

Chapter 2

Muslim Beliefs, Practices, and Values

In order to understand how and why religiosity (degree of and commitment to religious faith) in Islam might influence health, we need to examine the beliefs, practices, and values of those who call themselves Muslims.

Islam is the religion of an estimated 1.6 billion persons worldwide, including the majority of the population in at least 57 countries (Miller 2009). In 2010, countries with the most Muslims were Indonesia (205 million or 13 % of all Muslims), Pakistan (178 million), India (177 million), Bangladesh (148 million), Egypt (80 million), Turkey (75 million), and Iran (75 million). This means that only 20 % of the world's Muslim population lives in the Middle East proper. For comparison, there are only 2.6 million Muslims in the USA and 2.9 million in the UK (Pew Forum 2011).

The word “islam” in a religious context means voluntary submission to God. Islam is divided into two major branches, Sunni (80–90 %) and Shia (10–15 %). A third branch, Sufism (5 % of Muslims today) arose in the twelfth–thirteenth centuries. Sufis may be either Sunni or Shia. Sufism represents the mystical arm of Islam, and emphasizes reliance on the will of God and focusing attention on the inner self. It is known as one of the Islamic groups most tolerant to other religions (Rahman 1998, p. 31). The Sunni branch of Islam has four major schools of religious jurisprudence or law: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii, and Hanbali. The Hanafi school (representing reason) is the largest, and most adherents live in southern Asia. Hanbali represents the most conservative school, whose adherents live primarily in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Wahhabi, considered the most conservative Muslims, is a small branch of the Hanbali school. The more moderate Maliki school is widespread in northern and western Africa, while the Shafii school is more dominant in Malaysia and East Africa.

The word Sunni refers to those who follow and maintain the teachings and actions (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet Muhammad. Sunni Muslims revere Abu Bakr as the closest companion of the Prophet and consider him the first caliph (successor) after the Prophet Muhammad. Selected by a group of the Prophet's companions, Abu Bakr was the father-in-law of the Prophet and one of his closest friends.

He was followed as caliph by Ibn al-Khattāb, Ibn Affan, and Ibn Abu Talib, who together make up the four “rightly guided caliphs” in the Sunni tradition.

Belief in the above successorship is one factor that distinguishes Sunni from Shia Muslims, who believe that Ali, the Prophet’s son-in-law and cousin, was his rightful successor and first caliph. Shia believe that only God has the right to choose a successor to the Prophet, since the successor is responsible for safeguarding Islam, the Qur’an, and shari’ah law. The origin of the split between Sunni and Shia is a complex one, based in part on this line of succession and who should be revered (Armstrong 2002). The Shia branch consists of three major schools of jurisprudence: Twelver, Zaidi, and Ismaili. The Twelver school originated from the 12 imams or supreme religious–political leaders in early Islam who are believed by adherents to be infallible (Rahman 1998, p. 3). This school has the most adherents (85 % of Shia Muslims) and makes up the majority of the population in Iran (90 %), Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Bahrain. The Twelvers believe that the descendants of the Prophet through his daughter Fatima and son-in-law Ali are the best source of knowledge about the Qur’an and shari’ah and are those who are most worthy of respect and honor.

Although the differences that separate the two largest branches of Islam, i.e., Sunni and Shia, are numerous and complicated, many of the beliefs and traditions of Sunni and Shia Muslims are similar. Therefore, we make no effort to further distinguish Sunni from Shia beliefs and practices in our descriptions. However, given that the overwhelming majority of Muslims are Sunni, the beliefs and traditions discussed below lean more toward this branch of Islam.

Islamic beliefs and practices are based on the Qur’an, the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet reported by others), Sunnah (doings of the Prophet reported by others), and the opinions of early jurists based on their interpretation of the Qur’an, Hadith, and Sunnah (Alsharif et al. 2011). Islamic beliefs and practices are strongly related since devout Muslims do what they think is right and seek to avoid what is wrong in terms of behavior. The five core beliefs (pillars) of Islam are (1) the creed of belief (*shahada*), (2) daily prayers (*salah*), (3) giving to the poor (*zakat*), (4) fasting during Ramadan (*sawm*), and (5) pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). These are required for all believers and are the basis for Muslim life. The deeper the belief, the stronger the practice. Devoutness of belief can grow stronger or weaker with time depending on circumstances, and this may both influence health and be influenced by health.

