), *Voices of Islam*, (Praeger Publishers Inc), p. 103.

So what and who is a prophet (*nabi*)? It is common to misunderstand the word prophet in our contemporary times to mean that it refers to someone who prophesizes the future. However, in Islam the Arabic word *nabī* has no such connotations, even though some prophetic messages have been known to be connected to future events. The root of the term '*nabī*' in Arabic derives from two meanings; to give news and to be exalted by God. Thus, a prophet (*nabī*) in Islam is not in any way divine but is seen to be an exceptional mortal human being who is chosen by God and is given a communiqué to convey to the people. In addition to the term '*nabī*', Islamic primary sources frequently use the term '*rasūl*' (messenger) for prophets. The Arabic term '*rasūl*' refers to a person that conveys messages. From the overall usage in the Qur'an it is clear that the term '*nabī*' is wider in its scope than the term '*rasūl*'. The term *nabī* (prophet) denotes every person chosen by God to receive a message, whereas, the term *rasūl* (messenger) denotes the relatively small number of prophets who were chosen to receive an oral and/or a written scripture that was the basis of the revealed faith. Thus, a messenger is always also a prophet but not vice versa. For example, the most known of the prophets who were also messengers in Islamic theology, are Adam (the first prophet and messenger), Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (who is accepted as the last prophet and messenger of Allah). Then there are further examples of those individuals mentioned in the Quran who were prophets but not messengers, such as, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph; who all followed the scriptures and laws given to the Prophet Abraham. Similarly, prophets such as Aaron, Samuel and John the Baptist followed the main scripture and laws given to the messenger Moses. In the Hadith literature Muhammad spoke of 124,000 prophets, elected from all nations from the time of Adam to himself; whereas, he only mentioned 313 or 315 out of them to have been messengers i.e. someone who was chosen to receive a scripture and establish a revealed religion.⁴⁶

At this juncture it is very important for new Muslims to understand the concept of the inimitability (*isma*) of the prophets. According to the sources, all prophets are preserved from erring in the reception and the deliverance of the message revealed to them by Allah. It does not imply that they are not human or that they are free from human weaknesses. However, it needs to be emphasized that according to Islam, all the prophets and the messengers are *ma'sūm* (protected) from moral decadence and sin. The prophets have been recognized to have possessed four necessary attributes⁴⁷; they had to be truthful (*sidq*), trustworthy (*amāna*), proclaim

46. Sachiko Murata & William C. Chittick, (1996), *The Vision of Islam*, (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers), pp. 133-134

47. It is also agreed that the four attributes necessarily impossible for the prophets are the opposites of the previous four, namely lying, treachery, concealing what they were ordered to reveal, and feeble-mindedness. The one attribute possible for the prophets is that any human state that

the Divine Word (*tablīgh*) and had to be sagacious and intelligent (*fatāna*); in other words, inerrancy is acknowledged as a very important criterion for the station of a prophet and a messenger. Furthermore, the prophets and messengers are also acknowledged to have possessed qualities that cannot be imitated. The most well-known of these merits is the ability to perform miracles (*mu'jizāt*), which can only be executed by the prophets of Allah, the rule being that it is only achieved with the leave of Allah. Some of the well-known miracles of the prophets include healing by the Prophet Jesus and the parting of the red sea by the Prophet Moses.



To reiterate, Allah has only revealed one religion (i.e. the way of submitting to the One God), but He sent messengers with different laws and paths relating to that one religion, throughout time. Prophets continued to be chosen by God to lead people back to the original teachings, every time the original teaching was altered, until the last prophet Muhammad, who brought the final law and path, superseding all past revealed faiths. In the Qur'an, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is given the title, 'the Seal of the Prophets', meaning that he was the last human being to receive such guidance and revelation.⁴⁸ Prophet Muhammad elaborated on this title in his farewell sermon, "*O People, no Prophet or Messenger will come after me and no faith will be born after me.*"⁴⁹ It is a major part of the Muslim creed to accept the designation of Muhammad as the 'Seal of the Prophets', meaning that there will be no new Shari'ah after Muhammad nor will there be an appearance of a new religion or Prophet/Messenger. This also signifies that Islam is accepted as the final religion, and Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, has Himself taken a pledge that His religion of Islam will stay pure until the Day of Judgment.⁵⁰

does not detract from their rank, such as eating, sleeping, marrying, and illnesses not repellent to others; although God protected them from every offensive physical trait and everything unbecoming them, keeping them from both lesser sins and enormities, before their prophethood and thereafter.

48. Q. 33:40

49. Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 1623, 1626, 6361

50. For further information on the Messengers/Prophets of God please see Amjad M. Hussain, *The Muslim Creed: A Contemporary Study of Theology*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 2016, pp. 108-162.

THE HEREAFTER

Muslims believe that this life is very short in comparison to the life of the hereafter. Muslims are required to have faith in the reality of the hereafter, the Day of Judgment, Resurrection, Paradise and Hell.⁵¹ This is known as belief in ‘*ākhirah*’ (afterlife) or as ‘*Ma‘ād*’, which is another term for the Afterlife and it literally means, ‘the Return’ or ‘the Place of Return’.⁵² This expression originates from the Qur’an derived from verses such as, *“They say: What! When we are reduced to bones and dust, should we really be raised up (to be) a new creation? Say: “(Nay!) be ye stones or iron, or created matter which, in your minds, is hardest (to be raised up), (Yet shall ye be raised up)! Then will they say: Who will cause us to return? Say: He who created you first [...]”*⁵³ Based on the systematic study of the word ‘*Ma‘ād*’ in verses such as the one mentioned above, it is interesting to note that this term has always been paired with ‘*Mabda*’, which means, ‘Origin’ or ‘the Place of Origin’. The term ‘*Mabda*’ is found in Qur’anic verses such as: *“The Day that We roll up the heavens like a scroll rolled up for books (completed), even as We originated the first creation, so shall We produce a new one. A promise We have undertaken: truly shall We fulfill it.”*⁵⁴

This belief can be understood in relation to the belief in the journey of humanity between the origin and the return, the realms of Paradise (*Janna*), Hell (*Jahannam*) and the *Barzakh*, which is an intermediate state between death and the resurrection, and the apocalyptic events of the Last Days. It is vital that the new Muslim

knows that the basic message of Islam is that Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, has created humanity for a purpose, that there is a continuation of life after death and that there is a final reckoning. The origin and return of all creation means that all creatures, individually and collectively, are subject to extinction, to death and decay, to a change from one state to another and to a transition from one abode to the next. In comparison, God is recognized as Almighty, the Eminent, the Forgiving, the Manager of all affairs, and the Maker of des-



51. For further detailed information on the Messengers/Prophets of God please see Amjad M. Hussain, *The Muslim Creed: A Contemporary Study of Theology*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 2016, pp. 197-242.

52. Murata and Chittick, *Vision of Islam*, p. 340.

53. Q. 17:49–51.

54. Q. 21:104.

tinies. He alone has permanence across all of the ages, stages and lifetimes, which by necessity must wane and perish.

According to Islam, Muslims believe that before the resurrection, each person will meet his or her death in this world at a destined time (*ajal*); this belief is further reinforced by verses of the Qur'an such as: *"To every people is a term appointed: when their term is reached, not an hour can they cause delay, nor (an hour) can they advance (it in anticipation)"*.⁵⁵ Moreover, according to Islam, at a point in history, the absolute destruction of the universe or the cosmic death known as 'the Hour' (*Sā'a*) will take place at a determined time which, Allah alone knows. In Islam it is acknowledged that God has created humanity for a purpose, which is to worship Him, and as part of the continuation of life after death, there will be an ultimate accounting, whereby, God's justice will be served. It is on that day, the Day of Judgment, that the individual and the collective meet and are led to their final abode in the hereafter.

This whole idea of the Return is linked to the origin of humanity; when humanity had to leave its original home and was promised the possibility of a return. The Qur'an and the Hadith tradition are rich with descriptions of the creation of Adam and Eve, and their representations as the origin of humanity. Their origin began with their creation and their residence within the Garden, "We said: 'O Adam! Dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden; and eat of the bountiful things therein as (where and when) ye will; but approach not this tree, or ye will run into harm and transgression.' Then did Satan make them slip from the (garden), and get them out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been. We said: 'Get ye down, all (ye people), with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood—for a time.' Then learnt Adam from his Lord words of inspiration, and his Lord turned towards him; for He is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful. We said: 'Get ye down all from here; and if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from me, whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. But those who reject faith and belie Our signs, they shall be companions of the Fire; they shall abide therein.'"⁵⁶

The expulsion of Adam and Eve (peace be upon them) from the Garden described in this verse was a result of satanic deception and was immediately forgiven when Adam begged for forgiveness. It is important to note that in Islamic tradition, both the primordial man and woman were held to be equally blameful for the Fall of Man, and Eve was never seen as a temptress. Additionally, since God forgave them immediately, there is no doctrine of Original Sin in Islamic theology. Nev-

55. Q. 7:34.

56. Q. 2:35–39.

ertheless, they were exiled by God and this exile was applicable to all humanity for a set period of time. Human beings were promised guidance from God through prophets and messengers; they were given felicitations of the Garden, but, with a warning for those who rejected the message. This forged the link between this world (*dunyā*), where Adam, Eve and their progeny were exiled, and the Hereafter (*akhirah*), where they are destined to return. This journey of the children of Adam comes to an end upon the Day of Judgment.

