ISLAM: THE FIVE PILLARS OF FAITH
Lars Wilhelmsson

In the Islam religion, the concept of the deity is much related to the concept held by Judaism and Christianity. Islam acknowledges that

“... the divine had revealed itself through the Hebrew people and their religious leaders, it recognized Jesus as being a prophet. In so acknowledging the supra-human nature of the religious knowledge possessed by Judaism and Christianity, Islam identified itself with much of the main outline of thought pertaining to the divine which was fundamental to its two sister Semitic religions.”

Revelation

But it felt that through the Prophet Muhammad, it had a superior revelation, one which surpassed that of Judaism and Christianity. Islam sees revelation in four stages.

1. Through Abraham God revealed the truth of monotheism.
2. Through Moses He revealed the Ten Commandments.
3. Through Jesus He revealed the Golden Rule that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves.
4. A final prophet was needed to answer the question how we should love our neighbor and he was Muhammad.

All these men were authentic prophets as they were messengers of aspects of God’s truth. But the question remained, how should we love our neighbor? What does the love of neighbor require in this complicated world in which human interests can complicate things? Because God answered this final question through him he deserves the title, the Seal of the Prophets, for “The glory of Islam consists in having embodied the beautiful sentiment of Jesus into definite laws.” (Emphasis added)

THE FIVE PILLARS

These laws are spelled out in The Five Pillars of Islam, the principles that regulate on the whole the private life of Muslims in their direct relationships with God.

In spite of the crucial importance of the theological teachings concerning God, Creation, Man, the Day of Judgment, Kismet (fate), the Qur’an, as Muhammad Iqbal tells us, is “a book which emphasizes deed rather than idea.” Muslims will summarize how man should live by saying that Islam teaches him to “walk in the straight path.” The phrase comes from the opening surah of the Qur’an itself which is recited by every Muslim five times each day:
“Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds,
   The Compassionate, the Merciful.
King of the day of Judgment.
‘Tis Thee we worship and Thee we ask for help.
Guide us in the straight path,
The path of those whom Thou has favored,
Not the path of those who incur Thine anger nor of those who go astray.”

The straight path is the path that is neither crooked nor corrupt but is straightforward, direct, and explicit—the path which leads to what is right. Islam claims that unlike many other religions, it pinpoints how such a life should be lived through explicit injunctions. Thus a Muslim knows where he stands and exactly what is expected of him.

Although Islamic law is a complex code, there are five practices. So besides the five major beliefs of doctrines in Islam, there are also what is called “five pillars of faith.” These are observances in Islam which are foundational practices or duties every Muslim must observe. The five are: The Creed, Prayers, Almsgiving, Fasting and the Pilgrimage to Mecca.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

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<td>Making the public confession that “there is no god except Allah and and Muhammad is his prophet.”</td>
<td>Turning toward Mecca and praying five times a day, seven days a week, at the call of the minaret.</td>
<td>Fasting during Ramadan (the month Muhammad first received the Qur’an).</td>
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The Creed (Kalima/Shadada)

The creed of Islam is brief, simple and explicit for it consists of a single sentence:

“Allah is great. There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.”

This creed is the bedrock of Muslim belief. One must state this aloud publicly in order to become a Muslim. It is to be repeated in Arabic daily by the faithful. This creed is to be said correctly, slowly, thoughtfully, aloud, with full understanding and with heartfelt conviction of its truth. This is also called “the Witness” since the Muslim is bearing witness to his belief.
The creed not only affirms **monotheism** but also that **Muhammad is God’s prophet**. When Muhammad died there were some who attempted to deify him, but his appointed successor banished the thought with one of the most famous speeches in religious history. He affirmed:

“If there are any among you who worshiped Muhammad, he is dead. But if it is God you worship, He lives forever.”

