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## Islamic Practices

Islam is like a tree whose roots are its beliefs and whose branches are its practices. If the roots are not firm and healthy, the tree will not survive; the roots only form the foundation of the tree. Islamic practices are referred to as such because they are the ways in which the beliefs of Islam are transformed into reality. The different forms of outward worship translate a person's inner love and connection with God into a physical form.

Islam has ten fundamental practices: prayers, fasting, two forms of almsgiving, pilgrimage to the city of Makkah, *Jihad*, enjoining good, forbidding evil, supporting those who walk in the path of God, and turning away from the enemies of God.

### Prayer (Salaat)

Prayers are the pillars of faith. Through prayer people establish communication and dialogue with God. It makes one become aware and realize that he or she is not alone in this universe; each person has been created for a legitimate purpose. God created human beings to recognize and appreciate His grace and blessings.

### The Necessity of Connection with the Absolute

The instinct to worship is an innate aspect of human beings; it is part of their natural disposition (*fitra*). Since the dawn of humanity, civilizations have worshipped the Creator in many different ways. The need for prayer is great, and a deep, strong, innate feeling within people drives them toward the Absolute Power to seek His help and assistance.

Just as the body needs food to survive and grow, so does the soul. The food of the soul is prayer. In order for people to receive their necessary spiritual nourishment, and to maintain a strong connection with God, Islam instructs Muslims to pray at five particular times during the day. For example, the Quran states:

**Establish regular prayers from mid-day till the darkness of the night, and recite the Quran in the early dawn; verily, the recitation of the Quran in the early dawn is an act witnessed. (17:78-79)**

Islam has set five prescribed forms of prayers that must be completed everyday at specific times. All the daily prayers consist of recitations from the Quran and various bodily movements (prostrations).

People offer their prayers to God for many reasons; the first being the grandeur of the Creator.

When one ponders and reflects upon the nature of the universe, and all the diverse and intricate matters that keep life in harmony, one would automatically conclude the existence of a mightier power—God.

The Quran states:

**Truly, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the succession of night and day, there are signs for all who are endowed with insight, and who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides, and contemplate creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying]: “Our Lord, You have not created this without meaning and purpose, limitless are You in Your subtle Glory!” (3: 191)**

When a Muslim prays, he or she is acknowledging the grandeur of God. Prayer is a serene and uninterrupted time of communicating and building a relationship with one's Creator. The recitation of the Islamic prayers encompasses a complete mental and spiritual concentration. It is a commitment not to leave the prayers aside. Those believers who establish prayers and show their devotion through them have mastered one of the foremost qualities of reverence toward God:

**Successful are the believers—those who offer their prayers with humility and submissiveness...and those who guard their five compulsory prayers. These are indeed the inheritors who shall inherit Paradise and abide forever therein. (23: 1, 23:9-11)**

Prayers render moments of reflection and are a reminder of one's actions throughout the day. Prayers have significant benefits upon an individual, such as discouraging bad actions or seeking forgiveness. The Quran states, **“Truly, prayer restrains from evil and shameful deeds”** (29:45). Prayers keep one's perspective of life's ultimate meaning and goal. Imam Ali said, *“If a prayerful person knew to what extent he was surrounded by God's mercy, he would never raise his head from prostration.”*<sup>1</sup>

The need to worship is as strong as the need to eat, and just as the person who lacks proper food will eat anything to put an end to his or her hunger, the person who does not find proper spiritual nutrition will be led to unlawful worshipping such as the worship of animals, fire, stars, art, materialism, or anything else that has no power to aid nor harm anyone. Whether people have a structured religion or not, everyone worships something.

In society, whenever people meet others who they perceive to be of a high rank, such as celebrities, politicians, doctors, and scholars they show considerable respect for them, sometimes, at the expense of

their own dignity. If people show this much respect for other human beings (who were also created like them from dust) then how much respect should they show before the Creator whose knowledge, superiority, and grandeur is limitless and eternal? Should they not, at least, stand before Him many times a day and bow in respect and gratitude?