Islamic Beliefs

The Islamic creed of belief (confession of faith) in Arabic is *lā ilāha illā l-Lāh, Muhammad rasūlu l-Lāh*. Translating, this means “There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God.” This statement emphasizes belief in the oneness (*tawhid*) of God and the acceptance of Muhammad as God’s messenger and final prophet. A sincere declaration of this statement is required for anyone to be considered a Muslim. There are six articles of faith in Islam: (1) belief in God,

(2) belief in the Prophets, (3) belief in Divine Books, (4) belief in the Day of Judgement, (5) belief in Angels, and (6) belief in Destiny or fate (*qadr*). Besides these core beliefs, other important beliefs include those regarding life after death, intercession, and the role of the individual. We now describe each of these beliefs in greater depth.

Belief in God. *Allah* is Arabic for God (literally “the God”). While the Qur’an does not discuss the nature of God per se, He is the basis for all of the teachings in the Qur’an that guide human conduct. Without God, nothing can exist or operate in the universe. Rahman (1998) notes that the relationship qualities of God with respect to humans are “creation, sustenance [love], guidance, and judgement” (p. 11). God is the creator, the infinitely merciful who knows everything. He is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega. He does everything for the good of people and nothing in the world is due to chance. God is wise and merciful, but also judges and His punishment can be severe. God sees everything humans do, hears everything, controls everything, and nothing happens against His will. At the same time, people have free choice to do things either according to God’s will or against it, and are responsible for those choices. God is merciful to all people, both good and bad, but does not like what bad people do. God created both good and bad people for a purpose. Life is viewed as a kind of test. It is not easy for believers to do their duty and there are many challenges to overcome. One of those challenges is dealing with the actions of those who have gone astray, who need to be shown the right way.

God wants the best for all people, and so the true believer in God will be supported by their belief, which may relieve stress as the person accepts those aspects of life that he or she cannot control. If people choose to follow the will of God and surrender their lives to Him, then it is believed that they will find favor with others as well. Each person carries a great responsibility—the responsibility of being the best person he or she can be. This is dependent, however, on the person’s choices (see The Individual below).

Beliefs about God may have psychological consequences. When people feel that they are connected to God, whom they believe has unlimited power and is infinitely merciful, this helps them to relax and makes them more optimistic. This may help them feel that the unfairness they see in the world will not continue forever and that distressing and apparently bad events also have a purpose. While those events may seem terrible and hurt on first glance, they may not turn out to be so bad if people are patient and examine the events more deeply. Knowing God in Islam is considered a gift by itself that will help the individual to have patience and understanding. Muslims believe that God cares for people and will help them, but they must work hard to do right and be optimistic. God is most able to help those who work hard and expect the best. This belief helps create motivation to overcome obstacles and endure bad times based on the faith that good will result because God is in control.

Belief in the Prophets. The Prophet Muhammad (literally “praiseworthy”) was born in approximately 570 CE in Mecca. He had no formal education. While meditating in a cave, the angel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet and gave him revelations (*Wahy*).

According to Islamic expert Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “revelation” is a direct conveying of a message from Heaven that comes to prophets alone, and is distinguished from a similar concept, “inspiration,” which is available to everyone (Nasr 2002). The angel Gabriel commanded the Prophet to let others know about the revelations, and so he shared them with others who wrote down what the angel said to him, resulting in the Holy Qur’an. When the Prophet first began receiving revelations in 610 CE, most of Arabia was polytheistic and worshiped many different gods (idols, angels, the sun, moon, and other lesser gods). The angel told him that there was only one God. Throughout his life the Prophet would proclaim and insist that there was only one God and that people were to surrender their lives to Him (*islam*). Muslims consider the Prophet Muhammad an exemplar and seek to emulate his life and deeds. This means following the Holy Qur’an, and adhering to the Prophet’s sayings as reported by others in the Hadith and his actions in the Sunnah.

The prophets in Islam (the Prophet Muhammad and other prophets) are considered perfect human models (although are not necessarily sinless) (Omar 1993). They worship God and live in the best way. Muslims believe that a prophet is a special creation by God, but would never ask people to worship anyone except God. The fact that prophets are human beings means it is possible for people to follow their guidance and live the way they do. Although regular people cannot be as perfect as prophets, everyone can learn from them and seek to follow their teachings. A prophet demonstrates how people should live at home and treat their families, how to help other people at work, and even how to run a country. Muslims believe that if prophets were not human beings (i.e., were angels or other supernatural beings), then it would not be possible for regular people to do what the prophets have done. Because prophets are humans, this means that people have the ability to live like them. Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad was the last and final prophet in a long line of messengers from God that started with Adam (including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Jacob, Moses, David, Elijah, and John the Baptist, among others). Also on this list of prophets is Jesus the Christ or Messiah (*Isa al-Mesiah*), who is considered to be the only prophet to have been raised up to heaven by God (3:55). He is believed to be the last prophet before the appearance of the Prophet Muhammad.