Life in this lower world is intricately linked with eschatology because an individual's conduct directly affects how they are judged by God after death. In connection with this, the Qur'an offers a comprehensive portrait of the human psyche that is interesting and unique. Human beings are recognized as the vice-regents of God on earth and they have been given this high position due to their rational abilities. They have also been given all good things for their sustenance and have been created in the best of molds. However, the human being is also portrayed in the Qur'an as a highly multifaceted and a deeply divided personality, who is in need of guidance and discipline. The human being is described as a mass of unruly and chaotic contradictions, torn between illusory desires that constantly change, such as passion, anger, greed, generosity, pettiness and piety. In addition to a human being's own internal passions, there is an external enemy, Satan, who deceives the steadfast soul towards forgetting God. Thus, because the human soul can be steadfast and patient in its belief, or prone to capriciousness with hypocrisy, it is described in the Qur'an as in need of constant guidance from God through His prophets and messengers, and it is only through this guidance that a human being can return to felicity.⁵⁷

There is a well-known saying in Muslim literature that 'sleep is the brother of death' and many scholars have drawn an analogy between the resurrection after death and the awaking after dreaming. Moreover, just as dreaming can sometimes bring one closer to true reality than when one is awake, so too is death seen as an awakening to the reality and the removal of the veil. Hence, another popular saying in the Muslim world is 'people are asleep and when they die, they awaken.' Death, just like life in this world, is relative, rather than absolute, when compared to the Reality we know as God.⁵⁸ However, this does not mean that we Muslims do not feel the pain and sorrow when someone close to us dies. The best illustration of this is how the Prophet Muhammad grieved when his own son Ibrahim died at sixteen months of age; he showed his immense pain and sorrow through his

57. Q. 4:137, Q. 41:51. Q. 8:54

58. See Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa-mā ba'dahu*, trans. T. J. Winter as *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife: Book XL of The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1989, pp. 124 and 153–54.

tears. He is reported to have said, ‘O Ibrahim, were the truth not certain that the last of us will join the first, we would have mourned you even more than we do now [...] The eyes send their tears and the heart is saddened, but we do not say anything except that which pleases our Lord. Indeed, O Ibrahim, we are bereaved by your departure from us.’⁵⁹ When faced with death, it is common for Muslims to recite the Qur’anic verse, ‘To God we belong, and to Him is our return.’⁶⁰ In his work, ‘The Revival of the Religious Sciences’, the

famous scholar Al-Ghazali has written about how individual phases of life can be beneficial for the afterlife. The topic of afterlife has always been extremely important for Muslims because the promise of Paradise is specifically linked to their faith and good deeds in the world.⁶¹ Life in this world is seen as a rehearsal stage for the Hour; a place where all individuals are tried and tested.

Nevertheless, while the believer is striving to attain Paradise, the Qur’an contains a reminder to not forget the present world: ‘*But seek, with the (wealth) which God has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter; [and do not] forget thy portion in this world, but do thou good, as God has been good to thee, and seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land; for God loves not those who do mischief.*’⁶² Similarly, believers are encouraged to recite the prayer: ‘*Our Lord, give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter.*’⁶³ The reason given for why one should not forget about this world and only focus on the Hereafter is that it is goodness from God, which deserves to be paid forward in this world through faith and good deeds. This life is therefore of great consequence—all actions and deeds matter and nothing is trivial either in life or in death. For the new Muslim it is also important to know that in the *Hadith* literature, it is made clear that praying for the dead, asking God’s forgiveness for them and giving charity on their behalf are some of the deeds that can benefit those who have passed on from the lower world. Another element of social etiquette in Islam that is related to this issue, is visiting the graves of the deceased. The Prophet Muhammad is well known for recommending this



59. Translation from Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Truſt, 1994, p. 488.

60. Q. 2:156.

61. Q. 67:1–2.

62. Q. 28:77.

63. Q. 2:201.



by stating: “*So visit the graves, for they will remind you of death.*”⁶⁴ Once at a grave, it is recommended practice to recite the Qur’an and seek Allah’s forgiveness and mercy for the deceased. Many scholars have argued that people need to learn a lesson from going to graves; for instance, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alawī al-Ḥaddād wrote, “he should remember that soon he will go to the same end, and learn the lessons to be drawn from their condition.”⁶⁵

Muslims are asked to believe in the *Barzakh*, which is also known as the life in the grave. It is an intermediate stage through which every individual passes after their life in this world (*dunyā*) and before their raising on the Day of Resurrection. *Barzakh* literally means ‘*isthmus*’, a narrow strip of land that forms a barrier between two seas. The meaning of this term has been derived from the following two verses of the Qur’an: “*It is He Who has let free the two bodies of flowing water: one palatable and sweet, and the other salt and bitter; yet has He made a barrier (barzakh) between them, a partition that is forbidden to be passed,*”⁶⁶ and, “*He has let free the two bodies of flowing water, meeting together. Between them is a barrier (barzakh) which they do not transgress.*”⁶⁷ The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) described life in the Intermediate Realm in the following terms: “*The grave is either one of the chasms of Hell or one of the gardens of Paradise*”, and “*When one of you dies his [future] seat is displayed before him morning and evening: should he be of the people of Paradise, then it is situated among them, while should he be of the people of Hell, then it is situated among them.*”⁶⁸ The most complete description of the events within the *Barzakh* is found in the Hadith literature and it always begins with the arrival of two interrogating angels named *Munkar* and *Nakīr*. All traditions agree that the two angels have been commanded by God to ask the deceased three questions in the grave: Who is your Lord? What is your religion? Who is your prophet? The correct answers to these are said to be Allah, Islam and Muhammad, and the righteous answer without hesitation. After hearing the deceased’s answers to these questions, the angels open a window either to Paradise (*Jannah*), whereupon the righteous may gaze and feel the atmosphere of felicity, or the angels may open one to the Fire (*Nār*).

64. Sunan Ibn Majah, Vol. 1, Book 6, Hadith 1572.

65. Abdullah Ibn Alawi Haddad, *The Lives of Man*, Loiseville KY: Fons Vitea, 1991, p. 47.

66. Q. 25:53.

67. Q. 55:19–20.

68. Ghazālī, *Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife*, p. 127.

Although there is uncertainty about when the Hour will actually occur, there is no such ambiguity regarding what will occur at the end of the universe, during the Resurrection and on Judgment Day, because there are explicit descriptions of them in the Qur'an and Hadith. The subject is generally divided into events that will occur before the Hour (which are known as the 'Signs of the Hour') and those that come afterwards. After the arrival of the Hour, the approximate sequence of events is said to begin with the sounding of a trumpet followed by the destruction of the cosmos, resurrection and the final reckoning. Even though there are verses about the terrestrial signs of the Hour in the Qur'an, there are many more regarding God's cosmic undoing of the world before the Last Judgment. The topics of the actual destruction of the cosmos, the Resurrection, the Last Judgment and every individual being assigned a place for eternity in either Paradise or Hell are mentioned in detail in the Qur'an, and expanded accounts of these events are to be found in the Hadith literature and exegetical writings.

The Last Days before the arrival of the Hour (which is marked by the sounding of a trumpet) are primarily known as the *ashrāt al-Sā'a* or *ayāt al-Sā'a* (signs of the Hour). These signs are further divided into the minor signs, which mark the decay of society's moral order during the End of Days, and the greater signs, which are cataclysmic events that occur when the Hour is imminent. The ten major signs or tribulations (*fitan*) are smoke, al-dajjal, the beast, sunrise in the west, descent of Jesus (peace be upon him), Gog and Magog, three major earthquakes⁶⁹ and fire.⁷⁰ These cataclysmic events are dramatically and graphically described either in the Qur'an or in the Hadith literature, as the devastation of creation and as a complete reversal of the natural order.⁷¹ These events are foreshadowed by widespread moral decay, whose description is found within the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, and are recognized by most Muslim scholars as signs indicating the onset of the cataclysmic events.

Judgment Day is referred to by various terms in the Qur'an, including the Day of Resurrection (*Yawm al-Qiyāma*), the Day of Judgment (*Yawm al-Dīn*), the Hour (*al-Sā'a*), the Last Day (*al-Yawm al-Ākhir*), the Day of Decision (*Yawm al-Faṣl*) and the Day of Reckoning (*Yawm al-Ḥisāb*). The call of the trumpet brings forth the total annihilation of everything created and another call of the trumpet brings forth the Day of Resurrection. On that day the Trumpet shall be blown by the Angel Isrāfīl and destruction will commence and when the Trumpet is blown the second time, all will be resurrected from their graves and enter an enormous plain. After

69. In some sources 'three lunar eclipses'.

70. The Qur'an mentions three of these: the smoke (45:10–2), the beast (27:82) and Gog and Magog (18:94, 21:96).

71. For example, see Q. 11:73, 17:99, 20:102, 23:101, 27:87, and 36:51.

the trumpet blast, some of the perilous events that follow are described by Ghazali as: ‘the Resurrection on the Day of Arising, the Presentation before the Almighty, the Inquisition regarding matters both important and minor, the Erection of the scales in order that men’s destinies might be known and the passage over the Traverse despite the fineness and sharpness of its edge. These things will be followed by the awaiting of the Summons to final judgment, either bliss or misery.’⁷²

The Afterlife (or Hereafter) is in no way considered by Muslims to be equivalent to the lower world (*dunyā*). While it is certainly true that some importance is attached to the present life in Islamic literature (even when one lives this life in accordance with all of the tenets of faith), the central focus is always on the life to come. The primary sources of Islam, the Qur’an and the *Hadith* repeatedly state that life in this world is temporary, whereas, the real and everlasting life is that of the Hereafter.⁷³ The realm of Paradise and Hell is unobservable and is the part of the *‘Ālam al-Ghayb* (Unseen Realm); its location is unknown to anyone other than God. About Paradise, it is said in the Qur’an: ‘Now no person knows what delights of the eye are kept hidden (in reserve) for them as a reward for their (good) deeds.’⁷⁴ As for Hell, there are many descriptions of it in the Qur’an, and it is variously referred to there as, *al-Nār* (the Fire), *al-Jahannam* (*Gēhinnōm*⁷⁵) and *al-Jaḥīm* (the Blazing Fire). In contrast to the fires of Hell that await sinners, those who believe, refrain from evil, perform good deeds, have God consciousness (*taqwa*) and are truthful, penitent and heedful they are promised the rewards of Paradise. Most frequently referred to as *al-Janna* (the Garden), Paradise is vividly described in the *Hadith* and, especially, in the Qur’an: ‘(Here is) a parable of the Garden which the righteous are promised: in it are rivers of water incorruptible; rivers of milk of which the taste never changes; rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of honey pure and clear. In it there are for them all kinds of fruits; and Grace from their Lord.’⁷⁶ This lasting home of the Hereafter is depicted as having both physical and spiritual delights and as a place where the faithful are contented, satisfied, at peace and secure. Here they will not hear any evil, they will not experience death, but rather feel true peace, hear gentle speech and, most of all, be in the presence of God.