Human beings feel frail in front of God. If they try to act on their own, without the help of their Lord, they will be prone to failure because the source of all power and might is with God. Those who accomplished great feats for humanity—scientists in the laboratory, soldiers in the battlefield, astronauts in space, doctors in the hospital—all sought assistance from their Lord before embarking on their adventures. Alone, human beings are inferior and in need of God. The Quran states:

**O mankind! You are the ones who are in need of Allah, but Allah is free from all needs, worthy of praise. If He wanted, He could destroy you and bring about a new creation, and that is not hard for Allah. (35: 15-17)**

## **When a Society Ceases to Pray**

Forsaking prayer is perilous. The Quran states:

**There has succeeded them a posterity who have given up the prayers and followed their lusts, so they will be living lost, in confusion and disarray.... (19:59)**

## **Details of the Five Prescribed Prayers**

### **● Preconditions**

#### **Times:**

1) *The dawn prayer (Fajr)*: This prayer should be done between the time the first ray of light appears in the sky and the time of sunrise.

2) *The noon prayer (Duhr)*: The specific time for this prayer is right after the sun passes over its noon position. However, it can be done up until sunset.

3) *The afternoon prayer (Asr)*: This prayer can be done any time after the noon prayer and before sunset.

4) *The sunset prayer (Maghrib)*: This prayer should be done after the sun sets at the time when the red sky on the eastern horizon disappears. Yet, it can be done up until midnight.

5) *The night prayer (Isha)*: This prayer can be done any time after the sunset prayer and before midnight.

#### **Direction (al-qiblah):**

During prayer, all Muslims must face the Kabah, the House of God, built by Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael. The Kabah is located in the city of Makkah, in the Arabian Peninsula (Middle East). One way to determine the precise direction of prayer (called *al-qiblah*) is to use a compass. In North America, Muslims face northeast to locate the shortest path to Makkah.

### **Place:**

The place where a person is going to recite his or her prayer should either belong to that person or that person must have permission to pray in that area unless the place is public. The spot where the forehead touches the ground should be clean (*tahir*), and prostration must be done on earth or inedible plants (including paper or wood).

### **Purity of the body:**

Just as the soul must be pure, concentrated, and calm before the prayers, the body must also be free from impurities. Certain items are considered ritually impure and must be avoided, removed, or purified before the prayers. A specified washing (*wudhu*) must also be done before the prayers:

**O you, who believe, when you intend to offer prayers, wash your faces and your hands from the elbows to the fingertips. Rub [with wet hands] your heads and your feet up to the ankles, and if you are in a state of sexual impurity [jenaba], purify yourself [by bathing your entire body]. (5:6)**

If water is unavailable, dust may be used out of necessity. The Quran explains:

**But if you are ill or on a journey and you come from the call of nature or have been in sexual contact with women and do not find water, then take clean sand and rub your faces and your hands. Allah does not want to place you in any difficulty, but He wants to purify you and to complete His favor on you that you may be thankful. (5:6)**

### **Clothing:**

During prayer, a man must wear enough clothing to cover his body, and a woman must cover her entire body (including the head and hair), except for the face and hands. Clothing worn during prayer must be clean and lawfully obtained; it must not be stolen or borrowed without permission.

### **The call to prayer (adhaan):**

The call for prayer is highly recommended and is one of the distinguishing emblems of the Islamic faith. The call to prayer consists of two parts: the *adhaan* and the *iqaama*.

The person reciting the *adhaan* should stand facing the direction of prayer and say:

## Allahu akbar.

Allah is the Greatest (4 times).

*Ashhadu an laa ilaaha illa Allah.*

I testify that there is no Allah but Allah (2 times).

## Ashhadu anna Muhammadan-rasul Allah.

I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah (2 times).

## Ashhadu anna Alian walū'u Allah

I testify that Ali is the friend of Allah (2 times).<sup>2</sup>

*Hayya 'alaa as-salaah.*

Hasten to prayer (2 times).

*Hayya 'alaa al-falaah.*

Hasten to success (2 times).

*Hayya 'alaa khayr al-'amal.*

Hasten to the best of deeds (2 times).

## Allahu akbar.

Allah is the Greatest (2 times).

*Laa ilaaha illa Allah.*

There is no Allah but Allah (2 times).

The *iqama* should be said immediately before the prayer. It is identical to the *adhaan* with three exceptions:

1. The initial phrase, "*Allahu akbar*," is only said twice.
2. The final phrase, "*La ilaaha illa Allah*," is only said once.
3. The phrase "*Qad qaamat as-salaah*" which means "prayer is being offered" should be said twice; it should be inserted after "*Hayya 'alaa khayr al-'amal*" which is repeated twice as well.