Divine Books. In Islam, the Holy Qur’an is the infallible Word of God. Muslims believe that it was dictated directly to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel reading from the original “mother book” that resides in Heaven inscribed in Arabic on stone tablets. The Qur’an is believed to have come directly from God, and it is considered blasphemous to attribute the Qur’an to the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur’an is arranged into 114 numbered *suras* (chapters) that contain numbered verses (*ayas*).

A second source of Islamic teaching is the Hadith and Sunnah recorded after the Prophet’s death. As noted above, the Hadith involve reports about the sayings and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad. The Sunnah (distinguished from the Hadith, although sometimes described as a type of Hadith) are descriptions of the Prophet’s life itself, e.g., how he lived. While very important as a guide for living, the Hadith and Sunnah are not infallible like the Qur’an. There are six primary collections of Sunni Hadith: Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan Abu Dawood, Sunan al-Sughra, Jami al-Tirmidhi, and Sunan ibn Majah. Those Hadith with “sahih” in their name

are thought to be the most reliable and authentic (i.e., Bukhari and Muslim). There are also other collections of Sunni Hadith that contain authentic hadith but are used less frequently by Islamic scholars. These include the *Musannaf* of Abd al-Razzaq, *Musnad*, *Mustadrak*, *Muwatta* (Malik), *Sahih Ibn Hibbaan*, *Sahih Ibn Khuzaymah*, and *Sunan al-Darimi*.

Shia Muslims do not follow the six Sunni Hadith, but instead have their own. The four major Shia Hadith collections (associated with the Twelvers school of jurisprudence) are *Kitab al-Kafi*, *Man la yahduruhu al-Fqih*, *Tahdhib al-Ahkam*, and *Al-Istibsar*. These primary Hadith collections are written by three authors known as the “Three Muhammads”: Muhammad ibn Ya’qub al-Kulayni al Razi, Muhammad ibn Babuy, and Shaykh Muhammad Tusi. The differences between Sunni and Shia Hadith are based on their respective scholars’ belief in the reliability of the narrators (i.e., early companions reporting the sayings of the Prophet) and transmitters (those who collected these reports). In the Sunni tradition, Muhammad al-Bukhari is considered by far the most reliable of the transmitters. Because of this, and because 85–90 % of Muslims are Sunni, we frequently cite the Hadith collected by al-Bukhari.

Other divine books recognized in Islam are the Torah (*Tawrat*), the Psalms (*Zabur*), and the Gospel (*Injil*). Muslims believe that the Qur’an is the final divine book that has corrected all the previous divine books that contained errors, were corrupted, or were lost. Muslims believe in all of these divine books (Torah, Psalms, and Gospel) as revealed by God in their original form. Muslim scholars believe that the *Injil* refers to an original Gospel that was revealed by God to Jesus, but does not refer to the current Gospels of the New Testament, which are thought to contain some of Jesus’ teachings but are not the original Gospel, which was corrupted or lost (New World Encyclopedia 2008).

The Day of Judgement. Both the Qur’an and Hadith refer to the Day of Judgement (the day of resurrection, the “day after” the end of the world). We will refer to it here as the Day. The Qur’an notes that (1) the Day is known only to God (33:63), (2) the Prophet Muhammad cannot make it happen (6:57), (3) on the Day it will seem to people that they were on earth only a very short time and everyone will recognize one another (10:45), (4) God will resurrect everyone, even those who have turned to dust or stone (17:49), and (5) those who deny God’s truth will suffer in the fire of hell (11:17). Before the Day comes, there are three periods of time with some overlap between periods. The first period began when the Prophet Muhammad died and lasted until the death of his companions; the second period lasted 1,000 years; and the third period is the one we are in now and will end with the appearance of the Mahdi. The Mahdi, or guided one, is a leader who will usher in a period of about 7–9 years of justice, equality, and restore true religion, and then the world will end. Jesus the Christ (Isa) is foretold in the Qur’an to appear at this time: “And he [Isa] shall be a known sign for (the coming of) the Hour (Day of Resurrection)” (43:61).¹

¹The English translation of the Qu’ran used in this book is that of M.A.S. Abdel Haleem in the Oxford University World’s Classics series, *The Qur’an* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005; reissued 2008). Occasionally, to enhance clarity, the translation by Muhammad Asad is used (*The Message of the Quran*), although this will be noted.

