

MLU-3.1: Pillars of Islam: Shahada, Prayer (Salaat)& Fasting (Sawm)

System of worship in Islam

In Islam, worship is the very purpose of our existence. God declares in the Quran, the holy book of Islam, “I did not create Jinn and mankind except to worship Me” (Quran 51:56). Muslims worship God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, out of love and submission. They believe that He is the One God (Allah in Arabic) who is completely unique and only He deserves to be worshipped. Worshipping God is a comprehensive concept within Islam. Along with traditional rituals, such as praying and fasting, it also consists of any lawful action a person does with God-consciousness and in the hopes of earning reward from Almighty God. Therefore, devoting oneself to God in Islam does not require a person to enter a place of worship nor embrace monasticism. Rather, fulfilling this purpose of life is an active daily pursuit from the Islamic perspective. Hence, a Muslim can be engaged in worship throughout the day, be it at home, work or anywhere else.

Certain criteria determine whether an act can be considered worship. For instance, Islam teaches that the merit of a person's action depends on the intention. Muslims believe that God looks at people's hearts, not just their physical deeds. For an action to be regarded as worship, it must be performed with the pure intention of pleasing God. Therefore, the concept of worship in Islam encourages people to connect with God in every action they take, strengthening their bond with their Creator. In doing so, a person gains a sense of true peace that comes with carrying out their purpose in life. In addition to purifying one's intention, a person's deeds must also be consistent with divine guidance. While God has inspired an intuitive moral sense in every individual, people do not always act in a just and ethical manner. In fact, our ability to judge between right and wrong can often be muddled by external influences, outward appearances or ulterior motives. Hence, having a moral compass alone does not enable one to internalize righteousness or bring one closer to God.

Pillars of Islam.

The Five Pillars of Islam are the five basic acts in Islam, considered obligatory by Muslims. The Quran presents them as a framework for worship and a sign of commitment to the faith. They are

1. Shahadah (Creed)
2. Daily prayers (Salaat)
3. Sawm (Fasting during Ramadan)
4. Zakat (Almsgiving)
5. Pilgrimage to Makka (Hajj) at least once in a lifetime

1. Shahadah

Shahadah is a saying and confessing monotheism and accepting Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) as God's Messenger. The shahadah is a set statement normally recited in Arabic, which is translated as

I testify and bear witness that there is no god except Allah (SWT), and Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) is the last and final messenger of Allah (SWT).

Also, it is said that when dying one should recite this declaration of faith. In Azaan (call to prayer) it is recited. When a person wishes to convert his religion, he should recite this affirmation and believe in it.

2. Salaat

Purpose of Salaat/Prayer.

1. It strengthens the belief in the Existence of God and transmits this belief into the innermost recesses of man's heart.
2. It helps man to realize his natural and instinctive aspirations to greatness and high morality, to excellence and virtuous growth.
3. It purifies the heart and develops the mind, cultivates the conscience and comforts the soul.
4. It fosters the good and decent elements in man and suppresses the evil and indecent inclinations.

The Islamic prayer and study its unique nature, it will reveal to us that it is not merely a physical motion or a void recital of the Holy Book. It is a matchless formula of intellectual meditation and spiritual devotion, of moral elevation and physical exercise, all combined. It is an exclusively Islamic experience where every muscle of the body joins the soul and the mind in the worship and glory of God. It is difficult for anyone to impart in words the full meaning of the Islamic prayer yet it can be said that it is: -

1. A lesson in discipline and willpower;
2. A practice in devotion to God and all worthy objectives;
3. A vigilant reminder of God and constant revelation of His Goodness;
4. A seed of spiritual cultivation and moral soundness;
5. A guide to the most upright way of life;
6. A safeguard against indecency and evil, against wrong deviation and stray;
7. A demonstration of true equality, solid unity, and brotherhood;
8. An expression of thankfulness to God and appreciation of Him;
9. A course of inner peace and stability;
10. An abundant source of patience and courage, of hope and confidence.

