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The Importance of the *Shahadah*

The prophet said that Islam was established on five pillars. These pillars are the groundwork of Islam as a religious scheme of faith, worship, and devotion. "Islam was built upon five (pillars): `The testimony that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; the establishment of the prayer; paying the obligatory charity (Zakat); pilgrimage to the House (Hajj to the Ka'bah in Makkah) and fasting (the month of) Ramadan" (Qur'an). Although, the prophet said that Islam was established on five pillars, it is very clear that the most important pillar is the *shahadah*. The *shahadah* states that, "one must declare, or bear witness, that there is no God except God, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God" (A Concise Introduction to World Religions). The *shahadah* is the most important pillar, because without the declaration that there is no god except God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God the other pillars cannot be practiced and in declaring this it also show how they believe in the religion of Islam as a whole.

The second pillar of Islam is to establish regular worship. Obligatory prayers or "salat" are practiced five times in a day and night (The Private Performance). Salat is practiced at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and after dark (The Private Performance). The call to prayer is repeated at least twice for significance. The call is as followed: "God is greater. I bear witness that there is no god except God, and I bear witness that

Muhammad is the Messenger of God. Hasten to the prayers! Hasten to success (or prosperity)! (Shi'as add: Hasten to the best action!) God is greater. There is no god except God" (A Concise Introduction to World Religions). Through the quote one can directly see how "God is greater" and that "there is no god except God." The quote also helps to establish that salat cannot be practiced without stating the quote before. The fact that the quote is recited multiple times before the actual prayer is proclaimed helps to reinforce the fact that the *shahadah* is the most important pillar as well. The quote also adds that one must "bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God." Including this helps to assert that it must also be stated in order to practice salat. The inclusion of this represents acceptance of Muhammad's claim to prophethood and helps round out the *shahadah*.

Rak'ahs play a large role in the performance of prayers by Muslims as well. *Rak'ahs* are "cycles or units of prescribed movements and words followed by Muslims when offering prayers to God" (True Islam). Some examples of these cycles or units would include bowing, kneeling, and prostration (A Concise Introduction to World Religions). The dawn prayers *rak'ahs* are performed twice, the noon and mid-afternoon prayers consist of four *rak'ahs* each, the sunset prayers consist of three, and the night prayers of four (A Concise Introduction to World Religions). Due to prayers not being able to be performed without the profession that there is not god except God, *rak'ahs* also could not be performed. This also helps to support that the second pillar cannot be performed without the *shahadah*.

The opening Surah or *al-Fatihah* also plays a transcending part of Muslim's prayers. *Al-Fatihah* in the Qur'an states, "In the name of God, the All-merciful, the

Compassionate: Praise be to God, the All-merciful, the Compassionate, King of the Day of Judgment. You alone do we worship, and to you alone do we turn for help. Guide us to the straight way, the way of those upon whom you have bestowed your grace, not those who have incurred your wrath, nor those who have gone astray.” *Al-Fatihah* is repeated in every *rak’ah* “at least 17 times in every 24-hour period” (A Concise Introduction to World Religions). The fact that *al-Fatihah* is repeated 17 times in a day pushes the point that the *shahadah* is indeed the most important pillar due to its repetitiveness. *Al-Fatihah* also shows the importance of the *shahadah*, because it explicitly states, “You alone do we worship, and to you alone do we turn for help.” With the proclamation that there is not god except god, the Muslims can recite *al-Fatihah* and ultimately proceed with their performance of the religion of Islam.

The next pillar of Islam is to pay the *zakat* alms. The *zakat* is “the annual amount of wealth, food, property etc. that a Muslim with the adequate means must distribute among the rightful beneficiaries” (*Zakat*). The third pillar demonstrates the relationship between glorification of God and service to the less fortunate. The Qur’an states "O You who believe! Shall I lead you to a bargain that will save you from grievous suffering [in this world and in the life to come]? You are to believe in Allah and His Messenger and strive hard in Allah's cause with your possessions and your lives: this is for your own good – if you had known it." The Qur’an directly states that one is “to believe in Allah (God) and His Messenger (Muhammad).” One cannot believe in god unless one bears witness. The fact that the Qur’an includes this and also states that one must believe in the Messenger shows how the first pillar must be proclaimed in order to pay the *zakat* alms.