Table 2.1 Examples of God's compassion, mercy, and forgiveness in the Qur'an

"But there is also a kind of man who gives his life away to please God, and God is most compassionate to His servants" (2:207)
"...God would never let your faith go to waste [believers], for God is most compassionate and most merciful towards people" (2:143)
"On the day when every soul finds all the good it has done present before it, it will wish all the bad it had done to be far, far away. God warns you to beware of Him, but God is compassionate towards His servants" (3:30)
"Say, 'If you love God, follow me, and God will love you and forgive you your sins; God is most forgiving, most merciful'" (3:31)
"Hurry towards your Lord's forgiveness and a Garden as wide as the heavens and earth prepared for the righteous, who give, both in prosperity and adversity, who restrain their anger and pardon people—God loves those who do good" (3:133-134)
"But if you avoid the great sins you have been forbidden, We shall wipe out your minor misdeeds and let you in through the entrance of honour" (4:31)
"Whoever has done a good deed will have it ten times to his credit, but whoever has done a bad deed will be repaid only with its equivalent—they will not be wronged" (6:160)
"Ask your Lord for forgiveness, then turn back to Him. He will grant you wholesome enjoyment until an appointed time, and give His grace to everyone who has merit" (11:3)
"As for those who who avoid grave sins and foul acts, though they may commit small sins, your Lord is ample in forgiveness" (53:32)

Although the Qur'an emphasizes that the punishments for evil behavior and lack of belief will be severe on the Day of Judgement, it moderates the severity by stressing in many places that there is hope in God's compassion, infinite mercy, and forgiveness (see Table 2.1).

Angels. Muslims believe in angels, i.e., supernatural beings who act under the direction of God. They are not humans and never have been humans. In fact, they were asked by God to bow down to Adam (2:34). The Qur'an identifies Gabriel as the angel who appeared to the Prophet Muhammad, both to deliver the message of the Qur'an (2:97) and to miraculously transport the Prophet to Jerusalem (the Night Journey and ascension, 17:1, 17:60, 53:13–18). Both the angel Gabriel and the angel Michael are described in the Qur'an as message bearers from God (2:97–98; 66:4).

Destiny. Muslims believe in destiny, which means that everything—all events and happenings in life—have a purpose and there are no random occurrences: "It was not without purpose that We created the heavens and the earth and everything in between" (38:27). God has decided everything beforehand and His will is supreme, above even human will (57:22; 81:29). However, Muslims also believe that God gives people free choice in many things, especially the choice to be a good person (to do good things in life) or the choice to be a bad person. This freedom of choice means taking responsibility: "BEHOLD, from on high have We bestowed upon thee this divine writ, setting forth the truth for [the benefit of all] mankind. And whoever chooses to be guided [thereby], does so for his own good, and whoever chooses to

go astray, goes but astray to his own hurt; and thou hast not the power to determine their fate” (39:41).²

This means that Muslims have no excuse for not working or failing to be productive, since all are accountable for everything they do or not do. On the other hand, there are many things that people do not choose—such as the country or time in which they are born or their race or skin color. People may also receive unpleasant things in life such as diseases or loss of loved ones. In those situations, Muslims believe that they must accept what has happened and be patient, which God will reward (Bukhari 7/70/544–545).³ This belief helps people to accept disease and other stressful events, and in this way helps them to cope with them. Muslims are taught never to ask the question “why me” when they get a disease or have bad things happen to them. Belief in destiny helps people to accept disease and give support to others who are also afflicted with illness.

Other important beliefs, considered less central than the six beliefs above, include beliefs about life after death, intercession, and the individual (vs. the group).

Life After Death. As death nears, it is the responsibility of the dying person to recite the confession of faith (*shahadah*) and to seek the forgiveness of others whom he or she has wronged. After death, loud wailing by friends and family is forbidden, as is observance of the death beyond 3 days (Rahman 1998, p. 129). The Qur’an makes it clear that death is not the end. Rahman says, “For the Qur’an, the after-death life is as concrete and palpable as the ‘life in this world’; there is a natural continuity between the two, and death is the passage between them” (p. 126). The quality of life after death—either heaven or hell—is determined by an individual’s performance during this life. For the Muslim, death bed repentance is not allowed, since there is no more opportunity to work and do good. Says the Qur’an, “God is always ready to accept repentance, He is full of mercy. But God only undertakes to accept repentance from those who do evil out of ignorance and soon afterwards repent: these are the ones God will forgive, he is all knowing, all wise. It is not true repentance when people continue to do evil until death confronts them and then say, ‘Now I repent’ ...” (4:16–18).

Intercession. There are two types of intercession. One type involves *praying to God for someone* for the benefit of that person (e.g., for a sick loved one). The other type involves *praying to an intermediary so that the intermediary will pray to God*. With regard to the second type of intercession, the Qur’an emphasizes that there are no intermediaries between a person and God, and that intercession of this type is not allowed, at least not on the Day of Judgement (2:48, 2:254) and perhaps not otherwise

²Qur’an translation by Muhammad Asad in *The Message of the Quran* (http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/private/cmje/religious_text/The_Message_of_The_Quran__by_Muhammad_Asad.pdf) (last accessed April 22, 2014).