### The prayers:

Each of the prayers consists of a specific number of units (*rakat*). The dawn prayer has two units, the noon and afternoon prayers have four units, the sunset prayer has three units, and the night prayer has four units. The simplest prayer to learn is the two-unit dawn prayer, which will be described here.

Once all of the preconditions above have been fulfilled, and the person intending to offer the prayer is

facing the proper direction (*qiblah*), and a sincere intention has been made for that particular prayer (in this case the dawn prayer), then the prayer may be begun. The hands should be placed behind the ears and the following said:

## **Allahu akbar.**

Allah is the Greatest.

The first chapter of the Quran (*al-Fatiha*) must be recited.

**Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim.**

**Al-hamdu lillaahi Rabb al'aalamin.**

**Ar-Rahman ar-Rahim.**

**Maaliki Yawm-id-Din.**

**Iyyaaka na'budu wa iyyaaka nasta'in.**

**Ihdina-s-siraat al-mustaqim.**

**Siraat alladhina an'ama**

**'alayhim ghayr al-maghdubi 'alayhim wa laa adh-dhaalim.**

**In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate.**

**Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.**

**The Merciful, the Compassionate.**

**Master of the Day of Judgment.**

**You alone do we worship, and from You alone do we seek help.**

**Guide us the straight path.**

**The path of those whom You have blessed, not of those on whom is Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.**

Next, another full chapter of the Quran must be recited. The example given below is the chapter entitled, "The Oneness of Allah."<sup>4</sup>

**Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim.**

**Qul huwa Allahu Ahad**

**Allahu-s-samad**

**Lam yalid wa lam yulad**

**Wa lam yakun lahu kufwaan Ahad.**

**In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate.**

**Say, He is Allah, the One**

**Allah, the Eternal He begets not, nor was He begotten and there is nothing comparable to Him.**

At this point, "*Allahu akbar*" should be said and the person should bow, placing the hands on the knees and keeping the back straight. While bowing, the following should be recited:

**Subhaana Rabbi al-Athim wa bihamdih.**

**Glory be to my Lord, the Great, and praise be to Him.**

Then, while resuming the standing position, the following should be said:

**Sami'a Allahu liman hamidah.**

**Allah hears the one who praises Him.**

Then, "*Allahu akbar*" is said, and the person does prostration (*sujud*) on the ground. In *sujud*, the forehead, palms of the hands, knees, and tips of the toes must all touch the ground. The following must be said one or three times:

*Subhaana Rabbi al-a'laa wa bihamdih.*

Glory be to my Exalted Lord, and praise be to Him.

"*Allahu akbar*" should be said, and the person should sit up on his or her knees and say:

*Astaghfirullaaha Rabbi wa atubu ilayh.*

I seek forgiveness of Allah, my Lord, and turn toward Him.

Again, "*Allahu akbar*" should be said and *sujud* repeated. Then, the person should stand up and repeat the same process (*e.g.* recite the first chapter of the Quran; recite another chapter of the Quran, bow, and do the two *sujuds*). Finally, sitting on the knees, the following must be said:

**Ashhadu an laa ilaaha illa Allah, wahdahu la sharikalah wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan, abdahu warasuluh.**

**I testify that there is no Allah but Allah, alone without associate, and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger.**

**Allahumma salli 'alaa**

**Muhammadin wa aal-i Muhammad.**

**O Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad.**

**Assalaamu 'alayka ayyuha an-nabiy sa rahmatullahi wa barakaatuhu.**

**Assalaamu 'alayna wa 'alaa 'ibaad allahi-s-salihi.**

**Assalaamu 'alaykum wa rahmatullahi**

**wa barakaatuhu.**

**Peace be upon you,**

**O Prophet, and the mercy**

**of Allah and His blessings.**

**Peace be upon us, and upon all the righteous Servants of Allah.**

**Peace be upon you, and the mercy of Allah,**

**and His blessings.**

It is recommended that "*Allahu akbar*" be said three times by raising each hand to each side of the face. This action concludes the two-unit prayer. However, it may be followed by supplications or other recitations.

## **Fasting (Sawm)**

Almost every religion adopts some form of fasting. The Prophet Muhammad and the prophets before him all called upon their followers to fast. The Quran states, "**O you who believe! Fasting has been**

**prescribed for you just as it was prescribed for those before you so that you may be pious and learn self-restraint” (2: 183).**

Islam prescribes complete fasting. It requires complete abstinence from food, drink (including water), smoking, and sexual activity. Hence, from dawn until the time of the sunset prayer, one must abstain.

