

# Five Pillars

Islam is a lofty structure that stands on five pillars. Without these pillars, the structure will have little support, and may easily collapse.

We are unlike wolves which live separately, each on his own. Nor are we like mindless sheep driven by a shepherd.

Man needs to maintain a careful balance between his spiritual and physical needs, and between his personal and social life. Such a balance is best achieved through the five pillars on which the structure of Islam is built. Through these man's public life functions in harmony with his inner soul, and every individual complements his Muslim brethren. How does all this work?

## **The Declaration**

This is the declaration of belief in God's oneness and in Muhammad as God's messenger. It lays down a basic principle which establishes a community united by one of the most important and fairest principles, namely, that all worship should be addressed to God alone. The declaration is the one shared value that creates a well-knit community that is free of inner conflict: one God to be obeyed and one prophet to be followed.

I bear witness that there is no deity other than God; and I bear witness that Muhammad is God's messenger.

This declaration confirms that all worship must be addressed to God alone, because He is the Creator and the Provider who alone conducts all affairs of the universe. It also acknowledges that Prophet Muhammad, who was God's last messenger, must be obeyed in all what he bids and forbids, because it is through him that we know what God wants us to do.

## **Prayer**

Muslims are required to offer five obligatory prayers every day, and these prayers are spread over the day and night so as to keep man's soul always in contact with the Creator. These prayers are indeed a most effective barrier that stops man from doing what incurs God's anger. By attending to these prayers, Muslims are always in a situation where they have finished a prayer a short while ago or are preparing for prayer that will soon be due. Thus, they are keen not to lose the effect of the prayer they have finished when they were in contact with their Lord, and at the same time they do not wish to stand again in front of their Lord having just committed a sin. This is the effect the five daily prayers have on a Muslim. The Prophet says: "The five prayers are like a running stream close to your door, where you bathe five times every day". [Related by Muslim].

When you look at the universe around you, you will see that it totally submits to its supreme Creator. Nothing in the universe rebels, deviates, shows boredom, stops functioning, or goes on strike. It is as if the whole universe is in a situation of permanent prayer and prostration. This is perfectly described by the Qur'anic verse that says:

"Are you not aware that to God bow down in worship all those who are in the heavens and on earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees and the beasts, and a great number of human beings? But a great number also will inevitably have to suffer punishment. He whom God shall disgrace will have none who could bestow honour on him. God certainly does what He wills". (22: 18)

Honoured by God, man should have been the first of all creatures to remain in permanent worship and prayer, without a stop. However, he was chosen to be in charge of the earth, and given what is suited to the fulfilment of this role. He has been given the needs and desires that help him to fulfil his role. Therefore, his nature makes man unsuited to be in permanent prayer. Instead, man needs a special worship that ensures his spiritual balance and serves as a continuous bond with his Lord enabling him to draw closer to Him. It should at the same time be suited to his nature and conducive to the fulfilment of his role in this life.

This worship that man needs is the five daily prayers God has made obligatory to us.

## **Zakat**

Zakat is the safeguard that prevents social collapse. It is the institution that ensures that there will be no explosion like that suffered by Communist societies that went too far to the left, or capitalist societies that went too far to the right. In both cases, large sections of society, of both types, endured hunger.

Zakat is a financial act of worship, an annual duty paid by everyone who owns more than a certain threshold. It is a small portion, only two and a half percent, or similarly small rates of certain types of property such as agricultural produce and cattle. By paying their zakat, people ensure that their property is purified, and they are free of stinginess. They thus help their poor and needy brethren. God says to His messenger: “Take a portion of their money as charity, so that you may cleanse and purify them thereby”. (9: 103)

## **Fasting**

This is a unique type of worship which God prescribed to earlier communities of believers. He has made it one of the pillars on which the structure of Islam is built. Muslims abstain from food, drink and sex, from dawn to dusk, for a full month every year.

This worship provides training to control one’s desires and abstain from one’s pleasures. At the same time, it promotes health. It provides a bond between the Muslim community and the earlier communities of believers who followed earlier prophets. God says: “Believers, fasting is decreed for you as it was decreed for those before you, so that you may be God-fearing”. (2: 183)

Fasting shows how easy Islam is. When Muslims are ill or travelling, they are given an exemption of fasting, provided that they compensate by fasting the same number of days when they have recovered or returned home.

## **The Pilgrimage**

This is the great gathering a Muslim is required to attend at least once in a lifetime, provided that he is physically and financially able to undertake the journey. Muslims of all races, colours and nationalities meet at the same place, wearing the same garments, in absolute equality, glorifying their One Lord. They speak numerous languages but offer the same worship. They regain their pure human nature.

Should we put aside all the splendid aspects of Islam and focus only on its legislation and its unique organisation of human life, we will find this a clear evidence that shows every rational person that Islam is the religion bestowed by God, the Creator of the universe.