Pillars of Islam

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All practicing Muslims accept belief in the ‘Six Articles of Faith’ and are obliged to follow the ‘Five Pillars.’ They are:  
1. Muslim profession of faith or shahada.  
2. Ritual Prayer or salah.  
3. Obligatory Charity or zakah.  
4. Fasting or sawm.  
5. Pilgrimage or hajj.

**The First Pillar  
Shahada:**The Shahada is the Muslim profession of faith and the first of  
the ‘Five Pillars’ of Islam. The word shahada in Arabic means  
‘testimony.’ The shahada is to testify to two things:  
  
(a) Nothing deserves worship except Allah).  
(b) Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

A Muslim is simply one who bears witness and testifies that“nothing deserves worship except Allah and Muhammad is the  
Messenger of Allah.” One becomes a Muslim by making this simple  
declaration.  
It must be recited by every Muslim at least once in a lifetime with a full understanding of its meaning and with the assent of the heart. Muslims say this when they wake up in the morning, and before they go to sleep at night. It is repeated five times in the call to prayer in every mosque. A person who utters the *shahada* as their last words in this life has been promised Paradise.

1. **Nothing deserves worship except Allah (Allah).**  
   The first part of this testimony states that Allah has the exclusive right to be worshipped inwardly and outwardly, by one’s heart and limbs. In Islamic doctrine, not only can no one be worshipped apart from Him, but no one else can be worshipped alongwith Him. He has no partners or associates in worship. Worship,  
   in its comprehensive sense and all its aspects, is for Him alone. Allah’s right to be worshipped is the essential meaning of Islam’s testimony of faith: Lā ‘ilāha ‘illā llāh. A person becomes Muslim by testifying to the divine right to worship. It is the crux of Islamic belief in Allah, even all of Islam. It is considered the central message of all prophets and messengers sent by Allah – the message of Ibrahim, Isaac, Ismail, Musa, the Hebrew prophets, Esa, and Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon them.   
   , ‘And your Allah is One Allah: there is no Allah but He.’ (Quran 2:163). They all declared clearly:  
   “Worship Allah! You have no other Allah but Him.” (Quran 7:59).
2. **Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah (Allah).**  
   Muhammad was born in Mecca Arabia in the year 570 CE. His ancestry goes back to Ismail, a son of Prophet Ibrahim. The second part of the confession of faith asserts that he is not only a prophet but also a messenger of Allah, a higher role also played by Musa and Esa before him. Like all prophets before him, he was a human being, but chosen by Allah to convey His message to all humanity rather than one tribe or nation from among the many that exist. For Muslims, Muhammad brought the last and final revelation. In accepting Muhammad as the “last of the prophets,” they believe that his prophecy confirms and  
   completes all of the revealed messages, beginning with that of Adam. In addition, Muhammad serves as the preeminent role model through his life example. The believer’s effort to follow Muhammad’s example reflects the emphasis of Islam on practice and action.

**The Prayer***Salah* is the daily ritual prayer enjoined upon all Muslims as one of the five Pillars of Islam. It is performed five times a day by all Muslims. *Salah* is a precise worship, different from praying on the inspiration of the moment. Muslims pray or, perhaps more correctly, worship five times throughout the day:  
• Between first light and sunrise.  
• After the sun has passed the middle of the sky.  
• Between mid-afternoon and sunset.  
• Between sunset and the last light of the day.  
• Between darkness and midnight.  
  
Each prayer may take at least 5 to 10 minutes, but it may be lengthened as a person wishes. Muslims can pray in any clean environment, alone or together, in a mosque or at home, at work or on the road, indoors or out. Under special circumstances, such as illness, journey, or war, certain allowances in the prayers are given to make their offering easy. Having specific times each day to be close to Allah helps Muslims remain aware of the importance of their faith, and the role it plays in every part of life. Muslims start their day by cleaning themselves and then standing before their Lord in prayer. The prayers consist of recitations from the Quran in Arabic and a sequence of movements: standing, bowing, prostrating, and  
sitting. All recitations and movements express submission, humility, and homage to Allah. The various postures Muslims assume during their prayers capture the spirit of submission; the words remind them of their commitments to Allah. The prayer also reminds one of belief in the Day of Judgment and of the fact that one has to appear before his or her Creator and give an account of their entire life. This is how Muslims start their day. In the course of the day, Muslims dissociate themselves from their worldly engagements for a few moments and stand before Allah. This brings to mind once again the real purpose of life.