Although fasting is recommended on other significant Islamic dates, it is however, required every day during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The month of Ramadan is revered and honored by all Muslims. It was on a particular night called the “Night of Destiny” (*Laylatul al-Qadr*), during the month of Ramadan that the Quran was revealed to the Prophet.

Muslims believe that on this night, every year, God determines the fate of each person for the year to come. Therefore, worshipping on the Night of Destiny is considered, “**Better than a thousand months**” 97:3. Although the exact night of the Night of Destiny is not known, Islamic scholars approximate the date to fall on either the 19th, 21st, 23rd, 25th, or 27th of the month of Ramadan. Therefore, Muslims copiously worship God on these specific nights. The Quran states:

**Verily, We have sent it [Quran] down on the Night of Destiny and what would make you know what the Night of Destiny is? The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months; He sends down the angels, and the Spirit during it by His will for every matter; Peace! Till the rising of the dawn. (97)**

As with prayers, the benefits of fasting are innumerable. Fasting strengthens one's willpower, teaches discipline, encourages sympathy with the poor, breaks harmful habits, strengthens one's health, and establishes a sense of religious brotherhood and sisterhood. However, the strongest benefits are spiritual. Lady Fatima al-Zahra, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad said, “*Fasting is to deepen and strengthen faith.*” Fasting sharpens the spiritual awareness and inspires a sense of gratitude toward God.

Apart from refraining from food and drink, Muslims are also encouraged, during the month of Ramadan, to give additional charity toward the poor and the needy.

## **Almsgiving (Zakaat and Khums)**

The act of sharing and providing others who are less fortunate is not only mandated upon Muslims but is also considered one of the noblest acts that can bring a person closer to God. Giving charity benefits the individual and society; it purifies the soul from stinginess and meanness. The Quran says, “**Take alms from their wealth in order to purify and sanctify them**” (9: 103).

From a moral perspective, the obligation to pay the obligatory charities is no less important than the obligation to pray. Whenever the Quran refers to people who pray, it also refers to people who pay obligatory charities. Charity is not considered as a gift for the poor but rather a right for the poor. The

Quran states, **“And in their properties [fortunate ones] is the right of the beggar and the destitute”** (51:19).

Every monetary or material possession that people acquire comes through the generosity of God. Mary, the mother of Jesus was known to have received her sustenance unconditionally:

**Every time Zachariah entered the sanctuary to visit her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said, 'O Mary! From where did you get this?' She said, 'This is from Allah; verily, Allah provides sustenance to whomever He wills without limit. (3:37)**

Although people must work to earn a living, God is the one who determines the amount and the form of sustenance they will receive throughout their lifetime. Therefore, when people are directed to return some of their wealth toward charity, in reality they are not relinquishing their own property, but merely returning what God has lent them. God said, **“O you who believe! Spend out of what We have provided for you”** (2:254), and **“Surely those who recite the Book of Allah and keep up prayer and spend out of what We have given them secretly and openly hope for a gain which will not perish”** (35:29).

The supply of provision and sustenance not only applies to humankind but all kingdoms of God's creation (i.e., animal and plant). The Quran says, **“Many are the creatures that carry not their own provision; Allah provides for them and for you.”** (29:60)

Money that comes from obligatory charities (*Zakat* and *Khums*) provides security and dignity within society by providing for the needy, bridging the gap between the rich and the poor and eliminating poverty. The money collected is used for food, shelter, education, health care, orphanages, libraries, transportation systems, and other public services. A community in which everyone pays their dues (*Zakat* and *Khums*) will be successful. Just as a community in which people do not pay the *Zakat* and *Khums* will fall apart.

