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Beliefs of Muslims

Islam teaches the importance of both belief and practice; one is insufficient without the other (except for some Sufis). The following six beliefs are those that are commonly held by Muslims, as laid out in the Quran and hadith.

Six Major Beliefs

- **Belief in the Oneness of God:** Muslims believe that God is the creator of all things, and that God is all-powerful and all-knowing. God has no offspring, no race, no gender, no body, and is unaffected by the characteristics of human life.
- **Belief in the Angels of God:** Muslims believe in angels, unseen beings who worship God and carry out God's orders throughout the universe. The angel Gabriel brought the divine revelation to the prophets.
- **Belief in the Books of God:** Muslims believe that God revealed holy books or scriptures to a number of God's messengers. These include the Quran (given to Muhammad), the Torah (given to Moses), the Gospel (given to Jesus), the Psalms (given to David), and the Scrolls (given to Abraham). Muslims believe that these earlier scriptures in their original form were divinely revealed, but that only the Quran remains as it was first revealed to the prophet Muhammad.
- **Belief in the Prophets or Messengers of God:** Muslims believe that God's guidance has been revealed to humankind through specially appointed messengers, or prophets, throughout history, beginning with the first man, Adam, who is considered the first prophet. Twenty-five of these prophets are mentioned by name in the Quran, including Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Muslims believe that Muhammad is the last in this line of prophets, sent for all humankind with the message of Islam.
- **Belief in the Day of Judgment:** Muslims believe that on the Day of Judgment, humans will be judged for their actions in this life; those who followed God's guidance will be rewarded with paradise; those who rejected God's guidance will be punished with hell.
- **Belief in the Divine Decree:** This article of faith addresses the question of God's will. It can be expressed as the belief that everything is governed by divine decree, namely that whatever happens in one's life is preordained, and that believers should respond to the good or bad that befalls them with thankfulness or patience. This concept does not negate the concept of "free will;" since humans do not have prior knowledge of God's decree, they do have freedom of choice.

Muslims are asked to put their beliefs into practice by performing certain acts of worship. As in all faiths, since adherence to religious obligations and practices is a matter of individual choice, some people are very strict in performing these duties, while others are not.

The five pillars or acts of worship in Islam

- **The Declaration of Faith (shahada):** The first act of worship is the declaration that "There is no deity except God and Muhammad is the messenger of God." Muslims repeat this statement many times a day during their prayers. If someone wants to become a Muslim, he or she makes this profession of faith as an entry into Islam.
- **Prayer (salat):** Islam prescribes a brief prayer or ritual worship five times a day: at dawn, noon, late afternoon, sunset and night. Muslims perform ablution before prayer -- a brief prescribed washing of the hands, mouth, nose, face, arms and feet. One may pray alone or in a group in any clean location, including a mosque. The Friday noon prayer is special to Muslims and is done in a mosque if possible. Muslims face in the direction of Mecca when they pray.
- **Charity (zakat):** Muslims are required to give to the poor and needy. Islam prescribes an obligatory charity, known as zakat, based on two and a half percent of one's income and wealth. In addition to this prescribed charity, Muslims are encouraged to give as much as they can in voluntary charity throughout the year.
- **Fasting (sawm):** Muslims are required to fast from dawn to sunset during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the lunar calendar. People gather in the evenings for a festive breaking of the fast. When fasting, Muslims refrain from food, liquid, and sexual activity. During Ramadan, Muslims are also supposed to abstain from negative behaviors such as lying, gossip, petty arguments, and negative thoughts or behaviors, including getting angry. Muslims are required to start fasting when they reach puberty, although some younger children may also fast. People who are sick, traveling, menstruating, and pregnant or nursing may break their fast, but may make up the days later in the year. The elderly and people with disabilities are excused from fasting.
- Ramadan was the month in which the revelation of the Quran to Muhammad began. Therefore Muslims are encouraged to read the Quran during this month and often gather in the evenings in mosques to listen to recitations from the Quran.
- **Eid al-Fitr** (eed' al fi'-ter), or the "Festival of the Fast-Breaking," one of the major Muslim holidays, celebrates the completion of the Ramadan fast and occurs on the first day of the month after Ramadan. This is a day of celebration, prayers, feasts and gift giving.

- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj):** Every Muslim is required to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, located in Saudi Arabia, once in their lifetime if financially and physically able. Mecca is home to the first house of worship of God, the Kaaba, said to have been built by the prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael. Muslims all over the world face towards the Kaaba when they pray. All outward symbols of rank and wealth are erased during the pilgrimage, as Muslim from every part of the globe come together for the purpose of worshipping God. Muslims who complete the pilgrimage are referred to as "Hajji" and greeted with great celebration and respect in their communities when they return.
- **Eid al-Adha** (eed' al ad'-ha), or the "Festival of the Sacrifice," is the second major holiday in Islam. It falls on the tenth day of the month at the conclusion of the pilgrimage, and is celebrated by all Muslims with special prayers, feasts, gifts and the sacrifice of an animal (usually a lamb or goat). The meat is distributed to relatives, friends and the needy.