

## INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM B: PRACTICES

### ISLAMIC PRACTICES, DUTIES, AND FESTIVALS

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#### 3. THE FIVE PILLARS PLUS ONE

These five religious duties are the heart of the practice of Islam. By doing them conscientiously, the Muslim maintains his standing as a good Muslim and the best assurance of earning Paradise after death.

3.1. **Shahada** (The Creed) “There is no god but God. Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” (“La ilah illa llah. Wa Muhammadu rasul u’llah”) To this Shi’ites add: “ ‘Ali is the Friend of God.”<sup>1</sup> It is not found in these exact words in the Qur’an. The first part is found in S. 2:255; 28:88; and 112:1-4. The second part is found in S. 33:40; 48:29; and 64:8. A person can become a Muslim by merely reciting it sincerely before witnesses. Belief in this creed and loyalty to it is the most basic of all Islamic duties.

3.2. **Salat** (Prayer, or Worship) This is the ritual form of prayer including precise movements of kneeling and prostration joined to specific words which is to be performed five times a day. These five times are dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and evening. The rituals are to be preceded by specific washings (ablutions) which are also done in a very precise way. The prayers are to be done facing the direction of Mecca. Three of the five prayers are mentioned in the Qur’an (S. 2:238; 11:114; 17:78; 20:130). The number being set at five has its root in the Hadith, in the stories of Muhammad’s journey into heaven.<sup>2</sup>

3.3. **Zakat** (Alms-giving) This is a tax levied on all adult Muslims set at 2.5 percent of a person’s capital assets. This tax is intended for the help of poor and needy Muslims. According to S. 9:60, it is to go to poor people, debtors, Zakat collectors, travellers, for freeing slaves, and for *mujahidin*, those who are serving in the cause of advancing Islam, either through peaceful means or through warfare. It can also be used for building hospitals, schools, and mosques.<sup>3</sup>

3.4. **Sawm** (Fasting during Ramadhan) this is a fast to be done during daylight hours for the entire month of Ramadhan. Activities to abstain from are eating, drinking, smoking, and sex. Also, it is a month when Muslims make a special effort to not sin in any way. The fast begins at sunrise and ends at sunset. This month is traditionally a time for family get-togethers and for special personal devotions. The entire Qur’an is recited in the mosque during the course of the month. Around the 27<sup>th</sup> of Ramadhan, Lailat al-Qadr (the Night of Power) is

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<sup>1</sup> Ruthven, Malise, *Islam: A Very Short Introduction*, 2000 Reprint edn., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, Thomas Patrick, *A Dictionary of Islam*, Reprint edition of 1835 original. edn., Lahore: Premier Book House, 1989. 58-59.

<sup>3</sup> None, ‘Pillars of Islam’ in *Carey College Study Topics*, London: Carey College Associates, 1987, 14.

celebrated with special devotions. It is the anniversary of the night when it is thought Allah sent the Qur'an down from next to his throne to the lowest heaven so that Gabriel could then deliver its portions to Muhammad. Fasting during Ramadhan is commanded in S. 2:183-187.

3.5. **Hajj** (The Pilgrimage to Mecca) Once in a Muslim's life he or she is required to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca. It takes place for ten days at the end of the month Dhu'l al-Hijja and climaxes with the festival of 'Id al-Adha. This festival commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. The Qur'an does not specify which son, but Islamic tradition holds it to be Ishmael. At least two million Muslims from all over the world attend this annually.<sup>4</sup> The rituals of the Hajj include circling the Ka'ba, running between the two hills Safa and Marwa, standing in the plain of 'Arafat, and stoning three pillars which represent Satan with pebbles. The 'Id follows after this and they sacrifice a sheep in remembrance of Abraham. Muslims around the world celebrate this 'Id simultaneously. It is thought that if a Muslim performs the Hajj sincerely, he ends it like a new baby, fresh and sinless with a new start in life. Also, men who complete the Hajj can add the title **Haji** to their name. It is commanded in the Qur'an in S. 2:196-203 and 22:27-38.

It is interesting to note that the concept of these Five Pillars, together with the details of their practice, are not legislated in the Qur'an. Muslims often don't realize this. Significantly, the Shahada is not found in the Qur'an in its practiced form or legislated. Also, the five daily prayers are not legislated in the Qur'an. The concepts of almsgiving, at least three rounds of daily prayers, fasting during Ramadhan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca are all mentioned in the Qur'an, but the details as to how they are to be done including frequency and amounts are not made explicit and are rather supplemented from the Hadith and historical practice.

3.6. **Jihad** (Striving in the way of Allah). Some Muslims consider Jihad a sixth pillar, as important and basic as the other five. It is first of all conceived as a collective obligation, given to the Muslim community as a whole.<sup>5</sup> As applied to the individual, there are a variety of ways the individual is to strive to promote the aims and rule of Islam. These ways are set out in their understanding that there are two Jihad's, the lesser one and the greater one. The Lesser is the political and military striving to advance Islam, and the Greater is the personal striving against sin. The Greater Jihad is what one will hear promoted by Muslims in the Western media as being the true understanding of Jihad. What one does not hear is that the Lesser Jihad is the one that has been emphasised more through Islamic history and that is still considered valid by the majority of the world's Muslims.

