

Islam

From [Islam For Dummies](#) by Malcolm Clark

Understanding Islam begins with looking at the basic beliefs (Five Pillars of Faith) and required rituals (Five Pillars of Worship) of Muslims as well as the different Islamic sects that Muslims may belong to.

Islam's Five Pillars of Worship and Five Pillars of Faith provide the supports of a Muslim's daily spiritual life. Although all true Muslims share these beliefs and rituals, Islam is divided into a number of different sects that

The Five Pillars of Worship in Islam

In the Islamic faith, Muslims are expected to fulfill five fundamental acts of worship. The Five Pillars of Worship (*arkan al-`ibada*) are the basic acts involved in being a believing and practicing Muslim, but each Pillar is also a gateway to deeper understanding and greater spirituality as one grows in the Islamic faith.

1. **Shahada:** A person becomes a Muslim by making the basic statement of testimony or witness. "I testify that there is no God but God, and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God." Variations of the shahada are used in many different situations.
2. **Salat:** Salat is a formal, ritualized prayer performed at five specified times each day facing Mecca. Salat consists of a sequence of recitations and bodily positions, including prostration with one's forehead touching the ground.
3. **Zakat:** Zakat is an obligatory charitable contribution, theoretically due annually from every Muslim at the rate of 2.5 percent of liquid assets and income-producing property. Zakat supports charitable works and the promotion of Islam.
4. **Saum:** Fast from dawn to dusk each day during the ninth month (Ramadan), Muslims are not supposed to eat, drink, or engage in sexual intercourse. This is a time of spiritual renewal.
5. **Hajj:** At least once in his or her life, if physically and financially able, each Muslim makes the pilgrimage to Mecca during the twelfth Muslim month. During the five main days of the hajj, those on the pilgrimage duplicate the ritual first performed by Abraham, including circling the sacred shrine (Ka`ba), standing on the plain of `Arafat, and offering a sacrifice.

Islam's Five Pillars of Faith

In Islam, the Five Pillars of Faith (not to be confused with the Five Pillars of Worship) provide a brief and convenient summary of basic Muslim beliefs:

1. Belief in God (Allah) as the only god.
2. Belief in the angels of God, such as Gabriel.
3. Belief in the book of God and in the messengers and prophets who revealed this book. (These are sometimes listed as two separate Pillars, creating Six Pillars of Faith.) The book is an eternal heavenly book that was partly revealed in the Jewish and Christian Bibles and is fully revealed in

the Qur'an. God sent his prophets and messengers to reveal his word and to warn people what would happen if they didn't return to the path of God. Muhammad is the final prophet in a series that began with Adam and includes Abraham, Noah, Moses, and Jesus, among others.

4. Belief in the Day of Judgment and Resurrection at the end of time, when all will be raised from the dead, judged according to their faith and deeds, and sent to the gardens of paradise or to the fires of hell.
5. Belief that God is responsible for everything that happens, both good and evil, because everything happens according to the will of God. The individual, however, is still responsible for his or her own moral and immoral actions.

Muslims Adhere to Different Islamic Sects

Although Sunnis make up the majority of Muslims, not every Muslim belongs to the same Islamic sect. A Muslim's Islamic beliefs may take one of these forms:

1. **Sunni** Muslims include 84%–90% of all Muslims. *Sunni* means “tradition,” and Sunnis regard themselves as those who emphasize following the traditions of Muhammad and of the first two generations of the community of Muslims that followed Muhammad.

A number of movements to reform Islam have originated mainly in the 20th century. Some are limited to one country and others have a broader influence. Most are Sunni movements, such as the Wahhabis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Jama`at-i-Islami.

2. **Shi`ite** Muslims comprise 10%–16% of all Muslims. Shi`ites are the “party of `Ali,” who believe that Muhammad’s son-in-law `Ali was his designated successor (*imam*) and that the Muslim community should be headed by a designated descendent of Muhammad. Three main subgroups of Shi`ites are Twelvers (*Ithna-`Asharis*), Seveners (*Isma`ilis*), and Fivers (*Zaydis*).
3. **Sufis** are Islamic mystics. Sufis go beyond external requirements of the religion to seek a personal experience of God through forms of meditation and spiritual growth. A number of Sufi orders, comparable to Christian monastic orders, exist. Most Sufis are also Sunni Muslims, although some are Shi`ite Muslims. Many conservative Sunni Muslims regard Sufism as a corruption of Islam, although most still regard Sufis as Muslims.
4. **Baha’is** and **Ahmadiyyas** are 19th-century offshoots of Shi`ite and Sunni Islam, respectively. Baha’is consider themselves the newest of the major world’s religions but recognize that historically they originated from Shi`ite Islam in the same way that Christianity originated from Judaism. Ahmadiyyas do regard themselves as Muslims. Most other Muslims, however, deny that either group is a legitimate form of Islam and regard members of both groups as *heretics* — people who have corrupted and abandoned Islamic belief and practice.
5. **Druze, Alevis, and `Alawis** are small, sectarian groups with unorthodox beliefs and practices that split off from Islam. Druze and Alevis do not regard themselves as Muslims and are not considered Muslims by other Muslims. `Alawis have various non-Islamic practices, but debate continues as to whether they should still be considered Muslims.