72. Ghazālī, *Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife*, p. 173.

73. See for example, Q.57:20.

74. Q. 32:17.

75. A Hebrew eponym for Hell.

76. Q. 47:15.

THE DIVINE DECREE

The last article of faith is the belief in God's decree (*qadar*). Muslims believe that Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, has power over everything. All that happens is according to His Will, thus nothing is supernatural or random. However, Muslims are not fatalistic, they are given free will and enjoined to strive to do their best in all situations, since human beings do not know where their destiny lies. Thus, they must exhaust all possible means and when the inevitable occurs (good or bad) it is to be taken with patience and trusting acceptance of the Infinite Wisdom of Allah.⁷⁷ The most appropriate translation of *qadar* is, 'divine decree', other Arabic terms used to refer to this decree are, '*taqdir*' (determination of measurement) and '*al-qada wa'l-qadar*' (divine will and divine decree). The problem of understanding the true meaning of *qadar* arises when the human intellect considers any of the components of the divine decree within a timeline. *Predestination* and *fate* are inappropriate terms in this context because God is recognized as being the Creator of space and time and yet He is not bound by them. Consequently, God's divine decree is not bound by these limited conceptions. The notion of predestination somehow considers God's knowledge, power and will within the confines of time and space. Furthermore, the concept of fate makes one believe that the human being is totally devoid of free will, because one's actions would be determined in advance by an impersonal force.

It is recognized that there is a limit to how much human beings can understand about this article of faith. Simply said, Allah is the sole and absolute Creator of all human actions, as well as the Creator of the power (*qudra*) and choice (*ikhtiyār*) acquired and exercised by human beings. Hence, all actions, be they recognized as good or evil, are the creation of Allah, but although action, power and choice are created by Allah, it is the human being who acquires the act, and for that they are held responsible. This theory of acquisition (*kasb*) is inferred from the Qur'an and according to it, human beings only *perform* an action, whereas, the action is in fact created by Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. Thus, Allah alone is recognized as the Creator Who determines, through a created power (*qudra*), the individ-



77. For further detailed information on the Messengers/Prophets of God please see Amjad M. Hussain, *The Muslim Creed: A Contemporary Study of Theology*, Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 2016, pp. 242-279.



ual existence of each act in all its particulars. Yet this act is created in order to be acquired and performed by a creature, so it cannot be seen as God's own act. In other words, one could not say that God is responsible for it, but rather that the person who performed the act is responsible. According to the Qur'an there is no doubt that Allah is the Creator of everything, and that as far as any action exists, it is a created 'thing'. It is important for the new Muslim to understand that human beings have been created with a natural dis-

position (*fitrah*), an intellect, a capacity of willing, the ability of thinking, judging and choosing, along with the power to distinguish between what is right and wrong. Therefore, people have the ability to act and they possess the freedom of choice (*ikhtiyār*). It is this choice, and acting on this choice, that human beings are responsible for in their individual and communal life.

God's willing or creating an evil action cannot be seen as repugnant to His wisdom, because, He wills it in accordance with an individual's exercise of free choice. There are clear demarcations of evil deeds that are prohibited in Islam, but it is recognized that individuals have the autonomy to commit a sin. Hence, even though sins are in accordance with what is created by the divine, this does not indicate that these actions are in any way in accordance with divine guidance or pleasure. These actions are recognized as breaching the *Shari'ah* and so an individual is held accountable for his acquisition and performance of the act in question through his free will. Imam Ṭaḥāwī wrote, "All will act in accordance with their design and are moving inexorably toward the purpose for which they were created. Welfare and affliction, good and evil are determined for everyone. The [divine enablement] that an act requires, for example, an act of obedience, which cannot be attributed to a creature, occurs concurrent with the act. As for the [material] enablement that results from health, capacity, poise and sound means, it precedes the act. In sacred law, it is upon the latter that legal and moral obligation hinge, just as God, the Sublime and Exalted, states; '*God obliges no soul with more than its capacity*' (*Qur'an* 2:228). Human actions are God's creations but humanity's acquisitions."

Although one can state the various creeds regarding the divine decree, and the place of human responsibility in relation to it, due to the complex reality of '*Qadar*' the only true unveiling of it comes from living with trust in Allah's providence (*tawakkul*), which will enlighten the believer in such a way that he or she

will recognize that there is no power but Allah.⁷⁸ It is also important for the new Muslim to understand the notion of why evil or harmful things exist. The question of perceived injustice by anyone is either a lack of the full understanding of the situation at hand by the people themselves, or, it is simply the act of a moral evil, which is always carried out in violation of the divine command. This violation is due to the human being's ability to acquire and perform such actions as his or her own. After all, creation is a testing ground for faith, and harmful and malevolent situations exist as a means to acquire knowledge about the hereafter; in addition such situations also serve the purpose for the justification for a Judgment Day and a life in the hereafter. However, it is important to recognize that human beings act in accordance with their own will, notwithstanding the fact that a person's will is ultimately determined by divine decree.⁷⁹

The new Muslim needs to appreciate that Islam teaches us that our task is to make a sincere effort, to strive to do the best in any act and choice; for a human being does not know and cannot know wherein his or her destiny lies, and until he or she has exhausted all possible means with regards to what will inevitably take place, we cannot say that we have encountered our destiny. However, whatever then comes after all efforts have been made, should be received with patience and trusting acceptance of what He in His Infinite Wisdom has seen fit to send, and with the expectation that it may prove to be a source of good and ultimate blessing in the broader perspective of the life to come. Belief in the divine decree is, thus, a statement of belief in the meaningfulness and purposefulness of all that it is, an essential part of the Muslim's sense of total trust, dependence and submission in relation to his Creator. Thus, the divine decree can only be understood by living with trust in Allah; to understand the greater purpose of harmful substances in life and to have patience with everything that one encounters in this life.

78. Ghazālī, *Faith in Divine Unity*, p. 43.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 38.



THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM: THE FIVE PILLARS

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM: THE FIVE PILLARS

The Muslims' most important task is to initially get to know and worship (*ibādah*) Allah, the Almighty; Who created them, gave them life and someday will take their lives and then resurrect them. Therefore, the Muslims should accept Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, as the greatest power and the highest authority in their lives. The Lexical meaning of, '*ibādah*' is, to submit, to obey, to worship and to adore. In Islam all types of deeds carried out with the intention to gain Allah's Pleasure, to turn towards Allah, to establish an intrinsic relationship with Him, to be close to Him is considered *ibādah*; every command of His obeyed and every prohibition of His avoided, is deemed within the context of worship. It is possible to classify worship structurally under two categories: the first category consists of all kinds of work, activities and behavior performed to obey Allah's commands and gain His pleasure. Acts such as, working and gaining a livelihood through lawful ways, performing one's tasks in the best way possible, treating people nicely and graciously, protecting chastity, avoiding harmful habits, trying to prevent and annihilate the things that are harmful to society, protecting the environment, not littering, helping the poor and the needy, staying away from the religiously unacceptable and bad behaviors, are all recognized as worship. The second category of worship is more specific, and in this sense, worship refers to the practices that are performed in accordance with certain rituals, rules and order. Although there are many acts of worship (*ibādah*) in Islam, the five main obligatory acts of worship are called the, 'Five Pillars of Islam'. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings

of Allah be upon him) said, "*The structure of Islam is built on five (pillars): Testification of 'La ilaha illallah' (none has the right to be worshipped but Allah), that Muhammad is his slave and Messenger, the establishment of Salat, the payment of Zakat, the pilgrimage to the House of Allah (Kabah), and Saum during the month of Ramadan.*"⁸⁰ In this Hadith the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) gave a parable of the house of Islam which consists of five foundations or pillars. The first pillar is the declaration of faith



80. Riyadh as-Salihin, Book 9, Hadith 217.

(*shahada*) which states, “I testify that there is no deity but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah”. The second pillar is the prescribed daily prayers (*salah*), the third pillar is fasting during the month of Ramadan (*siyam*), the fourth pillar is giving alms (*zakah*) and the last pillar of Islam is to undertake a pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*).

At this juncture the new Muslim should appreciate the reason why he or she is obliged to worship Allah. The main and foremost aim of performing any act of worship is to be able to remember and glorify Allah, Most High; it is vital to understand that God’s majesty and glory does not depend in the slightest degree upon the praise and worship of human beings or any of His creation, rather, He is absolutely free of all such need. Instead, it is the human being who needs the recurrent forms of worship, so as to strengthen and solidify his or her faith and submission to God. By worshipping Allah, the human being gets to know Him as the Lord, has the opportunity to achieve His pleasure and through that gain Paradise. Therefore, the essence of Islam is total submission and obedience to Allah. The acts of worship referred to as the ‘pillars of Islam’, are obligatory upon all Muslims wherever they may live; these acts of worship have been specifically prescribed in the Qur’an and they are executed in the manner that the Prophet Muhammad performed them. It is stated in the Holy Qur’an that Allah created the human beings and the jinn to worship Him (al-Dharyat, 51: 56); and consequently, to test which one of them is the best in deeds (al-Mulk, 67: 2). In this respect ‘*ibādah*’ in its widest sense means to live in accordance with the Divine Will and Pleasure, to obey the religious rules and values, and to maintain the relationship and the connection with Allah. According to this understanding, ‘*ibādah*’ does not only consist of some limited practices that are carried out at certain times and places, but, instead it is a way of understanding life making it meaningful.

Before continuing any further it is important to mention two very significant details. Firstly, achieving the status of worship for a particular action or behavior depends on the performance of said action or behavior in accordance with the rules established by Allah and, with the intention and thought to obey Him and to gain His pleasure. People cannot establish a style or model of worship in accordance with their own desires and thoughts. The limits and models of right and wrong or, licit and illicit have been established by Allah, may He be glorified and exalted; these limits and models have been transmitted to us from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). He implemented and practiced these rules of worship in his life and became the best example for us.