**Prayer (Salat/Salaah)**

“And be steadfast in prescribed prayer (salah) and regular in poor-due (zakah), and whatever good you send forth for your souls before you, you shall find it with God. Verily, God sees all that you do.” (Surah 2:110)

“O you who believe seek help in patience and preescribed prayer. Verily, God is with those who patiently persevere.” (Surah 2:153)

“What stands between a human being and disbelief is the abandonment of prescribed prayer.” (Hadith)

Prayer as ritual is central to a devout Muslim. It is the second act of worship which Islam prescribes for its followers. A Muslim is to be “constant” in prayer (Surah 24:45). While the Qur’an mentions almost nothing in the way of specifics concerning prayer, Muhammad’s personal teachings and practices have crystallized into traditions that, in keeping with the explicitness of Islam’s religious practices, provides structure to fill the void left by the Qur’an. Thus a Muslim is to recite set prayers in Arabic while doing stipulated posture and prostrations facing Mecca. He is to do this five times a day (upon rising, at noon, in midafternoon, after sunset, and before retiring). The schedule is not absolutely binding. The Qur’an says explicitly, for example, that “When ye journey about the earth it is no crime to you that ye come short in prayer if ye fear that those that disbelieve will set upon you.” Under normal conditions, however, the five-fold pattern should be maintained. The realization that his brothers are doing likewise helps to create a sense of participation in a worldwide fellowship even when a Muslim is physically isolated.

The five times of worship through prayer correspond to the five periods of the day: daybreak, noon, afternoon, the close of day and night. These times corresponds to how most people organize their time during a day and is a reminder of Allah throughout the day. Since prayers (salah) consists of recitations from the Holy Qur’an and glorification of God the Muslim is reminded of what is most important in life.

The worshiper must recite the prescribed prayers (the first Surah and other selections from the Qur’an) in Arabic while facing the Ka’aba in Mecca. The Hadith (book of tradition) has turned these prayers into a mechanical procedure of standing, kneeling, hands and face on the ground, and so forth. The call to prayer is sounded by the muezzin (a Muslim crier) from a
tower called a *minaret* which is part of the mosque (the place of public worship). On Friday, congregational prayers are held in the mosque following a sermon by the leader/teacher. While in Islam no day of the week is as sharply set apart from others as is the Sabbath for the Jews or Sunday for the Christians, Friday most nearly approximates a holy day. **Formality is not a pronounced feature in Islam** but the closest that Muslims come to a formal service of worship is when they gather on Fridays for noon prayers and collective recital of the Qur’an. These gatherings are usually in mosques, and visitors to Muslim lands testify that one of the impressive sights in the religions of man occurs when, in a dimly lit mosque, hundreds of men stand shoulder to shoulder, then kneel and prostrate themselves toward Mecca. Even though they are encouraged to face the *Ka’aba in Mecca*, they also recognize that they can pray anywhere since every corner of Allah’s universe is equally pure. And so the Muslims can spread their prayer rug wherever they find themselves at the appointed hour.

When a Muslim prays

1. He stands erect with hands open on either side of his face and his thumbs touching the lobes of his ears.
2. He recites, “*Allahu akbar*” (“God is the greatest”).
3. Still standing he recites the opening *surah* of the Qur’an followed by other optional selections.
4. Bowing from his hips and placing his hands on his knees, he says, “I extol the perfection of my Lord the Great.”
5. He returns to upright position, again repeating, “*Allahu akbar*” (“God is the greatest”).
6. Gliding gently to his knees, he places his hands and his face to the ground.
7. He rises to his knees, sits on his heels, and again returns his hands and his face to the ground. The entire process is repeated several times, with the Muslim creed and optional prayers interpolated between each pair of prostrations.

The entire routine is designed to give form to the prayer while allowing ample scope for the most heartfelt outpouring of devotion before the “Almighty Presence.” Each of the prayers may take from five to ten minutes.

Such postures of prayer are more biblically grounded than that of contemporary Christianity.