Prophet Muhammad said:

*My community will continue to live fairly if they are faithful to each other, return deposits to their owners, and give alms [Zakat] to the poor. But if they do not fulfill these duties, they will encounter famine and scarcity.*<sup>3</sup>

Imam Ali said:

*God the Glorified has fixed the livelihood of the destitute in the wealth of the rich. Consequently, whenever the destitute remain hungry, it is because some rich persons have denied him his share.*<sup>4</sup>  
*When charity is delivered out of the hand of its owner, it says five things: at first, I was perishing and you gave me life. I was insignificant and you made me greatness. I was an enemy and you turned me into a friend. You used to protect me then, but now I will protect you up till the Day of Resurrection.*<sup>5</sup>

These traditions and legislations only refer to obligatory almsgiving; however, there is, in addition to

alms, voluntary charity of any kind, such as money, words, or deeds. Voluntary charity is called *sadaqah*. Like *Zakat* and *Khums*, benefits both the individual and society. Prophet Muhammad said, "Give charity and cure your sick persons by it because charity can surely remove your bad fortunes and ailments, and it causes prolongation of your lifetime and increases your rewards."<sup>6</sup>

## Specifics of the Zakat and Khums

1) **Zakat** is a traditional type of almsgiving that must be paid yearly on the following items, if they are possessed in sufficient quantities: wheat, barley, dates, raisins, gold, silver, camels, cows, and sheep.

2) **Khums** is an excess profit that is taxed. It should be paid yearly on 20% of the excess profit that a person acquires. Excess profit refers to the profit that remains after a person has paid for food, clothing, shelter, and other living necessities for himself or herself and the immediate family. It is advisable that *Khums* be given to a religious authority so that it can be distributed in the appropriate way. *Khums* must also be paid on six other items, for example, gems obtained while diving. However, this case in modern society tends to be rare.

*Khums* has been ordained in the Quran:

**And know that whatever profit you may attain, one fifth of it is assigned to Allah and the Messenger, and to the near relatives [of the Messenger] and the orphans, the destitute, and the wayfarer, if you have believed in Allah and that which We sent down to our servant [Muhammad].**  
(8:41)

## Pilgrimage to The City of Makkah (Hajj)

Every Muslim who is able must make the *Hajj* pilgrimage to the city of Makkah at least once in his or her life. This pilgrimage occurs every year during *Dhul al-Qadah* and *Dhul al-Hijjah*, the 11th and 12th months of the Islamic lunar calendar. Those who make the pilgrimage follow in the footsteps of the Prophet Abraham, "the father of the prophets."

Four thousand years ago, Prophet Abraham along with his wife, Hagar, and his son, Ishmael set out on a vast journey wandering through Babylon, Syria, and Arabia. They crossed vast hills, rivers, and deserts until arriving in the land of Makkah where Prophet Abraham received a revelation from God. The Quran states:

**And remember when we showed Abraham the site of the House saying... Do not associate with Me anything, and purify My house for those who circle around it and stand to pray and bow and prostrate themselves. And proclaim among the people the pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel from every remote path that they may witness the benefits for them and mention the name of Allah during the appointed days over what He has given them.**

(22:26-28)

Prophets Abraham and Ishmael were instructed by God to raise the cubic structure, the Kabah. According to the Quran, it is the, “**First house (of worship) made for mankind**” (3:95). Its original foundation was built at the dawn of creation by Prophet Adam. Prophet Abraham was then ordered to proclaim the pilgrimage to humankind.

Perplexed as to who would hear his voice in the desert land of Mekkah, Abraham climbed atop a nearby mountain and proclaimed to humanity the divine message of the *Hajj*. This call has passed through the distance of time, and it still reverberates to the millions of Muslims around the globe who answer God's call to make their pilgrimage.

## **Significance of the Hajj**

The *Hajj* is the supreme symbol of universal brotherhood, and it is the greatest annual congregation in the world. Every year in Makkah, millions of Muslims from diverse origins stand shoulder-to-shoulder, clad in the barest of materials (two pieces of white cloth) and perform the same rituals. Not one person can be distinguished from another on the basis of wealth, lineage, or power.

The most powerful leaders are on the same level as the general public. All artificial or human-imposed distinctions among humankind are lifted, and people have, for the span of a few days, the opportunity to know each other solely as brothers and sisters of humanity.

The *Hajj* also develops the human soul. Every human being (whether aware of it or not) is traveling toward God, and the essential part of the spiritual development in life is to recognize the returning journey. The *Hajj* not only represents a physical journey, but also compels the pilgrim to demonstrate his or her willingness to leave behind everything in his or her life for God.