³Citations to *Sahih Bukhari* (the most respected of all Sunni Hadiths) is based on a 2009 translation M. Muhain Khan (2009). We list the reference by volume, book, and number (vol/book/no). See http://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_books/single/en_Sahih_Al-Bukhari.pdf (last accessed April 22, 2014).

either (6:51, 6:70, 32:4; 39:43–44). In Islam, people are to pray directly to God and only to God. Less clear, however, is the Qur’anic view toward praying for others (the first type of intercession described above). Several Qur’anic verses indicate that prophets prayed to God for others. Moses prayed to God for the people when they were hungry (2:61) and when there was a plague (7:134–135). The Prophet was also told by God to intercede for the people on several occasions (3:159, 4:64, 63:5). Some suras suggest that God only permits certain people to intercede (“no one will have power to intercede except for those who have permission from the Lord of Mercy” 19:87), and only those with whom God is well pleased (53:26). Several Hadith have also been more tolerant with regard to the first type of intercession, emphasizing that the Prophet himself prayed for the well-being of others (Bukhari 1/12/768).

The Individual. Islam is a religion that systematically directs a person’s entire life. Islam regulates an individual’s daily activities and relationships with others in a way that builds a more homogenous society. This creates harmony between people, which influences their sense of value as an individual who has rights but also obligations to others that must be fulfilled. Individual identity and boundaries are clear and unambiguous, as are boundaries between individual rights and group rights. As a result, people feel equal to each other with clear individual roles, duties, and obligations to the community. While individual freedom is respected and honored, it cannot be at the expense of the community. Every person in the community is important regardless of role since Muslims believe that they will receive praise for their work from God, not other people. The value of a person is based on how closely their life conforms to these beliefs and practices, not by the material possessions they own or their job status.

The individual, then, plays an important role in Islam. People have the responsibility to make life better for themselves and for others. At the same time, Muslims believe that the individual is still a human being and will continue to make mistakes in life. This should not cause a person to feel frustrated or affect their self-esteem since that is the nature of being human. But, Islam stresses that a person should learn from mistakes and try to avoid them in the future. There is an understanding in Islam that people possess a range of weaknesses and strengths, but the goal is for each person to live the best life possible. Islamic beliefs (customs and societal rules) help to make a person feel more responsible, clear on his or her role, and valued as part of the community.

Islamic Practices

Islamic practices center around (1) daily prayers, (2) giving to the poor (zakat), (3) fasting during the month of Ramadan, and (4) participating in the Hajj at least once during one’s lifetime. These practices could influence health by helping people to relax and by decreasing materialistic thinking.

Prayer. Muslims say prayers five times a day. The first prayer is said at dawn, the second at midday around noon, the third around 4:00 PM, the fourth at sunset, and the last prayer 90 min after sunset. In Muslim areas, the call to prayer (*azan*) is announced from the minaret of the mosque by a loudspeaker that can be heard throughout the community. The preparation, dress, and physical activity during prayer are important. Muslims must first wash (feet, hands, forearms, and sometimes head), put on a long white robe (when able), take off their shoes, and prepare their prayer rug. They must bow during prayer so that their foreheads contact the ground. Every mosque around the world has a marker that indicates the direction to Mecca, toward which Muslims must face and bow.

Prayer involves a direct relationship between God and the individual. Prayer is relaxing and controls and organizes time and sleep. All Muslims pray at the same time, and when possible, in the same place. They believe that all are equal before God in prayer. This belief helps to equalize the value placed on the poor and makes the rich more humble. The prayer at dawn is the most important one, since this helps to set the tone for the day. Saying the prayers together in a group helps people to meet and talk with each other and enhances social relationships. Men are required to say their prayers at the mosque on Fridays (weekly), although this is optional for women. Saying prayer at the mosque is believed to be 27 times more beneficial (in reward) than saying the prayer at home (Bukhari 1/8/466). For women, however, praying at home is believed to be better, although women are permitted to go to mosque to seek knowledge and socialize with Muslim sisters (Ansari 2013).

Zakat. Giving to the poor is an important religious practice in Islam. Honor and courage are highly valued by Muslims, and are expressed in part by compassion for those in need. More than 30 verses in the Qur'an refer to *zakat*, which serves to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor and other dispossessed Muslims. As one of the five pillars of Islam, giving is part of the covenant made between God and humans (see Table 2.2). Rahman (1998) notes that the Qur'an is so intent on emphasizing good works and giving of one's wealth to support the poor (i.e., active rather than passive acts of worship) that in two places it even promises God's favor and salvation to whoever "believe in God and the Last Day and do good" (Muslims, Christians, and Jews) (2:62; see also 5:69) "without mentioning belief in the messengership of the Prophet Muhammad" (p. 24). Although the latter part of that statement by Rahman is controversial, it underscores the importance that the Qur'an places on good actions, especially caring for those in need, perhaps even at the expense of good belief [he is trying to make a point here about the general passivity found in the Hadith compared to the action orientation that pervades the Qur'an].