- Moses, Aaron and Jesus fell on their faces and prayed (Nu 16:22; Mt 26:39).
- Solomon knelt on his knees (2 Ch 6:13; see also Ps 95:6).
- Solomon stood before the Lord and spread out his hands (1 Ki 8:22; see also 1 Ti 2:8).
- Jesus told His followers to stand and pray (Mk 11:25).
Before praying one must be cleansed. The mosques provide the water either with a pool or a basin. The process includes

- Washing the hands up to the wrist three times
- Rinsing out the mouth three times
- Cleaning the nostrils by sniffing water three times
- Washing the face from forehead to chin and from ear to ear
- Washing the forearms up to the elbows three times
- Passing a wet hand over the entire head

The two great themes of Muslim prayers are expressions of praise and gratitude and supplication. There is a Muslim saying that every time a bird drinks a drop of water it lifts its eyes in gratitude toward heaven:

“All who are in the heavens and the earth celebrate His praises, and the birds, too, spreading out their wings; each one knows its prayer and its praise.”

Ideally, every second of man’s life should be lifted to God in gratitude.

When Muslims are asked why they are admonished to “be constant” in prayer, the basic reason implied by all the Qur’an’s direct statements is to keep man’s life in perspective. Repeated prayers throughout the day helps a Muslim from forgetting that he ultimately belongs to God and not to himself or even to the people who are closest to him. This means to acknowledge his creatureliness—that he is mere man, a creature—before his Creator and to submit himself to the will of God as rightfully sovereign over his life. Such repeated prayers also remind him of his obligations to God, to other people and to himself, for as the Qur’an says, “Salah restrains from shameful and unjust deeds” (Surah 29:45).

Almsgiving (Zakat/Zakaat)

“It is not righteousness that you turn your faces toward the East or the West but righteousness is that one believe in God and the last day and the angels and the Book and the prophets; and (that he) give his wealth out of love for Him for kinsmen, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask, and to ransom captives; and (that he) establish salah and give zakah. And those who keep their commitments when then make them and are patient in tribulation and adversity and in the struggle: these are the truthful and they are the God-conscious.” (Surah 2:177)

“You will not attain righteousness until you spent out of that which you love. And whatever you spend from (your) possessions, indeed God is aware of it.” (Surah 3:92)

“They ask you (Muhammad) what they should spend. Say: ‘Whatever you spend that is good for parents, the near of kin, orphans, the needy and the traveler, and whatever good you do, surely God knows it.’ They ask you what they should spend. Say: ‘What is beyond your needs.’” (Surahs 2:215, 219)
Islam does not concern itself with the theoretical problem of why some have so much and others so little. Instead it focuses on the practical question of what should be done about the situation. The answer is simple. Those who have much should help lift the burden of those who are less fortunate. Zakah or almsgiving is therefore the fourth of the acts of worship in Islam in which a follower of Allah “worships God by means of his wealth through an obligatory form of giving to those in need.”

Islam teaches that the true Owner of everything is not human beings but God who bestows on people out of His beneficence as He sees fit. Therefore, those to whom God has given more have an obligation to spend from His bounty for their brothers and sisters who need help.

Muhammad, himself an orphan, had a strong desire to help the needy. In the seventh century he prescribed a graduated tax on the haves to relieve the circumstances of the have-nots. This does not mean that Muhammad did not value work for he is reported as having said that it would be better for a person to eat from his income than to ask others for something.

The alms originally were voluntary, but all Muslims are legally required to give one-fourtieth of their income and holdings (the value of all they possess) for the destitute. Zakah is not to be paid on property which is for personal use (clothing and household furniture, a house in which one lives, a car, crops planted for domestic consumption), but is assessed at approximately two and a half percent per year on cash or capital which is beyond one’s immediate needs as, for example, cash savings or investment, the inventory of a business, cattle, lands and crops which are a source of profit, etc. Zakah is to be given annually to help the poor and to spread Islam. The recipients of such money is described in the Qur’an:

“The poor and the needy, and those who work on it (collecting zakah), and those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and (to free) captives and (help) debtors, and in the cause of God, and for travelers.” (Surah 9:60)

The poor who are to receive such help are those in direst need, slaves in the process of buying their freedom, debtors unable to meet their obligations, strangers and those who collect and distribute the charity.

