

Islam Practices



The Five Pillars and Ten Obligatory Acts

The Five Pillars

Duties that all Muslims are expected to undertake. They are central to Muslim practices and have a great impact on daily life. They join Muslims together as a community and show their obedience to God. The Five Pillars are:

1. **Shahadah**- the declaration of faith
2. **Salah**- to pray five times a day
3. **Zakah**- giving money to charity
4. **Sawm**- fasting during the month of Ramadan
5. **Haji**- pilgrimage to Mecca

The Ten Obligatory Acts

Ten important duties for Shi'a Muslims, which include the Five Pillars (also known as Ancillaries of Faith). They are:

1. **Salah**- prayer
2. **Sawm**- fasting
3. **Zakah**- giving money to charity
4. **Khums**- 20% tax on income once all expenses are deducted. Half goes to charity and half goes to Shi'a religious leaders
5. **Haji**- pilgrimage
6. **Jihad**- struggle to maintain the faith and defend Islam
7. **Amb-bil-Maruf**- encouraging people to do what is good
8. **Nahi Anil Munkar**- discouraging people from doing what is wrong
9. **Tawllah**- to be loving towards the friends of God, including Muhammad and the Imams
10. **Tabarra**- disassociating from the enemies of God

1. Shahadah

- A statement that expresses the main belief in Islam
- In Arabic it is '***La ilaha illa Allah wa- Muhammad rasul Allah***' which in English translates to 'there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah'
- Sincerely reciting this statement in front of Muslim witnesses is the only requirement for joining the Muslim community
- It is recited many times during a life time- when a baby is born and hopefully the last words before somebody dies
- It is included in daily prayers
- It provides the foundation for the other four pillars- the other four put into action the pillar of shahadah (this also applies to the additional Five Obligatory Acts found in Shi'a Islam)

Shahadah in Shi'a Islam

Many Shi'a Muslims add an extra phrase to the Shahadah '*and Ali is the friend of God*'. This demonstrates the belief that Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son in law was the true successor of Muhammad and only he and his descendants know the true meaning of the revelation given to Muhammad

2. Salah: Daily Prayers

- Sunni Muslims are required to pray at **5 set times** a day
 - The times are worked out from the time of sunrise to sunset so they change slightly each day and in different seasons. The five times of prayer are; **Fajr** (just before sunrise), **Zuhr** (just after midday), **Asr** (Afternoon), **Maghrib** (Just after sunset), **Isha** (night)
 - Salah places demands on Muslims but demonstrates their submission to Allah
 - **Shi'a Muslims** combine the midday and afternoon prayers, and the sunset and afternoon prayers so they pray **3 times a day**
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- It is important that Muslims are spiritually clean before they pray- this is achieved by ritual washing called **wudu**. Instructions for this are in the Qur'an ***'You who believe when you are about to pray, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, wash your feet up to the ankles and, if required, wash your whole body.'*** Qur'an 5:6
 - If water is not available, for example in a desert, a dry form of washing is allowed using sand or dust. This shows that wudu is about **spiritual cleanliness** and preparation not physical
 - Muslim face the holy city of **Makkah** (Mecca) when praying as this means all Muslims are focussing on the one place associated with God. In mosques they have a **mihrab**. This is a semi circular wall built into the **qiblah wall** which shows the exact direction of Makkah from the mosque. If prayers are taking place outside a mosque they may use a compass built into a prayer mat.
 - In the mosques prayers will be led by imams- men and women pray at the same time but in separate spaces