Zakat involves paying 2.5 % per year of all capital assets (savings of cash) and agricultural goods, gold, silver, stocks, and livestock (all assets owned continuously through the lunar year). Islamic scholars differ in what assets are included in the calculation of the zakat and how the calculation is performed. A person's home, clothing, and household furniture are excluded. Zakat is paid through a voluntary not compulsory system, except in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan where zakat is obligatory and is collected by the state. The Qur'an specifies who is

Table 2.2 Emphasis on giving to the poor in the Qur'an

<p>“Remember when we took a pledge from the Children of Israel: ‘Worship none but God; be good to your parents and kinfolk, to orphans and the poor; speak good words to all people; keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms’” (2:83)</p> <p>“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’” (2:215)</p> <p>“Those who spend their wealth in God’s cause are like grains of corn that produce seven ears, each bearing a hundred grains. God gives multiple increase to whoever He wishes: He is limitless and all knowing”(2:261)</p> <p>“None of you [believers] will attain true piety unless you give out of what you cherish” (3:92)</p> <p>“But those of them who are well grounded in knowledge and have faith do believe in what has been revealed to you [Muhammad], and in what was revealed before you—those who perform the prayers, pay the prescribed alms, and believe in God and the Last Day—to them We shall give a great reward” (4:162)</p> <p>“Alms are meant only for the poor, the needy, those who administer them, those whose hearts need winning over, to free slaves and help those in debt, for God’s cause and for travellers in need” (9:60)</p> <p>“Give relatives their due, and the needy, and travellers—do not squander your wealth wastefully; those who squander are the brothers of Satan, and Satan is most ungrateful to his Lord” (17:26-27)</p> <p>“Believe in God and His messenger, and give out of what He has made pass down to you: those of you who believe and give will have a great reward” (57:7)</p> <p>“[Prophet], have you considered the person who denies the Judgement? Is he he who pushes aside the orphan, and does not urge others to feed the needy. So woe to those who pray but are heedless of their prayer; those who are all show and forbid common kindnesses” (107:1-7)</p>
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eligible to receive the zakat that is given. There are eight categories of individuals eligible to receive zakat: (1) those in abject poverty (living on less than \$1.25 per day), (2) those who cannot meet their basic needs, (3) those who collect the zakat (the civil service), (4) non-Muslims sympathetic to Islam or those who wish to convert, (5) those who are trying to free themselves from slavery or war (for payment of ransoms or blood money), (6) those whose debts make it unable for them to meet their basic needs, (7) those working for an Islamic cause, i.e., “purely for the sake of Allah” (*Fī Sabīlillāh*), which includes defense, religious education, and health, and (8) children living on the street, or to provide facilities for travelers (Table 2.2).

Fasting. Regulation of food intake is important in Islam. Muslims are encouraged not to eat more than what their body requires. They are also responsible for feeding hungry relatives or neighbors if they cannot afford food (see Table 2.2). Muslims are also required to fast. The reason is “so that you may be mindful of God” (2:183). Muslims are obligated (*fard*) to fast during the month of Ramadan from dawn till sunset (2:183–185). Fasting during the day as a community during the month of Ramadan, and doing so in the same way and at the same time, influences feelings of unity and helps to bond people together. Fasting helps people to remember that there are poor people who cannot afford food. Both the rich and poor cannot eat anything during the daytime in the month of Ramadan. When there is no food consumption or tobacco use, and the focus is on prayer and worship, this will impact a person’s

mood and mental state. There may also be physical health benefits to fasting. These include lowering the risk of degenerative brain diseases, improving the aging brain's resistance to toxins, reducing the damage following stroke, slowing the motor deficits in Parkinson's disease, and lessening the rate of cognitive decline in Alzheimer's disease. These and other benefits of intermittent fasting were described in the January 2013 issue of *Scientific American*, which suggested that fasting breakfast and lunch each day over the long term may produce substantial health benefits (and increase productivity) (Stipp 2013).