The Arab word zakah literally means “poor-due” in English and the closest equivalent is the word “purification.” The idea is that since all wealth belongs to God who gives it to people as He sees fit, a part of what one possesses is to be returned back to God in this form, that is, in the form of money. The Qur’an puts it:

“Verily, the God-conscious will be in the midst of gardens and springs (in the next life), taking that which their Lord gives to them. Indeed, before that they were doers of good. They would sleep but little at night and in the early dawn then would pray for forgiveness and in their wealth (was remembered) the right of him who asked and him who was prevented (from asking, although needy).”

(Surah 51:15-19)
Zakah then is “the share that God prescribes as the right of the Muslim community in an individual Muslim’s wealth.” A former Christian who is now a Muslim, Suzanne Haneef, speaks of the benefits of zakah:

“Giving it *purifies* his remaining possessions and makes his ownership of them *blessed*. It also *purifies his heart of greed and selfishness* and from regarding what God in His bounty has bestowed on him as solely his by right. In turn zakah *purifies the heart of the one who receives it from envy and hatred of others* who are better-off. Rather than being his enemies or exploiters, the affluent are his brothers-in-the-faith who acknowledge his right on what God has given them and, from His bounty, extend their help to him.” (Emphasis added)

Muslims see *zakah* as divine wisdom in dealing with the problem of poverty while at the same time offering a solution to class rivalry and hatred. For it is

“... an institutionalized, obligatory kind of sharing and caring which equalizes the wealth in the community without, at the same time, banning private ownership of property or stipulating that all people must possess an equal mount of wealth, which is contrary to human nature and to dynamism and development within a society.”

Freewill offerings also can be exercised. Thus generosity is among the most emphasized qualities in Islam. A Muslim is supposed to be always responsive to human need and distress.

Since those to whom alms are given are helping the giver of salvation, they feel no sense of debt to the giver. On the contrary, it is the giver’s responsibility and duty to give and he should consider himself lucky he has someone to give.

**Fasting (Sawm/Ramadan)**

“O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you in order that you may be conscious of God... Ramadan is the (month) in which the Quran was revealed as a guide to mankind and as a clear evidence for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong). So whoever among you witnesses this month, let him 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 ease for you and He does not intend hardship and (He desires) that you should complete the prescribed period, and that you may glorify God for guiding you and that You may be thankful.” (*Surah* 2:183,185)

Faithful Muslims fast from sunup to sundown each day during the *Ramadan*, a month in the Arabian calendar which is considered holy because during it Muhammad received his initial commission as a prophet and ten years later made his historic *Hijrah* (migration) from Mecca to
Medina. To commemorate these two great occasions, physically-fit Muslims not involved in crises, like war, are to fast during Ramadan. This is the third of the obligatory acts of worship in Islam. Such fasting is accompanied by intensive devotional activity.

The fast of Ramadan has been prescribed in order to train Muslims in self-discipline and scrupulous obedience to God’s commands. Muslims point out that fasting is not related to penance for sins as a means of appeasing God’s wrath as in some religions.

Why It Is Important

The fast is important for at least three reasons:

- **Develops self-control.** Those who can endure its demands will have less difficulty controlling his appetites in other areas and at other times in his life.

  “It makes a person steadfast and resilient like a soldier who forgoes or postpones the satisfaction of his normal needs at the order of his Commander. This trains him to be flexible and adaptable in his habits, capable of enduring hardship, and not to take for granted the bounties of God which he normally enjoys.”\(^\text{19}\)

- **Develops devotion to God and dependence upon Him.** It underscores man’s dependence upon God. Although man is as frail as the rose petal, nevertheless he assumes airs and pretensions which fasting counters by reminding him vividly—painfully—of his essential frailty and dependence.

  “Islam recognizes that physical needs and appetites, particularly those of food, drink and sex are powerful factors in human life, tying a person to dependence on and preoccupation with his bodily needs and desires. Therefore the Muslim is asked for one month out of the year to do without the satisfaction of these needs by day in order to develop his spiritual nature. This helps to wean a person from dependence on physical satisfaction and the dominance of his animal needs, freeing him to pursue spiritual goals and values during this period.”\(^\text{20}\)

- **Develops identity with the destitute.** Only those who have been hungry can know what hunger means. If a person has himself fasted for thirty days within the year he will more likely listen and be compassionate toward someone in need.