Secondly, it is important for the new Muslim to be familiar with the subject of, ‘*Fiqh*’, which is a discipline of Islamic knowledge that encompasses the religious

and legal aspects of every individual's life, their relationship with each other, as well as, with Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. After the Prophet (peace be upon him) passed on, the most prominent of his companions took on the task of issuing rulings and judgments regarding the problems of Muslim society. They were very proficient in the Qur'an and Sunnah, and due to having the privilege of spending time with the Prophet himself, they knew the details and the purpose of every ruling. The Muslim scholars of law of the following generations followed these directions of the companions of the Prophet. Evidently, not every Muslim was expected to be able to deduct the religious rulings from the sources, so the Muslims were invited to, "*Ask the people of knowledge, if you know not.*"⁸¹ Due to the differences in the conventional opinions regarding the understanding of legal aspects since the companions' time, a number of schools of Islamic law (*madhab al-fiqhiyya*) developed. Presently there are four Sunni schools of law known as Hanafi, Shafi'i, Hanbali and Maliki; the majority of the Sunni Muslims living worldwide follow one of these four Sunni *madhaib*, which in most cases are very similar. Generally speaking a Muslim chooses to follow one of the four schools of law mentioned above and performs his or her acts of worship and deeds according to the exposition of their chosen *madhab*. It is important to bear in mind that a Muslim is free to change his or her *madhab*, however, once a change has been made, it is obligatory on the person in question, to learn the religious rulings of their newly chosen *madhab* in order to be able to perform worship and other duties in the correct manner. Moreover, Muslims are allowed to follow a ruling from another school of law when their own school of law does not provide an adequate answer or solution regarding a particular matter. This is permitted only in an essential and exceptional situation and it should be noted that such undertaking cannot be arbitrary. The aspects of worship mentioned below are mostly based upon Maliki *fiqh*, but at times, other schools of law are also mentioned.

SHAHADA

Shahada is an Arabic word which means, 'to testify' or 'to witness'. The *Shahada* is the first act of worship whereby the believer believes with his or her heart and declares with his or her tongue, the testimony of faith. The *shahada* consists of these words, "I testify that there is no deity except God, and I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God". The first statement of *shahada* manifests that, "there is no deity except Allah." It is necessary to declare or accept the *shahada* at least once in a lifetime to be a Muslim. It is the statement that every person utters when he or she becomes a Muslim; it is further stated numerous times through various rit-

81. Q. 16: 43

uals of worship, such as, the formal prayers. The first part of this statement is known as ‘*tawhīd*’, which lexically means, unification or causing to become one, technically, it refers to the acceptance of Allah as the only exalted authority. Allah is the only One, the Absolute and the Almighty; Who is the Owner and Creator of everything and Who cannot be compared to anyone. Allah is the only One Who is worthy of being worshipped; there is no one that is equal, similar, or partner to Allah. The second part of the *shahada* is a proclamation of accepting Muhammad as the Messenger of God and it is simultaneously an acceptance of the fact that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is the guide of humanity –the final and complete guide for all of humanity- and that the person stating the *shahada* intends to faithfully follow his guidance.



SALAH

The second act of worship which is prescribed in Islam is the performance of the five daily prayers (*salah*). In the Qur'an, the Arabic word “*salah*” terminologically means to demonstrate servitude to God by means of certain acts. By performing this ritual prayer, the Muslims remember their Lord, express their love and respect for Him, and invoke and strive to express their gratitude to Him. It is vital for the new Muslim to know that the ritual prayer is obligatory upon every sane and pubescent Muslim. It is stated in the Qur'an, “*Recite that which has been revealed to you of the Book and keep up the prayer. Surely prayer keeps away indecency and evil.*”⁸² One day the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) asked his Companions, “*If there was a river by the door of anyone of your houses and he took a bath in it five times a day, would there remain any dirt?*” When they answered, “No”, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) stated, “*That is the example of the five daily prayers with which Allah blots out evil deeds.*”⁸³ Thus, these five time prayers during the day and night keep for the Muslim clear, the perspective of who he or she is in relation to Almighty God. It is important for the new Muslim to be aware that no matter how faithful and conscientious an individual is, such reminders as the *salah* are essential, so as not to lose sight of one's relationship with Allah and one's responsibilities and to remember the ultimate purpose of

82. Q. 29: 45.

83. Sahih al-Bukhari, Mawaqit, 6.



one's life. Moreover, the daily prayers accustom a person to gratitude, move them closer to Allah, help them gain *thawab* (spiritual reward) and create an avenue of redemption for minor sins. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, *"Five daily prayers and Friday prayer, from one Friday to the next, are expiation for the sins committed between them, so long as one does not commit any major sin."*⁸⁴ It has been argued by many scholars that the closest moment of the servant to Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, in

this world, is the position of prostration during the ritual prayer. The peace and tranquility gained by performing the ritual prayer cannot be obtained by any other means of worship. However, this does not negate the fact that the regular performance of the five daily ritual prayers may become a difficult act for many people. In fact it is expressed in our Sacred Book that, 'prayer indeed is a hard thing for all but those who hope to turn to Allah and are humble in spirit'.⁸⁵ This is the reason why from all the acts of worship in Islam, ritual prayer is the most important and rewarding one. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said aptly, *"The prayer is the pillar of religion"*⁸⁶ Therefore, be steadfast and patient with regards to the daily prayers.

A Muslim is required to pray at the prescribed times wherever he or she may be –at home, work, school etcetera- but it is preferable to pray in a congregation at the Mosque. Just as performing a ritual prayer before its prescribed time is not accepted, it is also a great sin to delay the ritual prayer without a legitimate excuse, until after its appointed time. It is stated in the Qur'an, *"Verily, the (ritual) prayer is enjoined on the believers at fixed hours."*⁸⁷ The prescribed time of the Dawn Prayer begins at dawn and continues until sunrise. The time of the Afternoon and the Friday prayer begins when the sun crosses the meridian and continues until the shadow of an object becomes twice as much as the length of its height. The time of the Late Afternoon Prayer begins with the end of the time of the Afternoon prayer and continues until sunset. The appointed time of the Evening Prayer begins with sunset and continues until the reddish afterglow on the western horizon disappears and finally, the time of the Night Prayer begins with the end of the Evening prayer and continues until dawn. Every prayer is comprised of *takbīr*, *tawhīd* (expression

84. Sahih Muslim, Taharah, 14-15.

85. Q. 2: 45

86. Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Iman, 8.

87. Q. 4: 103.

of oneness of God), *tasbīh* (glorification of Allah), *ḥamd* (praise) *shukr* (expressing gratitude), humbleness, supplication and invocation for all the believers, and the sending of blessings (*ṣalawāt*) upon the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

Before we go through the acts of the prayer in detail, it is important for the new Muslim to appreciate the rules of cleanliness with regards to Islam in general. To perform prayer and any other major religious rituals, such as, reciting the Qur'an from the *ṣuḥuf*, it is necessary to be cleansed from legal impurities called '*ḥadath*', in other words, the state of major (*janāba*) or minor impurity. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "*The prayer of a person who breaks his minor ablution is not accepted till he performs the ablution.*"⁸⁸ If the person who is intending to perform the ritual prayer has material impurity on his body, on his clothes, or in the place of worship in a quantity that prevents the performance of the ritual prayer then it is compulsory for him to purify that impurity.⁸⁹ After cleaning it is important to make sure that one is dressed properly (*ṣatr al-awra*). That means to cover the parts of the body that are required to be covered for the performance of the ritual prayer. It is obligatory for men to cover the area between the navel and the knees. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) stated: "*Awra of man is between his navel and his knees.*"⁹⁰ Whereas women are obliged to cover their entire body except their hands, face and feet.⁹¹ The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) also said, "*Cleanliness is half of faith.*"⁹² Cleanliness has a vital importance for the individual and for the society as a whole. According to Islam, it is necessary to clean one-self from both material impurities, and false beliefs and thoughts. The requirements of the minor ablution and major ablution in order to purify one-self from *janāba* (major ritual impurity), paying attention to washing hands before and after eating etcetera are all examples that act to demonstrate the vital place of cleanliness in Islam. Allah Almighty praises those who clean themselves from material and spiritual impurities: "*...Surely Allah loves those who turn to Him, and He*

88. Sahih al-Bukhari, Wudu, 2.

89. *Najash* (material impurities) are categorized under two groups in terms of their influence to obstruct the ritual prayer: 1. Strong or heavy *najasah* (*najasah ghaliza*) is the material impurity that has conclusive religious evidence in the Qur'an or the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh). Human blood, urine, feces, and alcoholic drinks are the examples of such strong *najasah*. If the solid types of such impurities cover an area bigger than a watermelon seed, and if the liquid ones cover an area bigger than the palm, then the ritual prayer becomes invalid. 2. Light *najasah* (*najasah khafifa*) is the material impurity that does not have conclusive religious evidence in the Qur'an or the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh). Urine and feces of the animals whose meat is edible according to Islamic law such as sheep, cow and deer are accepted as light *najasah*. The performance of the ritual prayer is obstructed if the light *najasah* covers one fourth of the cloth or a limb.

90. Ahmad ibn Hanbal, v. II, 187. It is recommended to wear tops that cover the shoulders.

91. According to the Shafi'i School of law, women should cover their feet as well.

92. Sahih Muslim, Taharah, 1

loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.”⁹³ and “...Allah loves those who purify themselves.”⁹⁴ Furthermore, our Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, “Surely Allah is clean, and He loves cleanliness.”⁹⁵ Cleaning the material and spiritual impurities of one’s personal sphere is substantial for performing the acts of worship. ‘*Tahara*’, in other words, cleansing oneself from material impurities called, ‘*najash*’, and cleansing oneself from spiritual impurities called, ‘*hadath*’, which prevent a person from performing the acts of worship, are conditions to performing the ritual prayer (*salah*) and certain other acts of worship.

Purity of the body means removing from the body all kinds of dirt and impurities; it is the most important factor in keeping human beings healthy. Cleaning and caring for one’s hair, shaving the armpits and pubic hairs, clipping the nails, brushing the teeth, washing one’s hands and mouth before and after meals and taking a shower are all included in the concept of the purity of the body. The New Muslims should be aware that dental hygiene was very important for the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). He is reported to have said, “If I knew that I would not over-burden the believers, I would have ordered them to use *miswāq* (i.e. a stick for brushing the teeth) before every prayer.”⁹⁶ In order to perform the ritual prayers (*salah*) and certain other acts of worship, one must appear clean in front of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. In the following verse Allah Almighty commands the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and all the Muslims to implement material and spiritual purity, “And your garments do purify, and uncleanness do shun”⁹⁷ It is important to recognize the implication of such a command. By extension such cleanliness means keeping the houses we live in, the schools, the offices, the streets, the parks, the nature and all other places around us clean.