The Kinds of Prayer

The following are the various kinds of prayer:

1. Obligatory (Fard), which includes the five daily prayers and the Friday, s noon congregational prayer. Failure to observe these prayers on time is a serious and punishable sin. However, funeral prayer which is known as “Farad Kifayah” in Arabic, which is a collective duty, is also obligatory in the sense that if no one comes out to perform the prayer in a given community, the community as a whole is deemed sinful in the sight of Allah, but if it is performed by some of the people, then, the rest of the community are absolved of the sin.
2. Supererogatory (Wajib and Sunnah), which includes the prayers accompanying the obligatory services, and the congregations of the two great festivals (Eids). Failure to observe these is a harmful negligence and a reproachable conduct.
3. Optional prayer which includes all voluntary prayers at any time of the day or the night. Two periods have a special preference: the later part of the night until just before the breaking of the dawn and the mid-morning period.

Allah says in the Quran, “Salat at fixed times has been enjoined on the believers (4:103).”

The Ablution (Wudu€)

Before offering the prayer one must be in good shape and pure condition. It is necessary to wash the parts of the body which are generally exposed to dirt or dust or smog. This performance is called Ablution (Wudu,) and is preferably carried out as follows:

1. Make the intention by heart.
2. Wash the hands up to the wrists, three times.
3. Rinse out the mouth with water, three times, preferably with a brush whenever it is possible.
4. Cleanse the nostrils of nose by sniffing water into them, three times.
5. Wash the whole face three times with both hands, if possible, from the top of the forehead to the bottom of the chin and from ear to ear.
6. Wash the right arm three times up to the far end of the elbow, and then do the same with the left arm.
7. Wipe the whole head or any part of it with a wet hand, once.
8. Wipe the inner sides of the ears with the forefingers and their outer sides with the thumbs. This should be done with wet fingers.
9. Wash the two feet up to the ankles, three times, beginning with the right foot.

At this stage the ablution is completed, and the person who has performed it is ready to start his prayer. When the ablution is valid a person may keep it as long as he can, and may use it for as many prayers as he wishes. But it is preferable to renew it as often as possible. It is also preferable to do it in the said order, although it will be accepted from those who fail to keep this order. Ablution in the said way is sufficient for prayer unless it is nullified by any reason.

3. Fasting in Quran.

O believers! Fasting is prescribed for you—as it was for those before you—so perhaps you will become mindful of Allah` (2:183).

Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur'an, as a guide to mankind, also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgment (Between right and wrong). So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting, but if anyone is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed period (Should be made up) by days later. God intends every facility for you; He does not want to put you to difficulties. (He wants you) to complete the prescribed period, and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and perchance YOU shall be grateful.
[al-Baqarah 2:185]

True obedience and piety known as taqwa in Islam is developed through fasting. Fasting develops self-control and helps us to overcome selfishness, greed, laziness and other faults.

Meaning of fasting:

Fasting is another unique moral and spiritual characteristic of Islam. Literally defined, fasting means to abstain "completely" from foods, drinks, some human desires and smoking, before the break of the dawn till sunset, during the entire month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic year.

Here is an explanation of the spiritual meaning of the Islamic Fasting:

1. It teaches man the principle of sincere Love: because when he observes Fasting he does it out of deep love for God. And the man who loves God truly is a man who really knows what love is.
2. It equips man with a creative sense of hope and an optimistic outlook on life; because when he fasts he is hoping to please God and is seeking His Grace.
3. It imbues in man the genuine virtue of effective devotion, honest dedication and closeness to God; because when he fasts he does so for God and for His sake alone.
4. It cultivates in man a vigilant and sound conscience; because the fasting person keeps his fast in secret as well as in public. In fasting, especially, there is no authority to check man's behavior or compel him to observe fasting. He keeps it to please God and satisfy his own conscience by being faithful in secret and in public. There is no better way to cultivate a sound conscience in man.
5. It indoctrinates man in patience and selflessness, as through fasting, he feels the pains of deprivation but he endures them patiently.
6. It is an effective lesson in applied moderation and willpower.
7. Fasting also provides man with a transparent soul, a clear mind and a light body.