  No food or drink may be consumed during the daylight hours; no smoking or sexual pleasures may be enjoyed, either. However, many Muslims eat two meals a day during Ramadan, one before sunrise and one shortly after sunset. This fast is enforced by social pressure in most Muslim countries.

  Some Muslims may be exempted from fasting, including aged adults, young children before puberty and pregnant women. However, there are provisions to make it up at other times or to give food to the poor
Being a month in a lunar calendar, Ramadan rotates around the year. When it falls in the winter its demands are not excessive, whereas when it occurs during the scorching summers, to remain active during the long days without so much as a drop of water becomes an ordeal.

At the end of Ramadan there is a special festival, Id Fetr, when the fast is concluded with celebrations and a return to normal routines. On the special day of the festival Muslim put on new clothes and go to the mosque for prayer. After the Id Fetr prayer, there is visitation in homes with feasts and celebrations. The poor are provided with either money or food.

**The Pilgrimage (Hajj)**

“I search for the way, but not the way to the Ka’ba and the temple
For I see in the former a troop of idolaters and in the latter a band of self-worshipers.”
--Jalal Uddin Rumi

“Had I not seen the Prophet kiss you, I would not kiss you myself.”
--Caliph ‘Umar, addressing the Black Stone at Ka’aba

“From an ethical standpoint, the Mecca pilgrimage, with its superstitious and childish ritual, is a blot upon Mohammedan monotheism.”
--Samuel Zwemer

“And (remember) when We prepared for Abraham the site of the (Sacred) House (saying): ‘Do not ascribe for those who circumambulate it and those who stand and those who bow and those who prostrate themselves (there). And proclaim the hajj to people; they will come to you on foot and (mounted) on every kind of lean camel coming through deep ravines.” (Surah 22:26-27)

“The first house (of worship of God) appointed for people was that at Bakka, full of blessings and of guidance for all kinds of beings. In it are signs manifest: the station of Abraham—whoever enters it attains sanctuary. Pilgrimage to a people who submit to You. And show us our rites, and forgive us. Indeed, You are the Forgiving, the Compassionate.’” (Surah 2:127-128)

“Remember We made the House a place of gathering for people, and of security. And you take the Station of Abraham as a place for prayer. And We convenanted with Abraham and Ishmael that they should sanctify My House for those who circumambulate it or use it as a retreat, or bow or prostrate themselves (there in worship).” (Surah 2:125)

The entire ceremony of the pilgrimage has been taken over from pre-Islamic practice: “a fragment of incomprehensible heathenism taken up undigested into Islam.” The Hajj, or the Greater Pilgrimage to Mecca, the sacred city of Islam, is performed in the month of Dhu al-
Hijjah, or the twelfth month of the Muslim year. It is the fifth pillar of Islam, and a religious duty founded upon injunctions in the Qur’an. This pilgrimage to Mecca is expected of every Muslim in good health and with sufficient resources at least once in their lifetime.

Mecca is important because it was here that God’s climactic revelation was first disclosed. The main purpose of the pilgrimage is to **heighten the pilgrim’s devotion to God and to His revealed will.**

Secondary benefits are **equality** and **international relations.** Upon reaching Mecca, pilgrims remove their usual clothes, which tend to carry clear indications of their social status, and put on two simple sheet-like garments. Everyone as he comes near Islam’s earthly focus, wears the same thing. Thus all distinctions of rank and hierarchy are removed; prince and pauper stand before God in their undivided humanity. Pilgrimage also provides a service in international relations in that it brings people together from various countries demonstrating that they have in common a loyalty that transcends the loyalties of the warring kingdoms of man. By picking up information about their brothers in other lands they return to their own with a better understanding and appreciation of one another.

This trip can be extremely arduous on the old or infirm, so in their cases they may send someone in their places. The trip is an essential part in Muslims’ gaining salvation. It involves a set of ceremonies and rituals, many of which center around the **Ka’aba** shrine (a cube shaped building), to which the pilgrimage is directed. They are to go around this **Ka’aba** seven times. Upon return they may affect the title **Hajji.** Of the **Ka’aba,** Muhammad M. Pickthall comments in *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran:*

> “The Meccans claimed descent from Abraham through Ishmael, and tradition stated that their temple, the Ka’aba, had been built by Abraham for the worship of the One God. It was still called the House of Allah, but the chief objects of worship there were a number of idols which were called daughters of Allah and intercessors.”