Therefore it is necessary to observe the physical purification of your body and clothes for the ablution to be valid, for the performance of the acts of worship that necessitate ablution. Another very important detail to bear in mind that is related to the topic of cleanliness and purity is that, while in the restroom it is vital to not splash urine around and be careful not to contaminate (*najash*) the clothes one is wearing. Therefore, it is recommended that one should urinate in a sitting position and avoid urinating standing up without a valid excuse. It is reprehensible to urinate upwind, in still or running water, into insect nests, in places where people usually sit and at roads where people pass. Muslims are asked to clean the private parts of the body after urinating or defecating with water, which is called ‘*istinja*;

93. Q. 2: 222.

94. Q. 9: 108.

95. Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Adab, 2950.

96. Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Taharah, 23.

97. Q. 74: 4-5.

for men it is important to make sure the urine stops completely before the *istinja* is performed. This act is referred to as, '*istibra*'. *Istibra* can be achieved by engaging in certain movements, such as, moving a little, walking, coughing etc. It is also important to note that since Muslims perform all clean acts and good deeds with the right hand, it is Sunnah to do the cleansing acts of *istinja* and *istibra* with the left hand.

The human state that prevents the performance of the spiritual acts of worship and is considered a legal impurity is called, '*hadath*'. It is divided into two categories of minor and major *hadath*. The Minor *hadath* is the kind that comes into being when a situation nullifying the state of minor purity takes place; this type of *hadath* can be removed by performing the minor ablution (*wudu*'). The major *hadath* is the type that comes into being when a situation nullifying the state of major purity takes place, such as, emission of sexual discharge (*janāba*), menses (*ḥayd*) and post-natal bleeding (*nifas*).⁹⁸ This *hadath* is removed by performing the major ablution (*ghusl*). In other words, the major ablution means washing the entire body without leaving any part dry, with the intention of undertaking the major ablution. Allah Almighty says in the Qur'an, "*O you who believe! If you are in a state of janāba (under an obligation to perform a major ablution), then purify yourselves...*"⁹⁹ Moreover, it is also recommended for Muslims to perform the major ablution on certain other occasions, such as, to bath or shower for the Friday and the festival prayers, before getting into the state of *ihram* for major (*hajj*) and minor pilgrimage (*umrah*) and for the ritual standing (*waqfa*) on the day of Arafah etcetera.¹⁰⁰ There are a number of prohibited or impermissible actions for the one who needs to perform *Ghusl*, such as, performing the ritual prayer, the prostration of recitation, entering a mosque, performing *itikaf*, circumambulating around the Kaba



98. It's applied to end the state of *ḥayd* (menstruation) and *nifas* (postnatal bleeding). *Nifas* is the postnatal bleeding after giving childbirth and it is designated as the state of *hadath* (judicial impurity) due to this bleeding. There is no minimum duration for postnatal bleeding, while the maximum duration is forty full days (sixty days according to the Shafi'i School of Law).

99. Q. 5: 6.

100. According to the Hanafi School of Law (*madhab*) there are three obligatory acts of major ablution, rinsing the mouth with plenty of water, drawing water to the nose and cleaning it and washing the entire body without leaving any part dry. According to the Shafi'i School of Law, the intention for major ablution and washing the entire body are obligatory. If there is any material impurity on the body, it is necessary to clean it. It is only recommended to clean the mouth and nose, because mouth and nose are accepted as inner parts of the body by the Shafi'i School of Law.

and touching a copy of the Qur'an or a verse from the copy of the Qur'an. At this point it is also important to mention certain details relating to women and the concept of cleanliness and purity. A woman who is having menstruation or postnatal bleeding is not permitted to perform the ritual prayer, fast or have sexual intercourse with her husband. It is not necessary for women to make up for the ritual prayers that could not be performed during menstruation and the postnatal period; however, it is obligatory to make up the fasting for the days of Ramadan that could not be observed.

One who intends to perform the major ablution, commences the act by stating *aūdhu* and *basmala* (*bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahem* -In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate), he or she then expresses the intention to perform major ablution in order to be cleansed from major impurity for the sake of Allah (by saying: I intend to perform major ablution for the sake of Allah). This is followed by the private parts and the hands being washed and the impurities of the body being removed if there are any. This is followed by the performance of the minor ablution. During this process water is drawn to the mouth and nose. Those who are fasting should be careful not to swallow any water. After performing the minor ablution, water is poured on the body ensuring that no part of the body is left dry. It is important to note that according to the Hanafi School of Law, the major ablution negates the need to perform the minor ablution afterwards i.e. once the major ablution has been performed, it is enough to clean and purify the body and there is no need to follow this action with the performance of the minor ablution. The minor ablution means washing and wiping specific parts of the body with the intention to worship. Minor ablution is not merely a method of cleansing oneself physically, but it also deemed an act of *ibādah* itself, in the sense that the Muslim is following a command of Allah by making *wudu* before performing acts of worship. Performing the minor ablution assists the person in gaining spiritual rewards (*thawab*); it is conducive to receiving forgiveness for certain sins. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) expressed this point in his following sayings, “*He who performs minor ablution like me, his previous sins would be expiated*”¹⁰¹ and “*If a Muslim performs ablution and does it well and offers prayer, all his sins during the period from one prayer to another would be pardoned by Allah.*”¹⁰² Performing the minor ablution is a requirement for performing the ritual prayers, executing the prostration of recitation, circumambulating around the Kaba, and touching the copy of the Qur'an. The obligatory acts of minor ablution are stated in the following verse of the Qur'an, “*O you who believe! When you rise up to (perform) prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads and (wash)*

101. Sahih Muslim, Taharah, 8.

102. Sahih Muslim, Taharah, 6.

your feet up to the ankles..."¹⁰³ There are four obligatory acts of the minor ablution, washing the face once (from the hair of the forehead to the lower part of the chin, and across from one ear to the other), washing the hands and the arms from fingertips up to the elbows (including the elbows) once, wiping one fourth of the head and washing both feet up to the ankles once. The recommended acts of the minor ablution are to make the intention for performing minor ablution,¹⁰⁴ reciting *aūdhu* and *basmala* at the beginning of the ablution, washing the hands three times, rinsing the mouth three times (*madmada*) and drawing water into the nostrils thrice (*istinshaq*). This is followed by washing the face and arms thrice. Then ending the ablution by wiping the whole head, wiping the ears once and washing one's feet once. According to the Maliki *fiqh* it is recommended to observe the sequence of order when washing the limbs during the minor ablution, whereas, according to the Shafi'i *fiqh* it is obligatory.

Such acts that nullify the minor ablution are for example urinating, defecating, or breaking wind, emission of semen (*mani*) and preseminal fluid (*madhi*), vomiting, a flow of blood, pus, or yellow matter from any part of the body, losing consciousness and sleeping while lying down or leaning. Whereas blood or yellow matter that exits the wound but does not spread, sign of blood from the teeth, weeping and shedding tears, vomiting less than a mouthful, and sleeping while sitting are states that do not nullify the minor ablution.

The new Muslim should be aware that in the case that there is no water available to perform ablution, or when it is not possible to use water, then '*tayammum*' is performed with clean earth or something similar to earth. It is performed simply by wiping the face and the arms with the intention of cleansing oneself from *hadath*. *Tayammum* can also be performed by striking objects where there is trace of dust, with the palms of one's hands.¹⁰⁵ Once ablution has been performed, the Muslim is ready to commence the ritual prayer.

First of all, the new Muslim is required to turn towards the *qibla*, i.e. the direction of Mecca; generally a prayer compass is used to determine the correct direction of the *qibla*. However, if an error is made concerning the accuracy of the direction, any error of only 45 degrees towards the right or towards the left is not considered a deflection from the *qibla* and the prayer is accepted. After facing the *qibla* the Muslim is required to make the intention for *salah*; this is carried out by stating which prayer is to be performed and intending full heartedly to perform that worship for the sake of Allah. There are three times of the day during which the

103. Q. 5: 6.

104. Intention is obligatory according to the Shafi'i, Maliki and Hanbali Schools of Law.

105. According to the Shafi'i School of Law, it can only be performed with earth.



performance of the ritual prayer is strongly reprehensible (*makruh tahrimi*), these times are, during sunrise, at the time when the sun reaches at the meridian and during sunset. It is important for the new Muslim to know that during the above mentioned three times of the day, it is also prohibited to make up any lost prayers. One Hadith reports, “*There were three times at which Allah’s Messenger forbade us to pray, or bury our dead: When the sun begins to rise till it is fully up, when the sun is at its height at midday till it passes*

over the meridian, and when the sun draws near to setting till it sets.”¹⁰⁶

Generally, all the ritual prayers have similarities in terms of how they are performed; to demonstrate here the author will use the example of the Sunnah cycles (*rakah*) of the dawn prayer, performed before the obligatory cycles. The intention should be clearly expressed by saying “I intend to perform the Sunnah cycles of today’s dawn prayer.” The intention that is sincerely expressed by the heart can be uttered in any language. However, the rest of the prayer has to be performed in Arabic; it is important to note that parts of the Qur’an¹⁰⁷ are recited as an essential portion of the prayer and this is repeated in every unit of the prayer. It usually does not take much time for an individual to learn and memorize *Surah Fatiha*, a very short *Surah* of seven verses, and most of the Arabic words and phrases detailed below. According to Abu Hanifa, until the individual is able to memorize these words, the revert should be able to either follow a congregation at best or recite the prayer in his or her own language for a limited short time. It is important to note that reciting the *salah* in one’s own language is not an alternative or long term solution, in fact a new Muslim is obliged to memorize the Arabic terminology as soon as possible. However, he or she is free to learn the Arabic terms and phrases from Latin transliteration and learn the meaning of these Arabic words in their own language.

While saying the opening *takbir* (*Allahu Akbar*) the men raise their hands up to the level of the earlobes and the women raise them to the shoulder level; both genders turning their palms towards the direction of Mecca. All this is carried out while in *Qiyam* (standing) in the prayer. *Qiyam* is obligatory during the Sunnah cycles, all the obligatory (*fard*) and the necessary (*wajib*) ritual prayers. It is stated

106. Sahih Muslim, Musafirun, 293. According to the Shafi’i School of Law, prayers which take place before the obligatory ritual prayers such as the make-up prayers, and *tahiyāt al-masjid* (the prayer to salute the mosque) can be performed during the reprehensible times.