God has made it known that one of the ways to approach Him for forgiveness is to journey to His emblematic house—the Kabah in Makkah. Once, Imam Ali was with a group of his followers in the vicinity of the Kabah. They saw a man holding the cloth cover of the Kabah while supplicating, “*O Keeper of the House! This house is Your house, and this guest is Your guest. Each guest sees goodness from its host. Tonight, let Your goodness be the forgiving of my sins.*” Imam Ali asked his followers, “*Did you hear the words of this man?*” They said, “*Yes, we did.*” Imam Ali replied, “*Almighty God is more forgiving than to drive away His guests.*”

The sense of equality and humanity that is present during the *Hajj* should be reflected in one's own everyday life. The person who has experienced the *Hajj* ought to return home freed from the erroneous notions of race and class that often are prevalent in some societies.

For many Muslims, the *Hajj* serves as an enormous convention or conference in which information is exchanged and problems are solved. Since the advent of Islam, the *Hajj* has been one of the major unifying cultural factors for Muslims. This is based on the fact that every year Muslim delegates from every civilization meet in one place to discuss and solve Islamic matters.

## The Rites of Hajj

The beginning of the pilgrimage is marked by proclaiming, "*Labbayk, Allahumma, Labbayk*" which means "I am here, O Lord, I am here!" This should be followed by, "You, Who have no partner—I am here! Surely all praise and blessings are Yours, and the Kingdom—I am here, O Lord, I am here!"

During the *Hajj*, the millions of pilgrims present engage in circling the Kabah (a practice called *tawaf*). The pilgrim's circling (*tawaf*) around God's house symbolizes one's dependence and needed assistance of God. The circumnavigating (*tawaf*) also illustrates how one's ultimate being constantly revolves around God.

After *tawaf*, the pilgrims hasten between the two small mountains of Safa and Marwa. This rite reenacts Hagar's search for water for her infant son Ishmael. Alone in the desert, Hagar and her baby were in desperate need for water. She ran back and forth looking desperately for some hint of moisture in the desert sands.

Seeing Hagar's effort, God produced for her the spring of Zam Zam—a spring of cool, pure water which gushed forth at Ishmael's feet and continues to flow until this very day. By imitating Hagar's search, the pilgrims remember her plight, but also assimilate a message within themselves that they cannot sit and wait for God's blessings to unfold magically upon them. Rather, if people are in need of something, they should work hard for it and hope for the munificence of God.

The most significant day of the pilgrimage is the Day of Arafat. Arafat is a desert outside the city of Makkah in which all the pilgrims must stand from noon to sunset and commune with God. The time spent in Arafat marks the real essence of the *Hajj*; Prophet Muhammad said, "*The Hajj is Arafat.*"

In Arafat, pilgrims leave behind all material possessions except for the two pieces of cloth worn during their pilgrimage—a symbol of returning to the same condition in which one was wrapped in at birth and death. The vast gathering consists of millions of people all dressed alike standing in the same place at the same time; this represents the true origin and fate of humanity. We are born from dust, then we live for a short while, and in the end we are resurrected from dust again. The scene of Arafat resembles what the Day of Resurrection will be like; countless of individuals are pieced back together from dust to withstand the judgment of God.

At a place called Mina, on the outskirts of Mekkah, the pilgrims throw pebbles at three stone pillars symbolizing Satan. For the pilgrims, this demonstrates their continuing struggle and treatment of fighting against Satan, who is sworn to be the enemy of humankind. Pebble throwing is also another historical reenactment of Prophet Abraham and Ishmael's sacrifices for God. Abraham, along with his son Ishmael, were on their way to fulfill the command of God; the slaying of his son, Ishmael. Prophet Abraham encountered Satan three times disguised as a man. Satan attempted to discourage Prophet Abraham. Instead of listening to Satan's dissuasions, Prophet Abraham threw stones at him in each of

these three areas.

At the end of the *Hajj*, on *Eid al-Adha*, each pilgrim sacrifices an animal similar to what Prophet Abraham did in lieu of his son. The sacrifice denotes the pilgrim's willingness to adhere to God's commandments unconditionally. The meat of the animal must not be wasted; one-third may be kept for personal consumption, the other two-thirds should be divided equally among friends and the indigent.

## Striving (Jihad)

The literal meaning of *Jihad* is “to strive.” More importantly, it means to progress in all aspects of one's life. Although the word *Jihad* is used by the western media with militant connotations, in truth, it covers a vast range of human activity, such as family life, work, spiritual development, and justified military defense.