The idols were destroyed by Muhammad on his return to Mecca in power following the **Hijira** (Exile).

> “When the pilgrim is about six miles from the holy city, he enters upon the state of **ihram:** he casts off, after prayers, his ordinary clothes and puts two seamless garments; he walks almost barefooted and neither shaves, cuts his hair nor cuts his nails. The principle activity consists of a visit to the Sacred mosque (**al-Masjid-al-Haram**); the kissing of the Black Stone (**al-hajar al-Aswad**); seven circumambulations of the ka’aba three times running and four times slowly; the visit to the sacred stone called Maqam Ibrahim; the ascent of and running between Mt. Safa and Mt. Marwa seven times; the visit to Mt. Arafat; the hearing of a sermon there and spending the night at Muzdalifa; the throwing of stones at the three pillars at Mina and offering sacrifice on the last day of Ihram, which is the ’id of sacrifice (**’Id-al-Adha**).”
This Muslim pilgrimage serves to heighten and solidify Islamic faith.

The pilgrimage is divided into two segments: the first five days and the sixth to the tenth day. Furthermore the first seven days constitute the lesser pilgrimage (Umrah) that can be performed at any time except the eight, ninth, and tenth days of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah. These are reserved for the Greater Pilgrimage (Hajj), which begins on the eighth.

When the pilgrim first arrives at a point several miles outside Mecca, he prepares himself so that he is in a state of ritual purity or state of consecration. After dressing in a simple pilgrim’s dress and performing the necessary ablutions and prayers, the pilgrim enters the sacred precincts of Mecca, where he is expected to abstain from killing animals, tearing up plants, indulging in violence, and taking part in sexual intercourse. He makes further ablutions and prayers at the sacred mosque of Mecca, al-Masjid al-Haram; then he kisses the sacred Black Stone, which is set within the eastern corner of the Ka’aba, the cubelike building in the center of the roofless courtyard of the Sacred Mosque.

The pilgrim then turns to the right and circumambulates the Ka’aba seven times, three times at a quick pace, and four times at a slow pace. Each time he passes around the Ka’aba he touches the Yamani corner, where another auspicious stone is encased, and also kisses the sacred Black Stone.

The pilgrim then proceeds to the Maqam Ibrahim (the place of Abraham), where Abraham is believed to have prayed toward the Ka’aba. He performs two further prayers and returns to the Black Stone and kisses it. Nearby is the sacred well of Zem Zem, where according to Muslim tradition, Hagar and Ishmael drank in the wilderness. The pilgrims move on to an enclosure known as the al-Hijr, where Muslims believe that Hagar and Ishmael are buried, and where Muhammad himself is said to have slept on the night of his miraculous journey from Mecca to Jerusalem.

From the sixth to tenth day, the pilgrim leaves the sacred mosque by one of its twenty-four gates. Outside, he climbs the gentle hill known as Mt. As Safa, all the while reciting verses from the Qur’an. He then runs from the top of As Safa to the summit of al-Marwah seven times, repeating various prayers. This strange ritual commemorates Hagar’s search for water in the wilderness.

This is the sixth day of the pilgrimage; the evening is spent at Mecca where he goes around the Ka’aba once more. On the seventh day, he listens to an oration in the Great Mosque, and then, on the eighth he proceeds to Mina, where he performs the usual services of the Muslim ritual and remains the night. On the ninth day, after morning prayers, the pilgrim proceeds to Mount Arafat where the rite of “standing” (wuquaf, in Arabic) is performed. According to Muslim tradition, Adam and Eve met here after their fall from Paradise. Here the pilgrim recites the usual prayers and listens to another oration on the theme of repentance. He then hurries (the Arabic word means “stampede”) to Muzdalifah, a place between Mina and Arafat, where he is required to arrive for the sunset prayer.
The next day, the tenth, is the **Day of Sacrifice**, celebrated throughout the Muslim world as Id ‘l-Azha. Early in the morning in Muzdalifah, the worshipers say their prayers and move on to the three pillars in Mina. The pilgrim casts seven stones at each of these pillars, the ceremony being called *ramyu ‘r rijam*, the casting of stones:

> “Holding the pebble between the thumb and forefinger of the right hand, the pilgrim throws it at a distance of not less than fifteen feet and says, ‘In the name of God, the Almighty, I do this, and in hatred of the devil and his shame.’”