Muslims are encouraged to fast at other times during the year besides Ramadan, but this is not obligatory. Some devout Muslims fast 3 days each month and may even fast 2 days a week. Excessive fasting, however, is discouraged (Ali 1990). Besides emphasizing fasting, Islam also encourages people not to overeat: "eat and drink [as We have permitted] but do not be extravagant: God does not like extravagant people" (7:31).⁴

Hajj. The Hajj (pilgrimage) to the Kaaba in Mecca is one of the five pillars of Islam. Approximately three million people make this pilgrimage each year (United Press International 2010). Only Muslims can enter the city of Mecca and go into the mosque (*Masjid al-Haram*) that houses the Kaaba ("The Cube" or "Sacred House"). The Hajj is required at least once in a lifetime for those who can afford to go and are physically able. By "afford," this means having extra finances beyond that needed to support one's family. The Hajj is the largest annual religious pilgrimage in the world. People come from many different countries to the high plains of Arafat outside Mecca in the 12th month of the Islamic calendar (*Dhu al-Hijjah*). The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar and is 11–12 days shorter per year than the solar calendar, the one followed by those in the Western world. Each month is 29–30 days depending on when the crescent moon appears. For example, Dhu al-Hijjah in 2014 is September 26 through October 24, and in 2015, will be September 15 to October 14. The Islamic calendar is also dated differently than the Gregorian (Western) calendar, and starts in the year 622, when the Prophet Muhammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina. Dhu al-Hijjah is different from the month of Ramadan, which is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar (in 2014, Ramadan will occur from June 29 to July 27).

During the Hajj, men must wear the same dress (long white robes), which is another symbol of equality. Worshiping God together makes Muslims feel that they are not alone but part of something greater than themselves. Pilgrims are asked to leave everything behind them. Individuals must concentrate on their relationship with God and forget everything else that may be stressful in their lives (work, family problems, etc.). Being in an isolated place with a feeling of oneness and a chance to rethink issues provides an opportunity for self-examination and restructuring of attitudes and goals. Pilgrims are forbidden to argue during this time or make any bad remarks about other people. Only healthy discussions and pleasant words are allowed. The Hajj also involves physical exercise with much walking (and some running).

⁴Muhammad Asad's translation of 7:31 says: "O CHILDREN of Adam! Beautify yourselves for every act of worship, and eat and drink [freely], but do not waste: verily, He does not love the wasteful!"

Islamic Values and Attitudes

Ethical Values. As noted above, individuals in Islam are valued by their ethical behaviors in preference to what they produce. People are judged by their relationships to those who are close to them. It does not matter how much a person owns or who their father's tribe, language, or country is. Islam teaches that people are judged only on things they have control over. In Islam there are no second class people except those who intend to deviate from Islamic values and persist in doing so. These values, if applied, will influence people's feelings about themselves that could affect their mental health and may stimulate efforts toward self-improvement that could dispel feelings of emptiness or worthlessness.

Islam encourages "downward" comparisons with regard to possessions, but "upward" comparisons with regard to values. In other words, Muslims are taught to compare themselves to those who are less fortunate in terms of material possessions, but to look up to and try to emulate those who live virtuous lives. Great importance, then, is placed on a person's principles and faith. This minimizes a sense of inferiority that Muslims might otherwise feel to those who are rich or better off than they are. Feelings of equality with others and a sense of fairness can help to combat feelings of low self-esteem, thereby enhancing the health of the individual and the community more generally.

Positive Attitudes. Muslims believe in having a positive attitude, and are encouraged by their faith to be optimistic even in their darkest moments: "Who is it that answers the distressed when they call upon Him? Who removes their suffering? Who makes you successors in the earth? Is it another god beside God?" (27:62). The Qur'an in many places discourages sadness, since this life on earth is only a test period and not long enough to feel sad about small things. Feelings of desperation or powerless are also discouraged. One of the greatest sins in Islam is to give up and feel that God doesn't listen or care. Muslims believe that God does listen and may forgive anyone as long as they try their best, even if they make mistakes: "[Prophet] if My servants ask you about Me, I am near. I respond to those who call Me, so let them respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be guided" (2:186). Islam emphasizes that strong believers are better off than weak believers, and so people are encouraged to increase their beliefs, talents, and abilities in every respect and use them to help society. This increases motivation for individuals to help themselves and provides a self-image that may influence mental health, as well as affect apathy and feelings of emptiness. Thus, frustration, dissatisfaction, hopelessness, sadness, and feelings of shame run counter to what Muslims believe.