2. Salah: Daily Prayers cont...

- Daily prayers are made up of a **rak'ah**. This is a set sequence of actions and recitations. The morning prayer is made up of two **rak'ah** the night prayer is made up of four **rak'ah**
- The **rak'ah** changes depending on which prayer it is being used in- for example The **rak'ah** includes the following: **1.** While standing Muslims recite the first chapter from the Qur'an **2.** While bowing Muslims say in Arabic 'Glory be to my Lord who is the very greatest' three times. The bowing position shows they believe God to be great **3.** Returning to an upright position they make a recitation praising God **4.** They then kneel with their forehead, nose, hands, knees and toes touching the floor. This is called **prostration** and shows complete obedience to God. They recite 'How perfect is my Lord the most high' **5.** Muslims then sit while reciting 'God is the greatest' and after pausing for a few seconds prostrate themselves once more while repeating 'God is the greatest'
- Once the required number of rak'ah is completed Muslims turn their face to the right and then left, reciting in Arabic 'Peace be upon you, and the mercy and blessings of God'
- Personal prayers can be added at the end of the final rak'ah that can follow any form
- The midday prayer every Friday is considered to be special and is called the **Jummah prayer**. All male Muslims are expected to attend the mosque to pray together (women can also) where the imam will also deliver a sermon afterwards
- Muslims can pray at home in any clean space. They must still perform Wudu.

2. Salah: Daily Prayers cont...

Why is prayer so important...

- Prayer is very important to Muslims as this is something they believe Allah has commanded them to do:

'Your Lord says 'Call on Me and I will answer you' Qur'an 40:60

'So woe to those pray, but are heedless of their prayer' Qur'an 107:4-5

- Prayer creates a greater awareness of God, which in turn motivates them to do God's will
- Prayer unites Muslims worldwide because they all pray in the same way
- Reciting from the Qur'an during the prayers reminds Muslims of its importance
- The actions of bowing and prostrating them that God is greater and more important than they are

3. Sawm: fasting during Ramadan

- Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar- most important month
- It is during Ramadan that the Qur'an started to be revealed to Muhammad- many Muslims recite the Qur'an in daily sections over the 30 days of Ramadan- this helps them remember the importance of the Qur'an's teachings
- Ramadan is known as the month of fasting because Muslims fast during daylight hours for the whole month, going without food and drink
- The command to fast can be found in the Qur'an ***'It was in the month of Ramadan that the Qur'an was revealed as guidance for mankind...So any one of you who is present that month should fast'***
- Smoking and sex are also forbidden during daylight hours
- The whole focus during Ramadan is on God, for which purity of thought is required in order to cleanse the soul and free it from harm. Fasting requires considerable self-discipline but allows Muslims to show they can sacrifice their physical needs as evidence of submission to God
- Pregnant women, mothers nursing babies, children and those who are ill do not have to fast. Some children fast for a shorter length of time to help train themselves
- Feeling hungry during the day reminds Muslims of their duty to help the poor. Many Muslims choose to pay Zakah and many invite the poor to share a meal when they break the fast

3. Sawm: fasting during Ramadan cont...

- The Night of Power is an important festival that marks the beginning of God's revelation to Muhammad. The exact date this happened is not agreed on but it is believed to be one of the odd numbered dates in the second half of Ramadan. The first verses of the Qur'an that were revealed to Muhammad on this night describe how Angel Jibril instructed him to start reading ***'Read! In the name of your Lord who created: He created man from a clinging form [a blood clot]. Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One who taught man what he did not know.'*** Qur'an 96: 1-5
- The importance of the Night of Power is explained in the Qur'an ***'What will explain to you what that Night of Glory is? The Night of Glory is better than a thousand months.'*** Qur'an 97:2-3. This means that observing the Night of Power gives Muslims the benefits of worshipping for a thousand months because of this Muslims try to keep awake through the night on each of the possible dates, devoting themselves to prayer and studying the Qur'an

Benefits of fasting: **1.** It brings Muslims closer to Allah, they rediscover religion as a focus in their lives **2.** It is the month of forgiveness. Muhammad said all sins are forgiven for those who fast **3.** It serves as a reminder of the plight of the poor **4.** It builds personal qualities like self-determination, humility and courage