**Azan:**

Allahu Akbar (God is the greatest),  
Allahu Akbar (God is the greatest),  
Allahu Akbar (God is the greatest),  
Allahu Akbar (God is the greatest),  
Ash-hadu an-laa ilaaha ill-Allah (I witness that none deserves worship except God).  
Ash-hadu an-laa ilaaha ill-Allah (I witness that none deserves worship except God).  
Ash-hadu anna Muhammad-ar-Rasool-ullah (I witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God).  
Ash-hadu anna Muhammad-ar-Rasool-ullah (I witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God).  
Hayya ‘alas-Salah (Come to prayer!)  
Hayya ‘alas-Salah (Come to prayer!)  
Hayya ‘alal-Falah (Come to prosperity!)  
Hayya ‘alal-Falah (Come to prosperity!)  
Allahu Akbar (God is the greatest),  
Allahu Akbar (God is the greatest),  
La ilaaha ill-Allah (None deserves worship except God).

Friday is the weekly day of communal worship in Islam. The weekly convened Friday Prayer is the most important service. The Friday Prayer is marked by the following features:

• It must be performed in a congregation led by a prayer It fallas in the same time as the noon prayer.  
leader, an ‘Imam.’ It can not be offered individually. Muslims in the West try to arrange their schedules to allow them time to attend the prayer.  
• Rather than a day of rest like the Sabbath, Friday is a day of devotion and extra worship. A Muslim is allowed normal work on Friday as on any other day of the week. They may proceed with their usual activities, but they must break for the Friday prayer. After the worship is over, they can resume their mundane activities.  
• Typically, the Friday Prayer is performed in a mosque, if available. Sometimes, due to unavailability of a mosque, it may be offered at a rented facility, park, etc.  
• When the time for prayer comes, the Adhan is pronounced The Imam then stands facing the audience and  
delivers his sermon (known as *khutba* in Arabic), an essential part of the service of which its attendance is required. While the Imam is talking, everyone present listens to the sermon quietly till the end. Most Imams in the West will deliver the sermon in English, but some deliver it in Arabic. Those who deliver it in Arabic  
usually deliver a short speech in the local language before the service.  
• There are two sermons delivered, one distinguished from the other by a brief sitting of the Imam. The sermon is  
commenced with words of praise of God and prayers of blessing for Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him.  
• After the sermon, the prayer is offered under the leadership of the Imam who recites the Fatiha and the other  
Quranic passage in an audible voice. When this is done, the prayer is completed.  
Special, large congregational prayers, which include a sermon, are also offered at late morning on the two days of festivity. One of them is immediately following the month of fasting, Ramadan, and the other after the pilgrimage, or hajj. Although not religiously mandated, individual devotional prayers, especially during the night, are emphasized and are a common practice among pious Muslims.

**The Fourth Pillar of Islam:  
The Fast of Ramadan.**

Fasting is not unique to the Muslims. It has been practiced for centuries in connection with religious ceremonies by Christians, Jews, Confucianists, Hindus, Taoists, and Jains. God mentions  
this fact in the Quran: “O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may develop Godconsciousness.” (Quran 2:183)

The fourth Pillar of Islam, the Fast of Ramadan, occurs once each year during the 9th lunar month, the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar in which: “…the Quran was sent down as a guidance for the people.” (Quran 2:185)  
God in His infinite mercy has exempt the ill, travelers, and others who are unable from fasting Ramadan.

Fasting helps Muslims develop self-control, gain a better understanding of God’s gifts and greater compassion towards the deprived. Fasting in Islam involves abstaining from all bodily pleasures between dawn and sunset. Not only is food forbidden, but also any sexual activity. All things which are regarded as  
prohibited is even more so in this month, due to its sacredness.. Each and every moment during the fast, a person suppresses their passions and desires in loving obedience to God. This consciousness of duty and the spirit of patience helps in strengthening our faith. Fasting helps a person gain self-control. A person who abstains from permissible things like food and drink  
is likely to feel conscious of his sins. A heightened sense of spirituality helps break the habits of lying, staring with lust at the opposite sex, gossiping, and wasting time. Staying hungry and  
thirsty for just a day’s portion makes one feel the misery of the 800 million who go hungry or the one in ten households in the US, for example, that are living with hunger or are at risk of hunger. After all, why would anyone care about starvation if one has never felt  
its pangs oneself? One can see why Ramadan is also a month of charity and giving.

At dusk, the fast is broken with a light meal popularly referred to as iftaar. Families and friends share a special late evening meal together, often including special foods and sweets served only at this time of the year. Many go to the mosque for the evening prayer, followed by special pra yers recited only during Ramadan.  
Some will recite the entire Quran as a special act of piety, and public recitations of the Quran can be heard throughout the evening. Families rise before dawn to take their first meal of the  
day, which sustains them until sunset. Near the end of Ramadan Muslims commemorate the “Night of Power” when the Quran was revealed. The month of Ramadan ends with one of the two major Islamic celebrations, the Feast of the Breaking of the Fast, called Eid al-Fitr. On this day, Muslims joyfully celebrate the completion of Ramadan and customarily distribute gifts to children. Muslims are also obliged to help the poor join in the spirit of relaxation and  
enjoyment by distributing zakat-ul-fitr, a special and obligatory act of charity in the form of staple foodstuff, in order that all may enjoy the general euphoria of the day.