107. Surah Fatiha

in the verse: “...and stand before Allah with devotion.”¹⁰⁸ While standing the men grip the left wrist with the thumb and the little finger of the right hand; they put the other fingers of the right hand on the left wrist and hold the hand at the navel level. Women hold their hands in a similar manner to men but instead of holding them at the navel, they place their hands on their chests. One is required to look at the place of prostration while standing during the prayer. Feet should be kept in line with the shoulders and there should be a space between the two feet. After saying *takbir* and clasping the hands in *qiyam*, one recites the invocation of *Subhanaka*, followed by the recitation of *basmala* and chapter of the Qur’an named, ‘*al-Fatiha*’.¹⁰⁹ The Prophet (peace be upon him) stated: “One is not credited with having observed the prayer without the recitation.”¹¹⁰ Following the recitation of *al-Fatiha* the Muslim says “*Amin*” and continues by reciting another section from the Qur’an; this can either be a complete *surah*, three short verses, or a long verse the equivalent of a line from the Qur’an. This is called, ‘*damm al-surah*’ (additional chapter). The person who is worshipping then bends down to *ruku* by gripping his or her knees and saying “*Allahu Akbar*”. Men keep their backs straight during *ruku*, whereas, women are not required to bend down so much. The worshiper then says, “*Subhana Rabbi al-Azim*”, at least three times while in the position of *ruku* and then stands up straight by saying, “*Sami Allahu li man Hamidah*”. While standing he or she says, “*Rabbana laka al-Hamd*”, which is followed by the statement of “*Allahu Akbar*” and the performance of the prostration (*sajdah*). Allah has stated in the Qur’an, “O you who believe! Bow down and prostrate.”¹¹¹ Therefore, the *Sajda* (Prostration), an obligatory act of the ritual prayer, is followed after the act of bowing down. Muslims prostrate twice in each cycle of the ritual prayer. The prostration is performed by placing seven limbs on the floor. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) stated, “I have been ordered to prostrate on seven bones. Those are the forehead along with the tip of the nose”, then the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) proceeded to point towards his nose, both hands, both knees and the toes of both feet.¹¹² Prostration can be prolonged during the supererogatory prayers. It is stated in a hadith: “The nearest a servant comes to his Lord is when he is prostrating

108. Q. 2:238. Those who cannot stay standing may perform the prayer by sitting or by gestures. Those who fall ill while praying the ritual prayer may continue the prayer by sitting.

109. According to Hanafi School of law it is not necessary to recite it for the person who performs the ritual prayer in the congregation behind an Imam. The Prophet (pbuh) said: “Whoever has an Imam, the recitation of the Imam is his recitation.”

110. Muslim, *Salat*, 42. The recitation in the obligatory cycles of the afternoon and the late afternoon prayers is not performed out loud by oneself or in congregation. When the evening and the night prayers are performed in the congregation, the recitation is performed with a loud voice, and those who perform it individually can recite them with a light sound loud enough to hear oneself.

111. Q. 22: 77.

112. Sahih al-Bukhari, *Adhan*, 133.

himself, so make supplication (in this state).”¹¹³ The Muslim says, “*Subhana Rabbi al-‘Ala*”, three times while in the position of prostration. Then he or she says, “*Allahu Akbar*”, lifts his or her head from prostration and stays seated for long enough to say, “*Subhanallah*.” While in this seated position, the worshipers turn their right toe towards the *qibla*, keep their right foot straight, sit on their left foot and place their hands upon their knees. This is followed by reciting, “*Allahu Akbar*”, once again and prostrating for a second time; the words “*Subhana Rabbi al-‘Ala*” are recited three times again while in prostration and then the worshiper stands up by saying “*Allahu Akbar*”. In the second cycle, the *basmala* is recited while standing, preceded by the recitation of the chapter of *al-Fatiha* and an additional section from the Qur’an. Then the worshiper bows down by saying “*Allahu Akbar*” and proceeds to perform the *ruku* and the prostrations as in the first cycle. In this cycle after the second prostration, the Muslim sits in the same manner in which he or she does between the two prostrations. This is *the Final Sitting (Qa’dah al-Akhirah)* and it is obligatory in order to end the ritual prayer. During this sitting the invocation of *tahiyyat* is recited followed by the invocations of *Allahumma Salli*, *Allahumma Bariq*, and *Rabbana Atina*. Finally, the greetings of *salam* first to the right and then to the left are uttered by saying each time, “*al-Salam ‘alaykum wa Rahmatullah*”. This brings the *rakah* of the *salah* to completion. The obligatory part of the dawn prayer consists of two cycles which are performed in the same manner as the Sunnah cycle. It is important for new Muslims to know that it is reported that believers who perform their ritual prayers in congregation gain more spiritual reward than those who perform it individually. Our Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) gave us the following glad tidings, “*The prayer in congregation is twenty seven times superior to the prayer offered by a person alone.*”¹¹⁴ It is also important to note that the Friday and the Festival prayers can only be performed in congregation.¹¹⁵

It is helpful for the new Muslims to familiarize themselves with how the ritual prayer is performed in a congregation. First of all, the Imam reminds the congregation to line up properly, in close ranks and turns towards the direction of Mecca. It is important to bear in mind that while falling into line it is enough if the shoulders and the feet of a person are parallel to the shoulders and the feet of other worshipers; it is not obligatory or necessary for the shoulders and the feet of the individual to literally touch the shoulders and feet of other people. All those who are in the congregation state their intention by saying, “I intend to perform the obligatory cycles of today’s ... prayer and to follow the Imam”. The invocation of *Subhanaka*

113. Sahih Muslim, Salat, 215.

114. Sahih al-Bukhari, Adhan, 30; Muslim, Masajid, 42.

115. According to the Shafi’i School of Law, the Festival prayers can be performed individually, while there should be at least forty people to perform the Friday prayer.

is recited. The Imam recites both *aūdhu* and *basmala* silently or aloud;¹¹⁶ this is followed by the recitation of the chapter of al-Fatiha and an additional chapter of the Qur'an out loud, during the evening, the night and the dawn prayers, and, silently, during the afternoon and late afternoon prayers. The congregation stands quietly without any loud recitation, because the recitation of the Imam is deemed the recitation of the congregation. However, according to the Shafi'i *fiqh* the congregation is required to recite the chapter of al-Fatiha in each cycle.



At the end of a congregational prayer or individual ritual prayer the invocation (*dua'*) is read. This is truly the essence of worship. Allah is close to those who express invocations heartily and He accepts their invocations; *"And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am very near, I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me..."*¹¹⁷ A believer should know that his or her supplication will be accepted when he or she makes an effort for Allah. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) states, *"Whoever wishes his prayers to be accepted, his worries and grief to be removed, should lend a hand to those in need."*¹¹⁸ The invocation is conducive for the human being in finding their true value in the presence of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. This point is emphasized in a verse as follows: *"Say: My Lord would not care for you were it not for your prayer..."*¹¹⁹ Allah commands the believers to pray and worship, *"And your Lord says: Call upon Me, I will answer you. Surely those who are too proud for My service shall soon enter hell disgraced."*¹²⁰ It is the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) to say invocations after performing the ritual prayers and during various situations and circumstances. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, *"Whoever performs an obligatory prayer with submission, one of his invocations after this prayer will be accepted."*¹²¹ It is Sunnah to raise one's hands, praise Allah, send blessings upon the Prophet and then supplicate and ask God for whatever he or she wishes. It is important to note that if one simply wants to supplicate to Allah outside of the ritual prayer, then ablution is not required.

116. According to Hanafi school of Law, it is silent.

117. Q. 2: 186.

118. Sahih Muslim, Musaqaat, 32; Ahmad ibn Hanbal, v. III, 32.

119. Q. 25: 77.

120. Q. 40: 60.

121. Sahih al-Bukhari, Jihad, 180; Muslim, Iman, 39.

The Best Cleanser of Our Body and Soul: ABLUTION (WUDU')

A Muslim pay attention to his personal care very much. He performs ablution every day by washing his hands, face, feet; and washes whole body a few times a week and never smells sweat.

Now it is time for us to learn how to perform ablution.

1. PRAYER ABLUTION

Our Prophet gives us good tidings. “When a Muslim or a believer-washes his face (in course of ablution), every sin he contemplated with his eyes will be washed away from his face along with water, or with the last drop of water; when he washes his hands, every sin they wrought will be effaced from his hands with the water, or with the last drop of water; and when he washes his feet, every sin towards which his feet have walked will be washed away with the water or with the last drop of water with the result that he comes out pure from all sins.” (Muslim, Taharah, 32)

As our material body is cleansed by means of performing ablution, our feelings and intentions, which are our spiritual side, are also purified.

After saying Audhu Basmala when we start performing ablution, we wash our hands up to our wrists three times.

All praises due to Allah, Who made water clean, and Islam as light.

2



I give water to my mouth with my right hand and rinse my mouth three times.

7



3



I draw water into my nose by my right hand and cleanse it by my left hand three times.

I wash my entire face three times.

4



5



I wash my right arm up to my elbow (including my elbow) three times.

I wash my left arm up to my elbow (including my elbow) three times.

6





I wipe my entire head with both of my hands.

I wash my hands and wipe the inner side of my ears with my little finger, and behind my ears with my thumb.



I wash my right foot up to my ankle (including my ankle) three times with my left hand.

I wash my left foot up to my ankle (including my ankle) three times with my left hand.

We wash all our all limbs by rubbing them well without giving a break in between them.

Ablution is a light, and we shine when we perform ablution. The more we perform ablution, the brighter we become. Our skin becomes beautiful and our eyes start to spread energy of happiness.

2. MAJOR ABLUTION (GHUSL)

There is also Major Ablution the we perform in addition to our daily minor ab-lution. With major ab-lution, our body is cleaned and it smells nicely. Our protecting shield becomes shiny.

Here is How to Perform Major Ablution (Ghusl)

- Firstly, we wash our hands up to our wrists three times. Because we know that it is a sunnah of our Prophet.

- Then, we clean the impurities from our body, if there is any.