#### 3.6.1 The Greater Jihad

This form of Jihad is personal, directed toward oneself in resisting temptation and waging war on one's own lusts and the effort to have a perfect spiritual

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<sup>4</sup> Ruthven, *Islam*, 147.

<sup>5</sup> Ruthven, *Islam*, 116.

life. It is considered to be the harder of the two with the greatest rewards.<sup>6</sup> This is the main impetus for Muslims to live orderly and moral lives.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.6.2 The Lesser Jihad

The Lesser Jihad includes missionary activity with all the uses of modern literature, media and communications, as well as armed conflict. It is conceived of as warfare to promote the advance and rule of Islam. Note well, it is not primarily to convert people to Islam. If that happens, all well and good, but the primary aim is to advance Islam's influence and dominance.

The scriptural bases for the Lesser Jihad come from the later Qur'an verses, the ones given when Muhammad was ruling in Medina.

S. 9:5,6 the "Sword Verse" In classical Sunni interpretation this one verse overrules (abrogates) more than 100 verses in the Qur'an, including the peaceful ones.

S. 9:29 commands Jihad against Christians and Jews who resist the advance of Islam. Note the difference of how Jihad is applied to Jews and Christians compared to polytheists- Jews and Christians are offered a subjugated position under Islamic rule whereas polytheists are not. Though this came to be modified in actual historical practice with *Dhimmi* status being granted to Zoroastrians and Hindus, it is still the basic principle underlying Islam's self-consciousness that monotheists are better than polytheists.

### 3.6.3 Dhimmi Status

Dhimmi status was a civil status put on conquered, tolerated peoples. Muslims will often refer to Dhimmis as 'Protected' peoples, and by this they mean they are protected from further attacks by Muslims and outsiders. With the toleration and protection there was to also be a reminder of their humiliation. They had the right of practicing their religion but not promoting it. They were not forced to fight in the Islamic armed forces either. But they were to pay a special tax, often to wear special clothes, and to be constrained by many social and financial regulations not put on the Muslims. No Islamic countries now openly have Dhimmi laws, the Colonial era putting an end to them. However, their legacy is still in place in the laws that regulate religious minorities in all Muslim countries that restrict them more than the majority Muslim population. For instance, it is still necessary in Egypt to gain presidential approval to even build an addition to an existing church. Mosques are under no such restrictions. Also, the attitude that non-Muslims ought to be Dhimmis is very strong among the fundamentalist groups within Islam. The normal identity Islam promotes for itself is also one that views people of all other religions as inferiors before God and in relation to Muslims.

Some other significant verses commanding Jihad are 2:216-217; 4:76-79; and

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<sup>6</sup> Newby, Gordon D., *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2002. 115.

<sup>7</sup> Ruthven, *Islam*, 118-119.

8:39-42.

One significant Hadith that is used as a justification for deception in both missionary activity and active warfare is:

‘Ali said: Whenever I narrate to you anything from the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) believe it to be absolutely true as falling from the sky is dearer to me than that of attributing anything to him which he never said. When I talk to you of anything which is between me and you (there might creep some error in it) **for battle is an outwitting**.<sup>8</sup>

An important precondition for the lesser Jihad as traditionally conceived is a reasonable prospect of success. Unbelievers must also be summoned to belief in Islam before they are attacked. When they convert or have accepted a subjugated position within Islam and Islam is no longer under threat then the Jihad is to cease.<sup>9</sup>

From its outset, Islam has divided the world into the *Dar al-harb* (“The Realm of War”) and the *Dar al-Islam* (“The Realm of Peace”) Traditionally, The Realm of War are the non-Muslim areas of the world. The Realm of Peace are those areas under Islamic rule. Jihad from its outset was intended to extend the geographic area of Dar al-Islam, either through persuasion or warfare.<sup>10</sup>

Due to the impact of Colonialism and the effect on Muslims of Western ideas in the last two centuries, many Muslim jurists have restricted military Jihad to self-defense of Muslims, rather than emphasizing offensive warfare to advance the rule of Islam. This is currently the view favoured by most established Muslim governments and the dominant Islamic religious establishments. The Fundamentalists are emphasizing the more classical view, ignoring the current established religious and political authorities.

#### 4. The Islamic Calendar

Contrary to our current Western calendar, the ancient Semitic calendars were based on the cycle of the moon. With the basic unit of a seven-day week, they divided the year into twelve months. Since the Earth itself moves on its own axis and around the Sun, the seven day, twelve month system needs constant readjustment. For the Arabians of Muhammad’s day, about every two or three years they added a thirteenth month to keep their calendar synchronized with the seasons.<sup>11</sup> Muhammad is reported to have abolished this practice of adding a month with the effect that the Islamic calendar moves through the seasons over a cycle of thirty-three years.<sup>12</sup> Also, with the starting

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<sup>8</sup> Sahih Muslim #2328, 2:523.

