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Citation for Pillars of Islam

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Pillars of Islam

The five pillars of Islam (arkan al-Islam; also arkan al-din, "pillars of religion") comprise five official acts considered obligatory for all Muslims. The *Quran* presents them as a framework for worship and a sign of commitment to faith. The five pillars are the shahadah (witnessing the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad), regular observance of the five prescribed daily prayers (salat), paying zakah (almsgiving), fasting (sawm; siyyam) during the month of Ramadan, and performance of the hajj (pilgrimage during the prescribed month) at least once in a lifetime.

The first pillar, the shahadah, consists of two declarations. The first, "There is no god but God," affirms belief in a single divine reality (tawhid). The second, "Muhammad is the messenger of God," affirms submission to God via acceptance of His message as revealed to humanity through Muhammad. This declaration of faith signifies entrance of the believer into the broader community (ummah) of Muslims and is required of converts to Islam.

The second pillar, the five daily prayers, signifies the believer's submission to God and serves as public, physical evidence of the believer's adherence to Islam. Prayers are to be performed just before dawn, at noon, in midafternoon, just after sunset, and in the evening, between an hour after sunset and midnight. Prayers are to be made in the direction of Mecca and must be carried out in a state of ritual purity, achieved by either ritual ablutions or a bath.

Movements during prayer imitate entrance into the presence of a great ruler (symbolized by the raising of the hands to the ears and proclamation of the glory and majesty of the ruler for all to hear), bowing reverently, and then uttering the opening chapter of the *Quran*, the *Surat al-Fatihah*. Worshipers then utter other Quranic verses while completing the ritual bowing, which is followed by prostration, performed on the knees with both hands on the ground and the forehead touching between them. Worshipers repeat their glorification of God and prostration three times. The entire cycle of prayer (*rakah*) is then repeated. After every two cycles and after the third cycle in the sunset prayer, the worshiper sits back on the heels and addresses God with a ritual prayer calling forth God's blessings upon Muhammad. After completing all cycles of canonical prayer, the worshiper sits back on the heels and recites the *shahadah*, formally reaffirming the truth of Islam and engaging the worshiper in direct communication with God. Private petitions are then offered. Formal blessings are requested upon Muhammad and Abraham. The prayer ends with an invocation of peace. Every canonical prayer requires between two and four *rakahs*. In total, seventeen *rakahs* are performed daily.

The third pillar is the *zakah* (alms tax), typically paid to a religious official or representative of the Islamic state or to a representative of a local mosque. This amount is traditionally set at one-fortieth, or 2.5 percent, of the value of all liquid assets and income-generating properties owned by the believer. It is used to feed the poor, encourage conversion to Islam, ransom captives, help travelers, support those devoting themselves to God's work, relieve debtors, defend the faith, and any other purpose deemed appropriate. The *zakah* serves as a reminder of one's broader social responsibilities to the community.

The fourth pillar is observation of the monthlong fast (*sawm*) of Ramadan (the ninth month of the lunar Islamic calendar), from sunrise to sunset. The believer is supposed to abstain from food, drink, and sexual activity during the daylight hours, demonstrating affirmation of ethical awareness and serving as a purifying act of sacrifice of one's bodily desires for the sake of God. The direct experience of pain and hunger over a prolonged period of time reminds the believer of the pain and hunger experienced by the poor.

The fifth pillar is the pilgrimage to Mecca during the first ten days of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah. Every Muslim who is physically and financially capable of making the trip and performing the prescribed rites is required to make the *hajj*. The nine essential rites of the *hajj* are the putting on of the *ihram* (unsewn cloth symbolizing the humility and equality of all believers), circumambulation of the Kaaba, standing at the plain of Arafat, spending the night at Muzdalifa, throwing stones at three symbols of Satan, sacrifice of an animal at Mina, repetition of the circumambulation of the Kaaba, drinking of water from the well of Zamzam, and performance of two cycles of prayer at the Station of Abraham. The *hajj* can be considered complete without performing all of the required rites, but the pilgrim must pay expiation for the failure to complete them. During the *hajj*, the pilgrim is to avoid thinking about anything but the remembrance of God and the rites of pilgrimage, since the circumambulation of the Kaaba, like canonical prayer, symbolizes the believer's entrance into

the divine presence.

Both Sunnis and Shiis agree on the essential details for carrying out the five pillars. In popular Sufi piety, the five pillars were personally internalized as acts of devotion and spiritual exercises. The shahadah became a constant recollection (dhikr) of God and the obligatory prayers became a life of continuous prayer and meditation.

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