8. It enables man to master the art of Mature Adaptability. We can easily understand the point once we realize that fasting makes man change the entire course of his daily life.
9. It grounds man in discipline and healthy survival.
10. It originates in man the real spirit of social belonging, unity and brotherhood, of equality before God as well as before the law.
11. It is a Godly prescription for self-reassurance and self-control.

Fasting in Ramadan is obligatory on every responsible and fit Muslim. But there are other times when it is recommended to make voluntary fasting, after the Traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Among these times are Mondays and Thursdays of every week, a few days of each month in the two months the coming of Ramadan, i.e., Rajab and Sha'ban, six days after Ramadan following the 'Eid-ul-Fitr Day. Besides, it is always compensating to fast any day of any month of the year, except the 'Eid Days and Fridays when no Muslim should fast.

However, we may repeat that the only obligatory fasting is that of Ramadan - which may be 29 or 30 days, depending on the moon's positions. This is a pillar of Islam, and any failure to observe it without reasonable excuses is a grave sin in the sight of God.

Who Must Fast?

Fasting Ramadan is compulsory upon every Muslim, male or female, who has these qualifications:

1. To be mentally and physically fit, which means to be sane and able.
2. To be of full age, the age of puberty and discretion, which is normally about fourteen. Children under this age should be encouraged to start this good practice on easy levels, so when they reach the age of puberty they will be mentally and physically prepared to observe fasting.
3. To be present at one's permanent settlement, your home town, one's farm, and one's business premises, etc. This means not to be on a journey of about fifty miles or more.
4. To be fairly certain that fasting is unlikely to cause you any harm, physical or mental, other than the normal reactions to hunger, thirst, etc.

Exemption From Fasting:

These said qualifications exclude the following categories:

1. Children under the age of puberty.
2. Insane people who are unaccountable for their deeds. People of these two categories are exempted from the duty of fast, and no compensation or any other substitute is enjoined on them.
3. Men and women who are too old and feeble to undertake the obligation of fast and bear its hardships. Such people are exempted from this duty, but they must offer, at least, one needy poor Muslim an average full meal or its value per person per day.
4. Sick people whose health is likely to be severely affected by the observance of fast. They may postpone the fast, as long as they are sick, to a later date and make up for it, a day for a day.
5. Travelers may break the fast temporarily during their travel only and make up for it in later days, a day for a day.
6. Pregnant and women feeding their children may also break the fast, if its observance is likely to endanger their own health or that of their infants.

7. It should be understood that here, like in all other Islamic undertakings, the intention must be made clear that this action is undertaken in obedience to God, in response to His command and out of love of Him.

The fast of any day of Ramadan becomes void by intentional eating or drinking or smoking, and by allowing anything to enter through the mouth into the interior parts of the body. And if this is done deliberately without any lawful reason, this is a major sin which only renewed repentance can expiate.

If anyone, through forgetfulness, does something that would ordinarily break the fast, observance is not nullified, and his fast stands valid, provided he stops doing that thing the moment he realizes what he is doing.

On completion of the fast of Ramadan, the special charity known as Sadaqat-ul-Fitr (charity of 'Fast-breaking') must be distributed before 'Eid-ul-Fitr.

General Recommendations:

It is strongly recommended by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to observe these practices especially during Ramadan:

1. To have a light meal before the break of the dawn, known as Suhoor.
2. To eat a few dates or start breaking the fast by plain water right after sunset, saying this prayer Allah humma laka sumna, wa 'ala rizqika aftarna. (O God! for Your sake have we fasted and now we break the fast with the food You have given us).
3. To make your meals as light as possible because, as the Prophet (PBUH) put it, the worst thing man can fill is his stomach.
4. To observe the supererogatory prayer known as Taraweeh.
5. To exchange social visits and intensify humanitarian services.
6. To increase the study and recitation of the Qur'an.
7. To exert the utmost in patience and humbleness.
8. To be extraordinarily cautious in using one's senses, one's mind and, especially, the tongue; to abstain from careless gossip and avoid all suspicious motions.

Reference

<https://www.whyyislam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Worship-in-Islam-Brochure.pdf>