The remaining pebbles are thrown in the same way. He then returns and performs the sacrifice of a goat or lamb. After the feast, the pilgrims celebrate the rite of deconsecration, when many pilgrims shave their head or simply have a few locks clipped.

Muslims rationalize this particular superstition as symbolizing Abraham’s repudiation of the devil, who tried to keep the great patriarch from his divinely commanded duty of sacrificing his greatly cherished son Ishmael. The sacrifice of a lamb or goat simply commemorates the divine substitution of a ram for Abraham’s sacrifice.

How did an iconoclastic, uncompromising monotheist like Muhammad ever come to incorporate these pagan superstitions into the very heart of Islam? Most historians agree that had Jews and Christians rejected Moses and Jesus and favorably received Muhammad as a prophet who taught the religion of Abraham at Mecca when Muhammad made Jerusalem the *Kiblah* (the direction of prayer), then Jerusalem and not Mecca would have been the sacred city, and the ancient rock (*Sakrah*) and not the *Ka’aba* would have been the object of superstitious reverence.

Circumambulation of a sanctuary was a very common rite practiced in many localities. The pilgrim during his circuit frequently kissed or caressed the idol. Sir William Muir thinks that the seven circuits of the *Ka’aba* “were probably emblematical of the revolutions of the planetary bodies.” While Zwemer goes so far as to suggest that the seven circuits of the *Ka’aba*, three times rapidly and four times slowly were “in imitation of the inner and outer planets.”

It is unquestionable that the Arabs “at a comparatively late period worshipped the sun and other heavenly bodies.” The constellation of the Pleiades, which was supposed to bestow rain, appears as a deity. There was the cult of the planet Venus which was revered as a great goddess under the name of al-Uzza.

We know from the frequency of *theophorous* names that the sun (Shams) was worshipped. Shams was the titular goddess of several tribes honored with a sanctuary and an idol. Snouck Hurgronje sees a solar rite in the ceremony of “wukuf.”

The goddess al-Lat is also sometimes identified with the solar divinity. The god Dharrih was probably the rising sun. The Muslim rites of running between Arafat and Muzdalifah, and Muzdalifah and Mina had to be accomplished after sunrise and before sunrise. This was a
deliberate change introduced by Muhammad to suppress this association with the pagan solar rite, whose significance we shall examine later. The worship of the moon is also attested to by proper names of people such as Hilal, a crescent, Qamar, a moon, etc.\textsuperscript{41}

Houtsma has suggested that the stoning that took place in Mina was originally directed at the sun demon. This view is plausible since that the pagan pilgrimage originally coincided with the autumnal equinox. The sun demon is expelled, and his harsh rule comes to an end with the summer, which is followed by the worship, at Muzdalifah, of the thunder god who brings fertility.\textsuperscript{42}

Muzdalifah was a place of fire worship. Muslim historians refer to this hill as the hill of the holy fire. The god of Muzdalifah was Quzah, the thunder god. As Wensinck says:

“A fire was kindled on the sacred hill also called Quzah. Here a halt was made and this wukuf has a still greater similarity to that on Sinai, as in both cases the thunder god is revealed in fire. It may further be presumed that the traditional custom of making as much noise as possible and of shouting was originally a sympathetic charm to call forth the thunder.”\textsuperscript{43}

Frazer in the \textit{Golden Bough} has another explanation for the ceremony of stone throwing:

“Sometimes the motive for throwing the stone is to ward off a dangerous spirit; sometimes it is to cast away an evil, sometimes it is to acquire a good. Yet, perhaps, if we could trace them back to their origin in the mind of primitive man, we might find that they all resolve themselves more or less exactly into the principle of the transference of evil. . . . This notion perhaps explains the rite of stone throwing. . . . at Mecca . . . the original idea may perhaps have been that the pilgrims cleanse themselves by transferring their ceremonial impurity to the stones which they fling on the heap.”\textsuperscript{44}

According to Juynboll, the \textit{hajj} originally had a magical character:

“Its purpose in early times must have been to get a happy new year with plenty of rain and sunshine, prosperity, and abundance of cattle and corn. Great fires were lit at Arafat and Muzdalifah, probable to induce the sun to shine in the new year. Water was poured on the ground as a charm against drought. Perhaps the throwing of stones at certain places in Mina, a relic of the primitive heathenism, was originally a symbol of throwing away the sins of the past year, and in this way a sort of charm against punishment and misfortune.”\textsuperscript{45}

Similarly, the hurrying between Arafat and Muzdalifah, and from Muzdalifah to Mina may have had a magical significance. The feasting at the end of all the rituals was probably a symbol of the abundance that was hoped for at the end of the year. The various obligations of abstinence imposed on the pilgrim was originally to bring the pilgrim into a state of magical power.\textsuperscript{46}
A Dangerous Journey

Fourteen people were trampled to death in Saudi Arabia on February 12, 2003 when some worshipers tripped in a crowd during a ritual of the hajj. According to the head of hajj security, fifteen others were injured in the crowds that gathered to throw pebbles at a pillar representing the devil near Jamarat Bridge. Three Indians, four Pakistanis, two Egyptians, an Iranian and a Yemeni were among the dead. Security officials said they would increase their coordination to prevent more problems among the 2 million pilgrims.47

In 2001, 35 people died in a stampede during the devil-stoning ritual. In 1998, 180 died performing the same ritual.48

The Ka’aba

The Ka’aba was originally an idol which was generally placed in a sacred precinct delimited by stones. This sacred enclosure was an area of asylum for all living things. One often found a well within this sacred precinct. We do not know when the Ka’aba was first constructed but the selection of the spot owes something to the presence of the well Zam Zam, which provided precious water to the caravans that passed through Mecca to Yemen and Syria.49

The believers rendered homage with offerings and sacrifices. Inside the Ka’aba was a dry well in which offerings were placed. The pilgrim coming to pay homage to the idol often shaved his head within the sacred precinct or the sanctuary. One notices that all these rituals are present in one form or another in the Muslim hajj.50

According to the Muslim writers, the Ka’aba was first built in heaven, where a model of it still remains, two thousand years before the creation of the world. Adam erected the Ka’aba on earth but this was destroyed during the Flood. Abraham was instructed to rebuild it; Abraham was assisted by Ishmael. While looking for a stone to mark the corner of the building, Ishmael met the angel Gabriel, who gave him the Black Stone, which was then whiter than milk; it was only later that it became black from all the sins of those who touched it. The above is, of course, an adaption of the Jewish legend of the heavenly and earthly Jerusalem.51

While Muir and Torrey are convinced that the Abrahamic origin of the Ka’aba was a popular belief long before the time of Muhammad, Snouck Hurgronje and Aloys Sprenger agree that the association of Abraham with the Ka’aba was Muhammad’s personal invention, and it served as a means to liberate Islam from Judaism. Sprenger’s conclusion is harsh:

“By this lie . . . Muhammad gave to Islam all that man needs and which differentiates religion from philosophy: a nationality, ceremonies, historical memories, mysteries, an assurance of entering heaven, all the while deceiving his own conscience and those of others.”52
There is a sixth religious duty associated with the five pillars. This is *jihad*, the Holy War. This duty requires that when the situation warrants, men must go to war to spread Islam or “defend it against infidels.” One who dies in a *jihad* is guaranteed eternal life in Paradise (heaven).\(^5\)
NOTES


4


Ibid.


Ibid., 159.

Ibid., 161.


Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 41.

“14 trampled to death during Muslim ritual,” *USA TODAY* (February 13, 2003), 7A.

Ibid.

Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, 41.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.