

Unity: The Core Value of Islam

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The primary belief of Islam is: There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God. What is the meaning of this Shahadah, testimony? How it affects the other fundamentals of Islam: Salat (ritual prayer), Zakah (obligatory charity), Sawm (fasting) and Hajj (annual pilgrimage to Baitullah- Kaaba- the House of God). These five fundamentals are commonly known as Pillars of Islam. The Pillars comprise the main ritual activities including the fundamental Muslim faith. The Pillars, the symbol of Islam that includes fundamental Muslim faith, are not without spirit. These are not just what are essentially required to be member of the Muslim community- Ummah, but what it means to be a Muslim.

The single most significant factor in the performance of any Muslim ritual is the intention, which must be uppermost in the believer's mind before the ritual begins. The Pillars are some total of actions, which are not only verbal and bodily, but, above all, mental and moral, performed according to certain state of mind, certain conditions of conscious intention, of external and internal purity, presence of mind, modesty and obedience, humility and submissiveness of the heart, creating within the soul of the believers a real life of religious devotion and spirituality.

Leaving aside the principal Pillar: There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God, rest of the Pillars representing Salat, Zakah, Sawm and Hajj are all essentially group activities. The most important purpose of these Pillars is to assist the believers, through group actions, attain membership of the Muslim community, Ummah.

The Muslim community, which is constructed through self-conscious testimony and performance of the fundamental religious rituals, is a borderless community, a community not bound by geographic, national, ethnic and racial consideration but united only by a single testimony: There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God. It is a community united like a single solid body.

This harmony of testimony is also reflected in all the religious rituals of the Pillars. The first ritual Salat, is a communal activity, although allowed to perform individually in some cases (Salat al Juma- Friday Salat however has to be performed in the mosque along with other members of the community), binds the Muslim community as one community. The members of the community worldwide bow bend and stretch in the same direction, the Baitullah- Kaaba- the House of God. Muslims while performing Salat stand, bow, rise, sit, prostrate and turn faces, all repeated in cycles at one and the same time as if they act like a single body, united like a rock.

The second Pillar is Zakah (obligatory charity) is a compulsory duty of rich for the welfare of the less fortunate members of the community. Zakah is a communal responsibility in nature in two respects. Firstly, the rich has to share a portion of their wealth and resources for common good so that the community becomes strong and united like a solid body similar to rock. Secondly, the payment of Zakah is not optional but mandatory and its collection and distribution is a social responsibility and must be fulfilled by the state. Zakah demonstrates that rich and poor constitute one body.

The third Pillar is Sawm (fasting) during the month of Ramadhan - not to eat and drink and avoid intimate relation with spouse between sunrise and sunset - also binds the Muslim community as one and single body. Sawm is also communal in the sense that it is a reminder to wealthy and rich member of the community of the pangs and suffering of those who are without food. No member of the community take food openly during the day time reflects oneness of the community and then after sunset all break their fast together also reflect united action of the community as a whole. During Suhur, before the sunrise all take food to fast during day time also reflects the unity of the community.

The fourth Pillar is Hajj (annual pilgrimage to Baitullah- Kaaba- the House of God). Muslim from around the world of all race, color, and nationality, male, female and child, young and old, able bodied and disabled leave for Makkah in the lunar month of Zu al Hijja to perform the pilgrimage. This is a unique gathering that destroys the artificial division of mankind. Here in this assembly all are the children of Adam and Eve, the common father and mother of humankind. This congregation is an unparalleled example in which humankind appear before their Lord in identical dress of two sheets of white cloth. There is no difference in rank, class or status, no difference between ruler or ruled, no gender discrimination in this gathering of spiritual devotees, all are equal. It was precisely this communal spirit that inspired Afro-American Muslim martyr Malik al-Shabazz formerly Malcom X to comment while referring to his own pilgrimage "I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all colors together". Thus Hajj is a gathering of equals reflecting the true unity of humankind.

The four rituals - Salat (ritual prayer), Zakah (obligatory charity), Sawm (fasting) and Hajj (annual pilgrimage to Baitullah- Kaaba- the House of God) – provide meaning to the life and faith of Muslims and unite the Muslim community into one body and soul. The basic functions of these four rituals are to express the fifth fundamental Pillar, the Shahadah, testimony of faith: There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God – the only one requiring belief rather than action. Thus the Shahadah, testimony of faith, the core Muslim value, unites the Muslim community into a single cohesive community, the one Ummah. *

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