Muslims are also expected to practice voluntary almsgiving or *sadaqah* (A Concise Introduction to World Religions). According to the Qur'an the *sadaqah* is a loan given to God, which will be repaid on the Day of Resurrection. The *sadaqah* cannot be practiced without the belief that one will be repaid on the day God resurrects. One cannot believe that God will resurrect without an overall belief in the religion of Islam. In order to believe in the religion of Islam one must bear witness that there is no god except God and that Muhammad is the messenger of God. Coming full circle, this shows how the third pillar cannot be exercised without the *shahadah*.

The fourth pillar of Islam is the fast of Ramadan. Ramadan runs from dawn to dusk each day for a month. Ramadan is introduced in the passage of the Qur'an that states, "O you have faith, fasting is ordained for you as it was ordained for those before you, that you may become aware of God... Ramadan is the month in which the Qur'an was sent down as a guidance to humankind, manifestations of guidance and the Criterion. Therefore whosoever among you witnesses the moon, let them fast [the month], but whosoever is sick or on a journey, an equal number of other days." The Ramadan fast requires one from abstaining from "eating, smoking, drinking, chewing, and sexual relations during daylight hours" (Participation of Muslim Athletes During the Month of Ramadan). Not every day in Ramadan is the same, but during a typical day of Ramadan one starts with an early breakfast or "Suhoor," which begins hours prior to the break of dawn (Participation of Muslim Athletes During the Month of Ramadan). After Suhoor, one might head to the mosque for dawn prayers and to narrate verses of the Qur'an (Participation of Muslim Athletes During the Month of Ramadan). Several Muslims then wander back to bed prior to carrying out their day-to-day activities (Participation of

Muslim Athletes During the Month of Ramadan). At sunset, the fast is broken and then Muslims participate in regularly scheduled prayers, along with extra “Tarweeh” prayers and late night readings of the Qur’an (Participation of Muslim Athletes During the Month of Ramadan). Ramadan is considered to be a rite of worship and rites of worship cannot be performed without the *shahadah*, and because of this it helps to argue that the *shahadah* is the most important pillar of Islam.

The fifth and final pillar of Islam is to perform the hajj once in one’s life. When one performs the hajj it is done to display submission to God. *Following the Hajj* describes this event as “a once-in-a-lifetime compulsory duty for every Muslim who is financially and physically capable. Each year, some four million people perform the hajj to Mecca, following a religion tradition started by the prophet Abraham as early as 2000 BCE and carried on by the prophet Muhammad when he cleaned the Kaaba, destroyed the idols, and re-ordained the building as the house of God in 630 CE. It was from this point that the hajj became one of Islam’s Five Pillars. It is at once a profound religious ceremony and social phenomenon that brings together Muslims from every continent and every social and economic class in a shared experience unlike any other on earth.” The Muslims follow the exact steps Muhammad took during his first and only hajj (Encyclopedia of Islam). By following Muhammad’s exact steps, Muslims show that they believe that Muhammad is the messenger of God by carrying out his practices. This is also an essential part of completing the hajj.

The five pillars of Islam are the foundation of the religion and they are essential to the religion as a whole. All of pillars have a public or outer obligatory dimension and a private or inner voluntary dimension (A Concise Introduction to World Religions).

Whether it be the *shahadah*, establishing regular worship, paying the *zakat* alms, observing the fast of Ramadan, or performing the *hajj* once in one's life, they are all extremely important. With exception of the *shahadah*, the other four pillars of Islam are all rites of worship, because of this the *shahadah* is the most important pillar because without the profession of faith one cannot practice these rites of worship that are encompassed in the four other pillars.

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