



## MAJOR PRACTICES/DUTIES OF MUSLIMS

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Muslims are asked to put their beliefs into practice by performing certain acts of worship. As in all faiths, since adherence to religious obligations and practices is a matter of individual choice, some people are very strict in performing these duties, while others are not.

The five pillars or acts of worship in Islam

**1. The Declaration of Faith (shahada):** The first act of worship is the declaration that "There is no deity except God and Muhammad is the messenger of God." Muslims repeat this statement many times a day during their prayers. If someone wants to become a Muslim, he or she makes this profession of faith as an entry into Islam.

**2. Prayer (salat):** Islam prescribes a brief prayer or ritual worship five times a day: at dawn, noon, late afternoon, sunset and night. Muslims perform ablution before prayer -- a brief prescribed washing of the hands, mouth, nose, face, arms and feet. One may pray alone or in a group in any clean location, including a mosque. The Friday noon prayer is special to Muslims and is done in a mosque if possible. Muslims face in the direction of Mecca when they pray.

**3. Charity (zakat):** Muslims are required to give to the poor and needy. Islam prescribes an obligatory charity, known as zakat, based on two and a half percent of one's income and wealth. In addition to this prescribed charity, Muslims are encouraged to give as much as they can in voluntary charity throughout the year.

**4. Fasting (sawm):** Muslims are required to fast from dawn to sunset during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the lunar calendar. People gather in the evenings for a festive breaking of the fast. When fasting, Muslims refrain from food, liquid, and sexual activity. During Ramadan, Muslims are also supposed to abstain from negative behaviors such as lying, gossip, petty arguments, and negative thoughts or behaviors, including getting angry. Muslims are required to start fasting when they reach puberty, although some younger children may also fast. People who are sick, traveling, menstruating, and pregnant or nursing may break their fast, but may make up the days later in the year. The elderly and people with disabilities are excused from fasting.

Ramadan was the month in which the revelation of the Quran to Muhammad began. Therefore Muslims are encouraged to read the Quran during this month and often gather in the evenings in mosques to listen to recitations from the Quran.

Eid al-Fitr (eed' al fi'-ter), or the "Festival of the Fast-Breaking," one of the major Muslim holidays, celebrates the completion of the Ramadan fast and occurs on the first day of the month after Ramadan. This is a day of celebration, prayers, feasts and gift giving.

**5. Pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj):** Every Muslim is required to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, located in Saudi Arabia, once in their lifetime if financially and physically able. Mecca is home to the first house of worship of God, the Kaaba, said to have been built by the prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael. Muslims all over the world face towards the Kaaba when they pray. All outward symbols of rank and wealth are erased during the pilgrimage, as Muslim from every part of the globe come together for the



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purpose of worshipping God. Muslims who complete the pilgrimage are referred to as "Hajji" and greeted with great celebration and respect in their communities when they return.

Eid al-Adha (eed' al ad'-ha), or the "Festival of the Sacrifice," is the second major holiday in Islam. It falls on the tenth day of the month at the conclusion of the pilgrimage, and is celebrated by all Muslims with special prayers, feasts, gifts and the sacrifice of an animal (usually a lamb or goat). The meat is distributed to relatives, friends and the needy.

## Daily Life of Muslims

Islam contains many rules for daily life and human relationships. The first source of these rules is the Quran and the second is the hadith or reports of the prophet Muhammad's words or actions.

**Prohibitions:** In Islam, everything considered harmful either to the body, mind, soul or society is prohibited (haram), while whatever is beneficial is permissible (halal). Islam prohibits Muslims from consuming pork, alcohol or mind-altering drugs. Muslims are required to eat meat that is butchered and blessed in an Islamic way. This meat is called "halal." Muslims are also prohibited from gambling, taking interest, fortune-telling, killing, lying, stealing, cheating, oppressing or abusing others, being greedy or stingy, engaging in sex outside of marriage, disrespecting parents, and mistreating relatives, orphans or neighbors.

**Role of clergy:** There is no hierarchy of clergy in Islam, nor do Muslim religious leaders have the power to forgive people of their sins. Every individual has a direct relationship with God without any intermediary. There are religious leaders or scholars, called ulema, who have studied and are experts in different aspects of Islam, such as Sharia, hadith, or Quranic recitation. It is also important to note that there is not one Islamic authority; so there are differences among Muslim scholars.

**Conversion to Islam:** Muslims are encouraged to share their faith with others. However, Muslims are told not to attack others' beliefs or engage in conflicts or debates about matters of religion. There is no formal ceremony for conversion. People must merely believe in and recite the shahada to convert to Islam.



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