Importance of Family. Family and kinship are the cornerstones of Muslim life. Islam stresses that caring for family members is a primary responsibility of both the individual and the community (2:83, 2:215, 4:36, 6:151). Marriage is strongly encouraged, as is the raising of children in the proper way. Muslims believe that God will reward individuals who do this. In Islam, there is no excuse for men not to marry, even if they want to have more time to engage in religious activities (the Qur'an does not explicitly forbid celibacy and some Sufis in Islamic history have

been celebrate, although it certainly does not encourage it—see Rahman 1998, p. 103). Marriage is considered a religious practice and taking good care of family members is a priority: “Husbands should take good care of their wives, with [the bounties] God has given to some more than others and with what they spend out of their own money. Righteous wives are devout and guard what God would have them guard in their husbands’ absence” (4:34). The individual is responsible for supporting their first-degree relatives if those relatives cannot support themselves (spouse, children, and parents). Taking care of aging parents is especially important, which means supporting them morally, psychologically, and financially (17:23–24, 31:14, 46:15). Islam emphasizes that children should avoid upsetting aging parents about anything either major or minor. On many occasions, the Qur’an stresses respect for parents, particularly when they are old. Extramarital relationships are considered major sins and never allowed in Islam. Supporting women before and after marriage is required of all men. A man must support his wife even if she is rich and owns more than he does.

Adultery. The Qur’an forbids adultery: “And do not go anywhere near adultery: it is an outrage, and an evil path” (17:32). This passage is sandwiched between admonitions not to kill children and not to take a life, and so the prohibition concerning adultery is one about which there is little debate among Islamic scholars. Under Islamic law, the punishment for adultery is 100 lashes of moderate intensity (seldom carried out in most Islamic countries today): “Strike the adulteress and the adulterer one hundred times. Do not let compassion for them keep you from carrying out God’s law—if you believe in God and the Last Day—and ensure that a group of believers witnesses the punishment” (24:2). Although the Qur’an does not say the punishment is stoning to death, this is sometimes carried out in countries where a very strict form of shari’ah law is practiced (this is opposed, however, by the Islamic Human Rights Commission).

Polygamy. Muslim men are allowed to have up to four wives, although they must treat each wife equally. This is based on the Qur’an: “you may marry whichever women seem good to you, two, three, or four. If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them], then marry only one” (4:3). The difficulty of treating each wife equitably is also underscored in the Qur’an: “You will never be able to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire to do so...” (4:129). In reality, few Muslim men have more than one wife. There are practical reasons for this besides the issue of fairness. In some countries the custom is to ask the approval of the first wife before the husband can take on a second wife. Furthermore, women may specify in a prenuptial agreement that her husband can have only one wife. Despite this, however, systematic research indicates that in Turkey (where the practice has been illegal since 1926) about 2 % of men have more than one wife and in the Arab world the percentage ranges from 2 to 10 %. Researchers have found that the mental health of women in polygamous families is worse than that of women in non-polygamous marriages (Ozkan et al. 2006).

Importance of Work. Islam encourages Muslims to work and makes it clear that people who work and produce are better than those who spend their time doing

nothing or even spend it at the mosque in worshiping only. Strong believers work harder than weak believers. People who work (if they are able) are more respected than those who do not. People who work and produce have more self-esteem and respect for themselves and therefore experience better mental health. Work may also have a positive impact on physical health. Supporting one's family or a relative is an activity that is rewarded by God (as reflected by verses cited from the Qur'an in Table 2.2). Islam also teaches people how to spend the money they earn, and this may influence feelings of guilt associated with wrong spending. Those who spend their money according to Qur'anic guidelines may feel better about themselves. Regardless of the type of work a person does, he or she is rewarded by God as long as the work is something useful to the community. This makes Muslims feel proud of their profession regardless of what other people think.

Summary and Conclusions

There are many potential links between Islamic beliefs and practices and mental, social, and physical health. These beliefs and practices have the potential to promote self-esteem and provide rest and peace, even though some beliefs could cause guilt and fear. Muslims believe that surrendering one's life to God and doing good deeds will result in health and happiness on this earth and eternal life and happiness in the world to come (*jannah*). This is promised in the Qur'an, the highest authority and source of truth in Islam (2:25, 3:15, 5:19, 9:72). Muslims also believe that failure to surrender to God and perform good deeds result in the opposite, misery on earth and the tortures of hell (*jahannam*) in the hereafter (4:56, 5:37, 8:40, 9:35). They believe that God will weigh the good deeds against the bad deeds on the Day of Judgement (7:7–8), and this will determine a person's fate after death. Muslims also believe that good deeds cancel out bad deeds (11:111–115) and that a person's ultimate fate rests in the hands of God, who is just but also merciful. Three fundamental terms are emphasized in the Qur'an: *iman* (from the word "faith" whose root "a m n" means to be at peace or to be safe), *islam* (from the root "s l m" which means to be whole and safe, since surrendering to the law of God brings safety and peace), and *taqwa* (from the root "w q y" which means to be protected and guarded against peril through piety or fear of God) (Rahman 1998, pp. 13–14). These beliefs and behaviors, particularly in a religion such as Islam with many devout adherents, ought to have consequences for health and well-being.

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