4. Zakah: Almsgiving

- Zakah means giving money to the poor. For Muslims who have enough savings they must give 2.5% of their savings to the poor.
- By giving Zakah Muslims are acknowledging that everything they own comes from Allah and belongs to him, and they should use their wealth to remember God and those in need. It teaches self-discipline and honesty.
- Zakah literally means to purify and cleanse. Muslims believe that giving Zakah helps to purify the soul.
- The origins of Zakah are from the Qur'an *'They ask you [Prophet] what they should give. Say, 'Whatever you give should be for parents, close relatives, orphans, the needy and travellers. God is well aware of whatever good you do.'* Qur'an 2:215
- Only Muslims with savings greater than a certain figure (known as the nisab) are required to Zakah. The nisab is either worked out as the value of 87 grams of gold which in 2015 was around £2200 or 612 grams of silver which in 2015 was around £200.
- Zakah can be donated to charity such as Muslim Aid or put in a collection box in the mosque. The Qur'an makes clear who should receive Zakah *'Alms are meant only for the poor, the needy.'* Qur'an 9:60
- Muslims are also encouraged to give their time and money voluntarily at any point in the year. This is called **Sadaqah**.

4. Zakah: Almsgiving cont...

Zakah is important because...

- Giving Zakah means fulfilling a duty imposed by God.
- Paying Zakah gives Muslims a good attitude towards money.
- Zakah strengthens communities by making the rich support the poor.
- Zakah links well with salah. Prayers should make Muslims feel concern for others, Zakah puts that concern into action.

Khums is an important part of Muslim practice in Shi'a Islam in addition to giving Zakah. This is a tax set at 20 per cent of any yearly surplus. Half of the money collected as Khums goes to Shi'a religious leaders to be spent on behalf of God on things considered necessary for religious matters, while the rest is given to charity or the poor

5. Hajj-pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca)

- A pilgrimage is a journey made for religious reasons- Hajj is a pilgrimage that should be made once in a life time.
- Hajj starts and ends in the holy city of Makkah in Saudi Arabia. It always takes place from the 8th to the 12th months of Dhul Hijjah, which is the last month of the Islamic calendar.
- There are several references to Hajj in the Qur'an ***'Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owned by God by people who are able to undertake it.'*** Qur'an 3:97

How Hajj is performed

1. Muslims dress in two pieces of white cloth (ihram) one around the waist, the other over the shoulder. This shows all Muslims are equal before Allah.
2. Hajj begins in Makkah at the Ka'aba. This is the oldest shrine to Allah on Earth. It was built by Prophet Adam, rebuilt by Nuh (Noah to Christians) after the flood, and then again by Ibrahim and his son Ismail. Pilgrims circle the Ka'aba in an anti-clockwise direction seven times. As they circle the Ka'aba they recite ***'Here I am. Oh Lord, at your service. Praise and blessings to you.'*** Muslims would also try to touch the black stone built into the Ka'aba. This stone is very revered as the only surviving stone from the original Ka'aba built by Ibrahim.

5. Hajj-pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca) cont...

3. The crowd then walk along a covered walkway linking the hills of Safa and Marwah. This is connected to the story Hajira (Ibrahim's wife) and their son Ishmael who ran out of water. Haijra ran up and down the two hills Safa and Marwah looking for help. She prayed to God for help. Ishmael struck his foot on the ground which caused water to gush up from the earth. Muslims believe this water has life giving qualities. Muslims complete seven circuits of this walk and then drink water from the Zamzam well.

4. Pilgrims then travel from camp at Mina to Mount Arafat (Mount of Mercy) where Muhammad preached his last sermon. They stand from noon-sunset meditating, praying and asking for forgiveness. The heat of the sun is a reminder of what the day of judgement will be like for Muslims. Islam teaches that God will forgive the sins of all those who completed the standing at Arafat.

5. Muslims then move to Muzdalifah to camp and collect stones on the way to be used the next day at Mina. At Mina, there are three stone walls called the Jamarat. These walls represent the devil and temptation. The pilgrims throw the pebbles at the walls to show they reject evil.

5. Hajj-pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca) cont...

6. Many pilgrims then sacrifice an animal (sheep, cow, camel or goat). This is repeated throughout the world as part of the Id-ul-Adha celebrations. Men shave their heads and women cut a lock of their hair.

7. The next day pilgrims then return to the Ka'aba to circle it seven more times.

Why is Hajj so important?

