

The Five Pillars of Islam

Have you heard of the five pillars of Islam? If so, what are they? They are: 1) *shahadah*; 2) *salat* ; 3) fasting; 4) *zakat* charity; 5) *Hajj* pilgrimage.

1. *Shahadah*

It is the most important pillar in Islam and a declaration of monotheism “There is no deity worthy of worship except Allah” and “that Muhammad (pbuh) is his messenger and servant”. This declaration is uttered in public if one decides to become a Muslim. It helps remember that we come from Allah and to Him we will return. *Shahadah* is thus an expression of love for Allah. Muslims must therefore express their gratitude, remembrance and willingness to live according to the straight path of Allah.

2. *Salat* (Prayer)

It is performed five times a day. The times of prayer follow the natural cycle of the sun’s daily course. *Salat* is about rendering oneself to the Divine Presence.

Muslims are encouraged to pray with others in a mosque. The Prophet (pbuh) said that congregational prayer has great benefit. The location needs to be clean and the worshipper must clean himself/herself by making ablution (*wudu*). This ritual not only cleanses a Muslim physically, but is a moral and spiritual one as well. On Fridays, the noon prayer is replaced by Friday prayer. This special prayer is obligatory for men. Women are encouraged to attend as well.

In addition to the five prayers, the Prophet offered many more prayers in devotion to Allah. Muslims are encouraged to do the same. Praying five times a days is a constant reminder of Allah.

3. *Fasting*

Ramadan has recently the most known Islamic word in the West. It is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. Muslims believe that during the month of Ramadan, the Quran began to be revealed by Allah to

the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Revelation started when angel Gabriel first visited the Prophet (pbuh) in the cave of Hira in Mecca. Why do Muslims fast? For many purposes. For one thing it is a purification of both the body and the soul. It is strictly forbidden, for instance, to gossip during Ramadan. All charity and good deeds bring more blessings during Ramadan.

4. *Zakat* (Obligatory Charity)

Muslims must give 2.5% of their accumulated wealth that has been unused during the year. The money can be given to the mosque, which then discharges it to the poor and needy, or it can be given to charitable organizations, or even directly to individuals in need.

5. *The Hajj* (Pilgrimage to Mecca)

Hajj in Arabic language means destination. In Islam, *Hajj* is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and all related rituals. *Hajj* is an essential duty once in a lifetime upon all Muslims who are in good health and financially able to do so.

The rituals of the *Hajj* are based upon the story of the Prophet Abraham. After building the Ka'aba, Allah told Abraham "And proclaim the Pilgrimage among men: they will come to thee on foot and mounted on every kind of camel, lean on account of journeys through deep and distant highways (22:27). Muslims have been responding to the call of Abraham since the days of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The story is close to the heart of every Muslim.