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| **The Five Pillars of Islam**

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| The Five Pillars of Islam are the framework of the Muslim life.  They are the testimony of faith, prayer, giving *zakat* (support of the needy), fasting during the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Makkah once in a lifetime for those who are able. |

**1) Confession of Faith:**The testimony of faith is saying in Arabic with conviction, **“There is no true god (deity) but God (Allah), and Muhammad is the Messenger (Prophet) of God.”**  The first part, “There is no true god but God,” means that none has the right to be worshipped but God alone, and that God has neither partner nor son.  This testimony of faith is called the *Shahada* (sha-HEH-da).  The testimony of faith is the most important pillar of Islam, because it affirms both God’s oneness and the central role of the prophet. The Shahada appears in daily life in many different ways, from being proclaimed in the call to prayer to being inscribed on flags and coins. **2) Prayer:**Muslims perform five prayers a day.  Each prayer does not take more than a few minutes to perform.  Prayer in Islam is a direct link between the worshipper and God.  There are no intermediaries between God and the worshipper. Within this pillar, the believer washes according to a particular ritual and prostrates him or herself on the group in the direction of Mecca, while reciting certain phrases.In prayer, a person feels inner happiness, peace, and comfort, and that God is pleased with him or her.  The Prophet Muhammad said, “**Bilal, call (the people) to prayer, let us be comforted by it.**” Bilal was one of Muhammad’s  companions who was charged to call the people to prayers.Muslims are summoned to prayer by a muezzin (myoo-EZ-in) from a minaret. Prayers are performed at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and night.  A Muslim may pray almost anywhere, such as in fields, offices, factories, or universities. In addition to the five daily prayers, all male believers gather together on Friday for the noon prayer and listen to a sermon by a leader of the community. The rules for women’s attendance at Friday worship have varied over time and place. In many places today, women also attend Friday worship, although they are segregated from the men and pray behind, beside or above them. **3) Fasting the Month of Ramadan:** Every year in the month of Ramadan, which is the ninth month in the Muslim calendar, all Muslims fast from dawn until sundown, abstaining from food, drink, smoking and sexual relations.Although the fast is beneficial to health, it is regarded principally as a method of spiritual self-purification.  By cutting oneself off from worldly comforts, even for a short time, a fasting person gains greater awareness of God’s presence, true sympathy with those who go hungry, as well as growth in his or her spiritual life.The Muslim calendar is measured by the cycles of the moon, versus Christian measurements according to the sun. As a result, the Muslim lunar year is 11 days shorter than traditional calendars. The conclusion of Ramadan is marked by a feast, known as the *Id al-Fitr*, or break-fast feast. **4) Giving *Zakat* (zuh-KAHT) (Support of the Needy):**Muslims believe all things belong to God, and wealth is therefore held by human beings in trust. The fourth Pillar of Islam is to give alms to the poor, and Muslims are supposed to donate a fixed amount of their property to charity every year. The original meaning of the word *zakat* is both ‘purification’ and ‘growth.’  Giving *zakat* means ‘giving a specified percentage on certain properties to certain classes of needy people.’  Possessions are purified by setting aside a small portion for those in need, and, like the pruning of plants, this cutting back balances and encourages new growth.While most Muslims today donate money, one of the most common forms of charity in medieval Islamic cities was to establish a public drinking fountain.**5) The Hajj (Pilgrimage) to Mecca:**The annual pilgrimage (*Hajj*) to Mecca is an obligation once in a lifetime for those who are physically and financially able to perform it.  About two million people go to Mecca each year from every corner of the globe.  Although Mecca is always filled with visitors, the annual *Hajj* is performed in the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar.  Male pilgrims wear special simple white clothes that strip away distinctions of class and culture so that all stand equal before God.The rites of the *Hajj* include circling the Kaaba seven times.  Then the pilgrims journey 12 miles east and stand together in Arafat and ask God for what they wish and for His forgiveness, in what is often thought of as a preview of the Day of Judgment.The end of the *Hajj* is marked by a solemn festival, *Eid Al-Adha*, which is celebrated with prayers.  This, and *Eid al-Fitr*, a feast-day commemorating the end of Ramadan, are the two annual festivals of the Muslim calendar. |