The most important *Jihad* is the struggle to purify the soul, and this *Jihad* far outweighs any military *Jihad*. Prophet Muhammad once met a group of soldiers returning home from a defensive battle and said, “Welcome to the people who have concluded the minor *Jihad* [struggle].” Astonished, the soldiers asked, “Was this [military battle] a minor *Jihad*? Then what is the major *Jihad*?” Prophet Muhammad replied, “The major *Jihad* is the *Jihad* to purify one's self.”

The beginning steps of *Jihad* are to purify the soul by restraining one's self from committing sins that corrupt the soul. One must control material desires, overt selfishness, and remain uninfluenced by forces (internal or external) that distract one from the remembrance of God. All the forms of worship in Islam such as prayers, fasting, and charity exist as a means to purify and perfect the soul. Only in the upward development of the soul will one find happiness in this life and in the next life.

If the soul is unhappy, a person will be miserable, regardless of how materially wealthy he or she may be. The Quran says, “**And by the soul and Him Who perfected it, then showed it what is right and what is wrong for it—indeed, he succeeds who purifies his soul, and, indeed, he fails who corrupts his soul**” (91:7). The soul is the essence of humankind; it is the element that will outlast this life and be judged in the next. One of the primary reasons humankind was placed in this world is to test and develop their souls.

*Jihad* also refers to the legitimate struggle to defend human rights, such as personal and religious freedom, as well as the defense of land, property, and family:

**Permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully and offensively waged, and surely Allah is able to give them victory. Those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly, only because they said, “Our Lord is Allah...”** (22:39–40).

When people are being oppressed, Islam commands believers to defend the rights and integrity of the people. Fighting in the form of defense is not only permitted but required. The Quran explains, “**Fight**

**against aggressors until oppression is stopped” (2:193). *Jihad*, as a form of fighting, must be for just causes and to defend the freedom, liberty, and integrity of society:**

**And why do you not fight in the way of Allah and the utterly oppressed men, women, and children who are crying out, “O Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from You one who will protect, and raise for us from You one who will help.”**

**(4:75)**

Peaceful countries today could not have achieved their stature without a campaign for independence or a struggle for freedom. Furthermore, such countries could not have retained their positions without a strong force. In life, struggle will always exist between good and evil, truth and falsehood, and societies cannot progress if oppressors are left unchallenged.

## **Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil (Amr Bil-Ma’rouf –Nahiy An Al-Munkar)**

**Let there arise from you a group of people inviting what is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong; these are the ones who will be successful. (3:104)**

In order for religion to progress and society to flourish, people must initiate, advise, and attempt to guide each other toward righteousness by deterring each other away from misconduct. This action is mandatory for those who believe in God and the Day of Judgment. Giving sincere advice is not, as some may argue, meddling in someone's business; it is a valuable favor and one of the best forms of charity.

## **Supporting those who Walk in the Path of God (Tawalli Li Awliyaa’ Allah)**

This entire phrase means to be a friend and a helper of the righteous and pious people who maintain religion and believe in God. Specifically, it is directed to the prophets and imams (successors to the prophets), as well as those who work to establish order, justice, and religion on earth.

**“And whoever takes Allah, His messenger, and those who have belief as protectors and guardians, then the party of Allah will be victorious.” (5:56)**

## **Turning Away from the Enemies of God (Tabaari min A’daa Allah)**

This phrase refers to the opposite of *tawalli li awliyaa’ Allah*. Those who sincerely believe in God must dissociate themselves from those people who obstruct truth and justice and prevent the light of God from reaching others. The Quran states:

**Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity. It is regarding those who fought against you on account of religion and have driven you out of your homes and helped to drive you out that Allah forbids you to befriend them, and whoever will befriend them, then such are the wrongdoers. (60:8-9)**

**O you, who believe, take not for protectors and helpers those who take your religion as a mockery and fun from among those who received the scriptures before you, or from among the disbelievers, and fear Allah if you indeed are true believers. (5:57)**

**Let not the believers take the disbelievers as supporters and helpers and friends instead of the believers. And whoever does that will never be helped by Allah in any way. (3:28)**

It is for the benefit of believers that God warns them against associating with unbelievers, tyrants, and enemies of God and humankind.

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1. Gharar al-Hikm, p.175.
  2. This part is recommended not mandatory.
  3. Wassail al-Shia, v.6 p.13.
  4. Nahj al-Balagha (The Peak of Eloquence).
  5. Al-Ithna Ashariyyah, p.23.
  6. Kanzal-Ummal, v.6 p.31.

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