- Later on, we express our intention thinking that “I have indented to perform the obligation of ghusl” or “to remove the big spiritual impurity.”

- Then, we wash our private parts.

- Then, we draw water to our mouth and then to our nostrils and cleanse them.

- Then, we wash our entire face once.

- Then, we wash our hair. We make water reach to the roots of our hair with the help our hands and wash our hair completely by pouring water over our head three times.

- We wash our neck and then wash our shoulders down to our elbows.

- Then, we pour water to the right side of our body down to our heels, and wash the right side of our body by rubbing it with our hands, and then do the same thing to the left side of our body.

- Then, we wash our body completely by rubbing without leaving any dry place. We should be very careful not to forget especially some parts of our body such as belly button, inner parts of our ears, ear hole, the roots of our hair and the roots of our beard.

- We wash between the fingers, and finally we wash our feet well and leave the bath.



3. DRY ABLUTION (TAYAMMUM)

Sometimes there are times of drought in our lands. We may not be able to find water for days or sometimes we may not be able to find water when we are in long journeys. When we do not have water, are we going to stay in a spiritually impure state? Of course not. Soil is a clean material. If we perform dry ablution (tayammum) when there is no water, we will be purified from material and spiritual impurities and will be clean. So, are you ready to perform dry ablution (Tayammum)?

- We recite Basmala (in the name of Allah) when we start performing dry ablution (tayammum) and then express our intention.

- We uncover our arms well, and take off our ring, watch, bracelet etc. or we move them while performing dry ablution.

- We keep our fingers separate from each other and we rub our palms on clean soil.

- We rub our entire face starting from up to down with our palms once.

- Then, we rub our palms on the soil again.

- We rub upper part of our right arm with our left arm up to the elbows (including elbows). Then we rub the inner part of our arm starting from the elbow down to our wrist. After that, we move the inner side of our thumb on the outer side of our right thumb.

- After that, first we rub the upper part of our left arm up to the elbow (including elbow) with our right hand, and then rub inside of our arm down to our wrist.



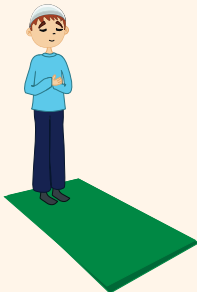

- Then, we rub right palm on our left palm up to our fingers.

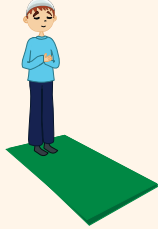


- Then we interlock our fingers to each other.



TABLE OF PRAYERS CYCLE BY CYCLE

If you follow this table carefully, you can perform your ritual prayers in a correct way. Don't forget, each prayer cleans you, prevents you from doing mistakes and bad things.

	1st Cycle	2nd Cycle	3rd Cycle	4th Cycle
Performing a two-Cycle Prayer	<p>We express our intention to pray. Then we say "<i>Allahu Akbar</i>"</p>  <p>We recite <i>al-Fatiha</i> and then some more verses from the Qur'an.</p> <p>Then we bow down and say "<i>Subhana rabbiyal azim</i>" as many times as we want.</p> <p>Then we rise back and say "<i>Sami 'Allahu liman hamidah</i>" "<i>Allahumma Rabbana laka'l-hamd</i>"</p> <p>We then prostrate and recite "<i>Rabbi zalamtu nafsi wa amiltu su'an faghfir li</i>" and then we rise back from prostration and sit for a while and again prostrate and say "<i>Subhana rabbiy al a'ala</i>" as many times as we want.</p>	<p>We recite <i>al-Fatiha</i> and then some more verses from the Qur'an.</p> <p>Then we bow down and say "<i>Subhana rabbiyal azim</i>" as many times as we want.</p> <p>Then we rise and say "<i>Sami 'Allahu liman hamidah</i>" "<i>Allahumma Rabbana laka'l-hamd</i>"</p>  <p>We then prostrate and recite "<i>Rabbi zalamtu nafsi wa amiltu su'an faghfir li</i>" and then we rise back from prostration and sit for a while and again prostrate and say "<i>Subhana rabbiy al a'ala</i>" as many times as we want.</p> <p>We then sit down and recite the supplications of <i>Tahiyyat</i>, <i>Salli and Barik and Rabbana atina</i>.</p> <p>And finally, we turn our face to right and say "<i>As salamu alaikum wa rahmatullah</i>" and then to left and say the same statement.</p>		
Performing a three-Cycle prayer	<p>Perform like the first cycle of 'a two-cycle Prayer'</p> 	<p>Perform like the second cycle of 'a two-cycle Prayer.'</p> <p>Recite only the supplication of <i>Tahiyyat</i> when you sit but do not turn your face to right or left in the end. Remember, there is one more cycle we need to perform!</p> 	<p><i>al-Fatiha</i> is recited.</p> <p>We bow down and recite "<i>Subhana rabbiya al-azim</i>" as many times as we want. Then we rise and say "<i>Allahumma Rabbana wa laka'l-hamd</i>"</p> <p>We then prostrate and recite "<i>Rabbi zalamtu nafsi wa amiltu su'an faghfir li</i>" and then we rise back from prostration and sit for a while and again prostrate and say the same supplication</p> <p>We then sit down and recite the supplications of <i>Tahiyyat</i>, <i>Salli and Barik and Rabbana atina</i>.</p> <p>And finally, we turn our face to right and say "<i>As salamu alaikum wa rahmatullah</i>" and then to left and say the same statement.</p>	

	1st Cycle	2nd Cycle	3rd Cycle	4th Cycle
Performing a four-cycle Obligatory Prayer	<p>Perform the first cycle like the first cycle of 'a three-cycle prayer'.</p>	<p>Perform the second cycle like the second cycle of 'a three cycle prayer'.</p> 	<p>Perform the third cycle like the third cycle of 'a third-cycle prayer.' Do not read any other verses from the Qur'an after <i>Al-Fatiha</i>.</p>	<p>O my friend! Continue performing it like the previous cycle. After prostrations, you can sit down and finish your prayer. Recite the supplications of <i>Tahiyyat, Salli and Barik and Rabbana atina</i>. Then we end prayer by turning our head to right and then to left while saying "<i>As salamu alaikum wa rahmatullah</i>". May Allah accept your prayers.</p>
Performing a four-cycle of a <i>Sunnah Muakkada</i> prayer	<p>Perform the first cycle like the first cycle of 'a three-cycle prayer'.</p>	<p>Perform the second cycle like the second cycle of 'a three cycle prayer'.</p>	<p>Perform it like the first cycle. Recite <i>Al-Fatiha</i> and any other <i>Surah</i>; bow down and then prostrate. And this cycle is completed as well.</p> 	<p>Perform it like the second cycle of 'a two-cycle Prayer' and complete your prayer. May Allah accept your prayer.</p> 

ZAKAH

Zakah is an Arabic term with the root meaning, ‘to purify’. *Zakah* is a form of alms obligatory on both males and females, in order for them to purify their wealth by giving to those who are less fortunate. Allah, the Almighty has ordered the payment of *zakah* in many verses of the Qur’an, such as, “*And keep up prayer and pay the poor rate...*”¹²² and “*... And We revealed to them the doing of good deeds, the establishment of prayer, and the giving of zakah*”¹²³ The obligatory alms is due on the wealth which has been saved during the time period of one year; in other words, it is due on money that has not been spent towards meeting one’s needs. It is important to note that *zakah* is obligatory upon different forms of wealth, such as, money, crops, fruits, livestock and treasures found in the earth. In today’s world, the most common form of wealth is that of money. *Zakah* has to be paid on one’s money if that amount of money reaches the minimum required for *zakah* and if it has been in the person’s possession for the time of a year.

According to Islam, Muslims believe that Allah is the One who creates the wealth and fortune that people earn through working; He is also the One who bestows the wealth on His human beings for the service of humanity. Therefore, there is a responsibility on the people to spend a certain amount of their wealth that Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, has bestowed upon them for His sake. Moreover, since it is Allah the Almighty Who has ordered the payment of *zakah*, it becomes a responsibility on the believers to carry out this command of their Creator. Islam also recognizes that *zakah* is a tool that brings blessings for the wealth and goods of people; it allows their wealth to increase and grow. Allah says in the Qur’an, “*If you are grateful, I will surely increase you in favor*”¹²⁴ and “*And whatsoever you spend of anything (in Allah’s Cause), He will replace it (with something better).*”¹²⁵ In some ways, *zakah* pushes Muslims to utilize their money and turn it into an investment, because those who cannot utilize their wealth, are obliged to pay more *zakah* every year. In this manner, the obligatory alms aid in keeping the economy alive, by preventing people from hoarding their money; furthermore, it ensures the flow of capital and removes the extreme imbalances that can result due to the difference of wealth between the rich and the poor. In other words *zakah* allows for the establishment of peace

122. Q.2:43; 4:77; 14:65

123. Q. 21:73

124. Q. 14:7

125. Q. 34:39



in the community. At the same time, spiritually, *zakah* purifies the wealth and protects the individual from morally questionable traits, such as, stinginess and greed; instead it encourages the Muslim to be a giving and generous person. Allah the Almighty states in the Qur'an, "*Take, from their wealth a charity (zakah) by which you purify them and cause them increase.*"¹²⁶

There are certain conditions that need to be met in order for *zakah* to be obligatory upon someone. Some of these conditions are related to the person who is going to pay *zakah*, others are related to the goods out of which the zakat is going to be paid. The person who will give the *zakah* must be a Muslim and he/she must be free. For those who have not reached puberty or who are not sane, it is obligatory upon their guardians to pay *zakah* on their behalf out of their wealth. For *zakah* to be obligatory, it is mandatory that the person is free of debt. The minimum required holding of wealth before one is obligated to pay *zakah* is known as the *nisab*. The wealth that is payable as *zakah*, must reach the amount of *nisab* or must be equal to, or more than the value of *nisab*. If a person's wealth is below the value of *nisab*, they are not obligated to pay *zakah*. In fact there is a distinct *nisab* for gold and for silver. In the case of gold, silver or currency (including bank savings), the *nisab* should have been in the person's possession for a period of one year. In present day, most people hold currency rather than gold or silver as savings, therefore, the specific *nisab* is commonly based upon the currency's purchasing power, which is actually backed by gold and silver. Information regarding the specific amount for *nisab* is usually available through the internet. There is no *zakah* on precious stones that are not gold or silver. Moreover, personal possessions, such as, furniture, horses, cars, honey, milk etc. is not subject to the payment of *zakah*, provided that such possessions are not kept for the purpose of trade.