<sup>9</sup> Glassé, Cyril, *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, London: Stacey International, 1989. 209.

<sup>10</sup> Newby, *Encyclopedia*, 51.

<sup>11</sup> Freeman-Grenville, G. S. P., *The Islamic and Christian Calendars*, Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1995. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ruthven, *Islam*, 39. Surah 9:36 and a hadith from the Mishkat al-Masibih Book 11, chapter 11.

days of the months regressing about eleven days each year, the new month does not start until the New Moon is actually sighted.<sup>13</sup>

The Islamic calendar is therefore a religious calendar which bears no relation to the solar year or the agricultural cycles of the seasons. It consists of twelve lunar months with the months alternating between having twenty-nine and thirty days. Also, within each yearly cycle, an additional day has been added to the last month, *Dhu al-Hijja*, in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, and 27<sup>th</sup> years. These years have been given the name of the *Kabisa* years. This causes ordinary years to consist of 354 days, and a Kabisa year to consist of 355.<sup>14</sup>

Also, year numbers of the Islamic years are numbered from the year (AD 622) during the middle of Muhammad's career when he fled Mecca secretly and migrated to Medina. At Medina, Muhammad molded his followers into a nation and Islam became a political entity. The original migration to Medina is known as the *Hijra*, ("migration"), and is what is cited in the common abbreviation before a Muslim year number, the Latin Anno Hijrae, or AH.

Here are the names of the twelve Islamic lunar months:

- 1) Muharram
- 2) Safar
- 3) Rabi' al-Awwal
- 4) Rabi' al-Thani
- 5) Jumada al-Ula
- 6) Jumada al-Akhira
- 7) Rajab
- 8) Sha'ban
- 9) Ramadhan
- 10) Shawwal
- 11) Dhu al-Qa'da
- 12) Dhu al-Hijja

#### 5. The Major Festivals<sup>15</sup>

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|--------------------|---|
| 1 Muharran:        | New Years Day (Month 1)   |
| 10 Muharram:       | Al-Ashura (Day of mourning and anniversary of Hussein's martyrdom at Karbala for Shi'ites, and a day of voluntary fasting for Sunni's.) (Month 1) |
| 12 Rabi' al-Awwal: | Maulid al-Nabi (Birth of the Prophet Muhammad) (Month 3)  |
| 27 Rajab:          | Isra al-Miraj (Night Journey of the Prophet Muhammad into heaven) (Month 7)   |
| 15 Sha'ban         | Shab-i Barāt (the night of general amnesty) <sup>16</sup> (Month 8)   |

<sup>13</sup> Freeman-Grenville, *Calendars*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Freeman-Grenville, *Calendars*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Freeman-Grenville, *Calendars*, 102.

1 Ramadhan:	The start of the month of fasting (Month 9)
27 Ramadhan:	Approximate date of the Lailat al-Qadr (The Night of Power)
1 Shawwal:	‘Id al-Fitr (2-3 Day celebration at the end of Ramadhan) (Month 10)
10 Dhu al-Hijja:	‘Id al-Hajj (Festival remembering Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son) (Month 12- Month in which Hajj is performed 7-10th, followed by three days of celebration.)

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTION

What does God really want from mankind? In your mind compare this system of beliefs and practices to the heart of the Law and the Prophets of the Bible:

Matthew 7:12

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (ESV)

Matthew 22:37-40

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. (ESV)

The Qur’an does not restate these laws. It instead emphasizes obedience to God according to the rules of Islam. It also does not command love to non-Muslims. At best, concerning how others should be treated, there are two sayings attributed to Muhammad:

None of you truly believes until he wishes for his (Muslim) brother what he wishes for himself.<sup>17</sup>

Whoever wishes to be delivered from the fire and enter the garden should die with faith in Allah and the Last Day and should treat the people as he wishes to be treated by them.<sup>18</sup>

The ‘people’ referred to in this second one are Muslims. Some Muslims will extend the intent of these verses to non-Muslims, but in their original contexts, they are applied only to Muslims.

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<sup>16</sup> Geijbels, M., *Muslim Festivals and Ceremonies in Pakistan*, C.S.C. Series No. 15, Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Christian Study Centre, 1982. 14.

<sup>17</sup> An-Nawawî, *Forty Hadith*, Damascus: Holy Koran Publishing House, , Number 13. Also, it is found with slightly different wording in Sahih Bukhari, v. 1, Book 2, Number 12.

<sup>18</sup> Sahih Muslim, Book 020, Number 4546.

- An-Nawawî, *Forty Hadith*, Damascus: Holy Koran Publishing House,  
Freeman-Grenville, G. S. P., *The Islamic and Christian Calendars*, Reading: Garnet  
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