- It can bring about a spiritual transformation that makes them a better person.
- It shows self-discipline. The physical and mental demands it imposes are great.
- It emphasises unity and equality.
- It reminds Muslims of the faith and examples set by Ibrahim, Hajira and Ishmael.
- It can lead to forgiveness of sins.
- It teaches sincerity and humility in a person's relationship with God.

Jihad

- Jihad means struggling against evil either as an individual or a collective.
- The origins of jihad go as far back as Muhammad (it appears many times in the Qur'an and the Hadith) ***'But those who have believed, migrated, and striven for God's cause, it is they who can look forward to God's mercy: God is most forgiving and merciful' Qur'an 2:218***
- **Greater Jihad** is the personal inward struggle of Muslims to live in line with their faith. This means observing the Five Pillars. Muslims must also devote their life to God by avoiding temptations such as alcohol and drugs. Some take this even further and try to learn the Qur'an by heart or give **Sadaqah**.
- **Lesser Jihad** is less important than greater jihad. This is the outward struggle to defend Islam from threat. This was important in the early stages of the religion when Muslims were persecuted for their faith and this is why there are several instances in the Qur'an that appear to allow violence. There are rules however for lesser jihad- it must be in response to a threat to the faith, it must be the last resort, it cannot be used to convert people to Islam and innocent people are never to be harmed.

Id-ul-Fitr

- Also written as Eid-ul-Fitr means the 'festival of breaking the fast'. Also can be called the Sugar Feast, the Sweet Festival or Lesser Eid.
- Festival marks the end of the month of Ramadan. It is celebrating the end of a month of fasting, but also thanking God for the strength he has given them. Muslims also give thanks to God for providing his guidance and wisdom in the Qur'an, the first revelation of which was during the month of Ramadan.

How is it celebrated?

- Celebrated for one or two days
- Muslims gather together in Mosques to say special prayers focussed on forgiveness
- Everyone wears their best clothes and homes are decorated. Special foods are eaten and processions take place throughout the street. Cards and presents are exchanged. Many go to the local cemetery to remember family members who have died.

Id-ul-Adha

- Also written as Eid-ul-Adha is the festival of sacrifice or Greater Eid.
- It is celebrated on the 10th day of the month of Dhul-Hijjah and lasts for four days.
- This festival remembers the prophet Ibrahim who was willing to sacrifice his son on Ishmael on God's command.

How is the festival celebrated?

- The festival forms part of hajj but is celebrated by Muslims all over the world.
- It begins with prayers in the mosque where the imam preaches a service about sacrifice.
- People visit family and enjoy festive meals. Cards and presents are given.
- Those on hajj might sacrifice an animal to remember Ibrahim's sacrifice for those on hajj. In the UK however this is not allowed so British Muslims may buy an animal from the local slaughterhouse. The family keep a third of the meat, a third is given to relatives and the remaining third is given to the poor.

Festival of Ashura

- The Day of Ashura (Day of Remembrance) is a major Shi'a festival that takes place on the 10th day of the month of Muharram. Ashura means 'tenth'.
- Sunni Muslims also observe Ashura but refer to it as the Day of Atonement, and remember it as the day when the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt others remember it as the day Noah left the ark after the flood. Muhammad nominated Ashura as a day of fasting from sunset to sunset and it is still a voluntary fast day for Sunni Muslims.
- Shi'a Muslims remember Ashura as the death of Husayn (Hussein) son of Imam Ali and grandson of Muhammad, on 10 October, 680CE in Karbala Iraq. It is a day of mourning for the martyrdom of Husayn. Husayn's martyrdom is widely seen by Shi'a Muslims as a symbol of the struggle against injustice, tyranny and oppression.

How is Ashura commemorated?

- In Muslim countries e.g. Iraq there is a public holiday that takes place to remember the events.
- During the day Shi'a Muslims take part in a public expression of grief and mourning, some even beat themselves on the back with chains to connect themselves with Husayn's sufferings. Most Shi'a Muslims would condemn these practices now however and would instead stage re-enactments. Some Shi'a Muslims believe they should shed blood through blood transfusions instead.
- In Iraq many Shi'a Muslims go to the Mashhad al-Husayn the shrine in Karbala which is believed to house the tomb of Husayn.