The *nisab* for the wealth and savings of an individual is calculated as two and a half percent of the total cash value of such items. Furthermore, *zakah* must be paid once a year on livestock; such as cows, camels, sheep and goats; when their number has reached the level of the *nisab*. There is no zakat on donkeys and mules. For example, if one owns 30 to 39 cows, then the *zakah* to be given is 1 two-year-old cow, and, if 40 to 59 cows are owned, then 1 three-year-old cow is to be paid as *zakah*. Similarly, if the number of sheep or goats owned are 40 to 120, then the *zakah* to be given is 1 one-year-old sheep or goat, if 101 to 200 sheep are owned, then 2 sheep or goats are to be given as *zakah*, if 201 to 399 sheep are owned, then 3 sheep or goats are to be paid as *zakah* and if 400 and above sheep or goats are owned, then 1 sheep or goat for each hundred owned is to be paid as *zakah*. *Zakah* is also to be paid on crops whenever a crop is harvested. It is to be paid on wheat, rice and other

126. Q. 9:103

grains, all kinds of beans and peas, groundnut, dates, olives, and their equivalents in various parts of the world. As recommended by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) the *nisab* for farm produce if the land is irrigated naturally (by a spring, rainfall, or a river) is one-tenth, and if it is irrigated by drawing water from a well or dam, the *nisab* is one half of one-tenth. *Zakah* is not required on fruits and vegetables that perish quickly when picked, such as, oranges, bananas, pineapples, mangoes, guavas, lettuce spinach, tomatoes, peppers, etc.

The manner in which to pay *zakah* is to make an intention at the time of giving it but there is no need to express verbally to those who receive it, that it is *zakah*.¹²⁷ In Islam *zakah* has to be distributed to specific categories of people. Allah has mentioned those categories in the following verse: *“The alms are only for the poor; the needy, those employed to collect (the funds), and to attract the hearts of those who have been inclined (towards Islam); and to free the captives; and for those in debt; and for Allah’s Cause, and for the wayfarer (a traveler who is cut off from everything); a duty imposed by Allah. And Allah is the All-Knower, the All-Wise.”*¹²⁸ In this verse, the poor mean, the people who do not have enough food to eat for a year. The needy, cover the people who do not own anything at all. The latter people are in more need than the poor. Those employed to collect the *zakah* i.e. the collectors that participate in every job concerning the collection and the distribution of the *zakah*, receive a specified portion of the collected *zakah* as salary in exchange for the service they carry out; they are paid a specified portion of the *zakah* even if they may be wealthy and well off financially. *Zakah* is also distributable to people whose hearts have been inclined towards Islam i.e. the non-believers, in the hope that they will become Muslim by seeing the good of the Muslim society; *zakah* can also be paid to Muslims who are new to Islam, in the hope that their choice will be strengthened, or, in the case that these new Muslims may have suffered financial or other loss due to the rejection and persecution by their people. In the past when the taking of war prisoners and slavery was wide spread, *zakah* was distributed to such Muslims who had been taken as slaves or prisoners of war, with the purpose of empowering them to buy their own freedom. The sixth category of people to receive the *zakah*, are those who are weighed down with debts but they lack the means to pay off these debts. The seventh category is specified for those who are on the Path of Allah; this covers all the uses of money for the defense and propagation of Islam. In relation to this it can be stated that the Islamic organizations of present day, dedicated to spreading the message of Islam, are eligible to receive *zakah*. Fi-

127. According to Hanafis and Malikis, it is better if *zakah* is given secretly so that the receiver is not humiliated since it may hurt their feelings and also so that this act of generosity is not openly shown to everyone. However, according to the Shafi’i and Hanbali madhhabs, it is more appropriate for the *zakah* to be given openly in order to encourage people to implement this ‘*ibādah*.’

128. Q. 9:60

nally, the wayfarers, refers to the people who are left stranded during their journey because their money has run out and they are unable to reach their homeland. In the categories mentioned above, with the exception of those whose hearts will be attracted to Islam-, it is required for these people to be free, Muslim and not to be of the Hashemite lineage. It is not obligatory for the *zakah* to be distributed equally amongst these eight groups of people; it is possible for the *zakah* to be given to only one person or to one category. In addition, it is possible to use the *zakah* to assist a destitute person who has trouble meeting their needs of paying their rent, by making them a homeowner.

Normal charity which is called, '*sadaqa*' in Islam, is also strongly recommended to Muslims; *sadaqa* can be given anywhere and at any time. *Sadaqa* may be in the form of money, food, clothing or even a deed. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) mentioned that an act of kindness can also be considered *sadaqa* (charity). In other words, removing harmful objects from the road, helping someone to load his vehicle or even smiling at someone is a form of *sadaqa*. Therefore, every person, whether rich or poor, has the means to give *sadaqa*, i.e. to help his or her relatives, neighbors and other people, in order to gain Allah's pleasure.

SIYAM

The lexical meaning of the word, '*sawm*' (fasting), is to keep oneself away from an action. In legal terminology, it means, for people who are legally responsible, to carry out this act of worship, by staying away from eating, drinking and engaging in sexual relations from the time of the dawn until the setting of the sun, with the intention of performing an act of worship. Fasting is a source of self-restraint, piety and achieving God consciousness. The purpose of *sawm* is to seek *taqwa* (heightened spiritual awareness of Allah). Fasting was even prescribed by Allah for the people before the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), "*O believers! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may attain taqwa [self-restraint, piety and God-consciousness]*"¹²⁹ There are countless spiritual and moral benefits to fasting. *Sawm* is an act of obedience to Allah. A fasting person is willing to sacrifice his basic humanly needs in submission to Allah's Will and to seek His pleasure and blessings. In their hunger and thirst, the humans can feel the essence of Allah's immense power. *Sawm* teaches good behavior and discipline; it does not require abstinence from eating and drinking only, but rather, a fasting individual must also try to keep in check,

129. Q. 2:183

all their improper behavior. The Prophet is reported to have said, *“If one does not abandon falsehood in words and deeds, Allah has no need of his abandoning his food and drink”*.¹³⁰

Therefore, fasting strengthens people’s will-power and helps them to control the wants and desires of their inner self (*nafs*). By exercising patience while being hungry, human beings learn to apply self-control in all difficult circumstances; they learn to become masters of their desires rather than slaves to their longings. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) expressed this truth by stating, *“Fasting constitutes half the patience.”*¹³¹ Another hadith expressing the importance of fasting is as follows; A man came to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) and said, *“Order me to do something from which Allah will make me benefit from.”* The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) stated, *“I recommend fasting to you, continue with that because that is an act of worship with no equal.”*¹³² Fasting vitalizes the feelings of compassion, love and mercy in people; it enables these peaceful feelings to replace resentments and disappointments. Moreover, fasting can help people’s physical health by removing harmful substances from the body which have accumulated over time; the Prophet stated, *“Fast and you will gain health.”*¹³³ In the following Hadith, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), further expressed that fasting is also a means by which sins are forgiven; *“Whosoever fasts in the month of Ramadan out of sincere faith and hoping for a reward from Allah then all his previous sins will be forgiven.”*¹³⁴ *Sawm* unites Muslims all over the world, it brings together the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, the men and the women; whatever their status, they share the same experience of sacrificing their needs to please Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. *Sawm* may also help the wealthier Muslims to empathize with those Muslims and non-Muslims who suffer poverty and hardship; by experiencing the effects of hunger and thirst, any Muslim can better understand the suffering of another.



Fasting in the month of Ramadan is one of the five basic principles of Islam. It was made obligatory upon believers in the second year of the Hijrah. The obligation of fasting is stated in the following verses of the Qur’an, *“O you who believe*

130. Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 30, Hadith 1

131. Sunan Ibn Majah, Kitab as-siyam. 44.

132. Sunan an-Nasai, Kitab as-siyam, 165.

133. Sunan at-Tabarani, Bab as-sawm, 5.

134. Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 32, Hadith 1

decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous." and, "So whoever sights [the new moon of] the month, let him fast."¹³⁵ In order for the Ramadan fasting to be considered obligatory, it must be undertaken during the month of Ramadan. Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) stated, "Start fasting when you see the crescent of the month of Ramadan."¹³⁶ As it is understood from the verses of the Qur'an and the above Hadith of the Prophet, it is obligatory upon every Muslim, who is *mukallaf* (legally responsible), to fast in the month of Ramadan every year. Taking the obligation of fasting lightly or denying that it is an obligatory act of worship is unacceptable in Islam. As for the person who believes that fasting is obligatory, but still does not fast without having a valid excuse, he/she is seen as committing a sin.

Fasting is classified into different categories according to certain rulings; namely, obligatory (*fard*), recommended (*mandub*), disliked (*makruh*) and forbidden (*haram*). There are two types of fasts that are *fard*; firstly, fasting in the month of Ramadan, which is obligatory upon all Muslims who carry the conditions of being a mukallaf. In other words, Muslims who are able-minded, have reached puberty and have no valid excuses that prevent them from fasting, are required to fast in the month of Ramadan. Muslims are obligated to make up any Ramadan fast (*qada* and *kafara*) that could not be performed, or, that was broken due to a valid excuse or without an excuse. According to most Muslim jurists, the making up and the expiation of these fasts needs to be fulfilled in the same year they were not performed. Those who did not fast in the month of Ramadan must make up for these days in the days other than the month of Ramadan, except the days when fasting is not allowed. Secondly, if someone vows to fast, the fast becomes obligatory for them (*nadhr*). The recommended fasts according to the Sunnah are,

such as, fasting on the day of Arafa for the person who is not performing the major pilgrimage (*Hajj*), fasting on the eight days before the day of Arafa, fasting on the day of *ashura* (that is the tenth day of the month of Muharram), fasting on a day before or after *ashura*, fasting in the months of Rajab and Shaban, fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, fasting on the fifteenth day of the month of Shaban, and fasting three days in every lunar month. Disliked or *makruh* fasting according to Islam is as follows; it is considered repre-



135. Q. 2: 183

136. Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 30, Hadith 10.