

The Pillars of Islam

In what ways did the early history of Islam reflect its Arabian origins? What did the Quran expect from those who followed its teachings?

Directions: In the space provided explain the possible Social, Political, and/or Religious causes and effects of each pillar.

BELIEF ~ “Iman”: The first Pillar of Islam is for the believer to testify, in Arabic, “There is no god but God and that Muhammad is His messenger.” This phrase, known as the *shahada*, or Profession of Faith, is central to Islam, for it affirms both God’s oneness and the central role of the Prophet. The *shahada* appears in daily life in many different ways, such as being proclaimed in the call to prayer. In contrast to the Judeo-Christian tradition, which extorts believers not to take the Lord’s name in vain, Muslims constantly call on God by name in all sorts of situations. For example, when beginning any activity, one might say *bismallah* (“in the name of God”) or when admiring something, one might say *al-hamdu lillah* (“praise be to God”).

WORSHIP ~ “Salat”: The second Pillar of Islam is to worship God five times a day. To do so, the believer washes according to a particular ritual and prostrates himself on the ground in the direction of Mecca, while reciting certain phrases. This rite takes only a few minutes to perform and can be done anywhere. A *muezzin* summons worshippers to prayer. Muslims believe that the call to prayer by the human voice distinguishes Islam from Judaism, which uses the shofar, and Christianity, which uses the bell.

FASTING ~ “Sawm”: The third Pillar of Islam is to abstain from food and drink, as well as smoking and sex, between sunrise and sunset during the month of *Ramadan*, the ninth month in the Muslim calendar. Abstinance during *Ramadan* brings Muslims to greater awareness of God’s presence and helps them acknowledge their gratitude for God’s provisions in their lives. It serves to heighten a sense of community among believers as Muslims around the world join together in the performance of this ritual.

ALMSGIVING ~ “Zakat”: The fourth Pillar of Islam is to give alms to the poor. Muslims are supposed to donate a fixed amount of their property to charity every year. Many pious individuals, from the mightiest rulers to modest merchants, give money to help out the less-fortunate by establishing soup kitchens, hospitals, schools, libraries, mosques, and the like. One of the most common forms of charity in medieval Islamic cities was to establish a public drinking fountain, where fresh water was distributed freely to all passers-by. Such a drinking fountain was commonly known as *sabil*, from the common Arabic expression *fi sabilillah*, literally meaning “in the path of God” and referring to doing something for God charitably or disinterestedly.

PILGRIMAGE ~ “Hajj”: The fifth Pillar of Islam is to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in one’s lifetime, if one is able, during the first days of *Dhu’l-Hijja*, the twelfth month of the Muslim calendar. People who have performed this pilgrimage, called in Arabic *hajj*, earn the epithet *hajji*, which is the title of great respect. Before entering Mecca, the pilgrim dons a special garment made of two seamless white cloths. The ceremonies of the pilgrimage are associated with the prophet Abraham and center on the *Kaaba*, which Muslims believe to be the house that Abraham erected for God.

