

Islam - Practices - Duties and Festivals 1

Role and Benefits of Sawm (during Ramadan)

- Reminds Muslims of the hungry and the poor, hopefully encouraging them to help them more.
- Reminds Muslims that food is not the most important thing.
- Helps Muslims submit to Allah ('Islam' and 'Muslim' are both related to the Arabic word for 'submission').
- Helps to teach patience and self-control.
- Helps with spiritual purification – becoming closer to Allah and making up for sins.

'Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur'an... So every one of you who is present (at his home) during the month should spend it in fasting...'
(Qur'an 2:185)

Significance of Fasting During Ramadan

- Ramadan was the month in which the Qur'an was first revealed to Muhammad.
- Allah is believed to chain up devils, so that they cannot tempt Muslims.
- Ramadan is special, and any good action, such as fasting, is believed to earn more favour with Allah during this time.
- As Muslims are fasting at the same time, this strengthens the Muslim community.

Duties

When fasting, Muslims must not eat or drink between dawn and sunset. Muslims must also not have sex, smoke or take medicines during this time, and should concentrate on prayer and doing good.

The day after the end of Ramadan is **Id-ul-Fitr** – the festival of breaking the fast. Muslims traditionally feast and party for several days to celebrate, with family and friends. Muslims know that Ramadan has ended when they see the new moon (as the Islamic calendar is lunar).



Muhammad traditionally broke his fast with fresh dates, and Muslims try to do so too.

Sawm is fasting. Muslims are obliged to fast during the month of Ramadan, and may also fast at other times.

Exceptions

- Exceptions include pregnant, breastfeeding and menstruating women, and young children, who are not supposed to fast.
- Some groups, such as those who are ill or travelling, may choose not to fast.
- People in these conditions are more in need of food, or at least of water.
 - ↳ People who are able to make up the fast at a later time are often expected to do so, e.g. someone who is no longer ill.
 - ↳ If someone cannot make up a fast, they may choose to feed a poor person for a day instead.
 - ↳ If a Muslim has to break their fast, it is important that they had the intention (**niyah**) to fast.

Sawm

Origins

Fasting during Ramadan is commanded in the Qur'an and was practised by Muhammad.

Both **Sunnis** and **Shi'as** fast during Ramadan – Shi'as break their fast slightly later, when it is dark, rather than when the sun has just gone down. Popular days to fast outside of Ramadan may also vary for Sunnis and Shi'as.

Night of Power (Lailat al qadr)

- The first night on which Muhammad received a revelation of the Qur'an from the angel **Jibril** is known as the **Night of Power** (Muslims disagree on whether he received the first part, or all of the Qur'an at this time).
- Surah 96:1-5 was the first section revealed.
- Muslims believe that praying on the Night of Power is very powerful, and Allah is likely to forgive sins of those who ask.

'The Night of Power is better than a thousand months.'
(Qur'an Surah 97:3)

'Proclaim! (or read) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created – Created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood: Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful – He Who taught (the use of) the Pen – Taught man that which he knew not.'
(Qur'an Surah 96:1-5)

- The amount a Muslim has to pay as **zakah** is 2.5% of their money and possessions after certain expenses have been taken care of.
 - ↳ This can be paid as money or food.
- Certain personal items are not included in the possessions considered, such as one's house.
- The threshold at which Muslims must pay **zakah** is called **nisaab** – if they do not possess this much, they do not need to pay **zakah**.

Role of Zakah/Almsgiving and why Zakah is given

- **Zakah** means 'purified' – **zakah** is given as a way to purify oneself, and also one's remaining possessions.
- A service to Allah.
- Reminds Muslims not to be self-centred or greedy.
- Reminds Muslims that they need to help others.
- Reminds Muslims that money is not really theirs, but that all blessings come from Allah.

How Zakah is given

- In some countries **zakah** is compulsory and is collected by the government.
- In many countries Muslims will pay their **zakah** money to charities such as Islamic Relief, or to their local mosque – these will then distribute the money appropriately.

Significance of Zakah/Almsgiving

- Paying **zakah** is believed to help Muslims achieve salvation (be rewarded with heaven on the **Day of Judgement**).
- Paying **zakah** helps Muslims to have a strong relationship with Allah, as they are putting him before their own desires.

'They ask thee concerning (things taken as) spoils of war. Say: "(Such) spoils are at the disposal of Allah and the Prophet..."'
(Qur'an Surah 8:1)

Khums (in Shi'a Islam)

- Shi'a Muslims also pay **khums** as well as **zakah** – this is a 20% tax on certain things.
- Originally **khums** was a tax on spoils of war, paid to religious leaders.
- Now, for Shi'as, **khums** is paid on things such as business profits, and is generally given to people in need.
- **Sunnis** do not usually pay **khums** – they believe it should be paid on bounty from war and in some other cases, but these are not common for the average Muslim.
- There are different Sunni and Shi'a opinions on what **khums** should be paid on and whom it should be paid to.

Zakah is a complicated concept – it is not quite the same as charity, as it is compulsory, but it may not be accurate to think of it as a tax either. It is often referred to as almsgiving (giving to those in need). It is money which all Muslims have to pay to certain specified causes.



Benefits of receiving Zakah

- **Zakah** is often paid during Ramadan and can be used to help poor people celebrate **Id-ul-Fitr**.
- Debtors can pay off their debts and, historically, slaves could buy their freedom.
- Actions in the cause of Islam can be pursued without disadvantaging those who want to pursue them (e.g. paying for Muslim wars).
- New converts to Islam and travellers receive support.

'Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (Funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to Truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah; and for the wayfarer: (thus is it) ordained by Allah, and Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom.'
(Qur'an Surah 9:60)

Zakah

Origins of Zakah

- Giving alms and charity is encouraged in the Qur'an.
- Muhammad and the following leaders of Islam paid **zakah**. Much of the early **zakah** was used to support wars defending Islam (in the cause of Allah).

Islam - Practices - Duties and Festivals 2

Hajj is a pilgrimage to Makkah, which Muslims are expected to make at least once in their lifetime (if they are able). Hajj has to take place at a particular time, during the month of Dhu al-Hijjah. (If Muslims go on pilgrimage to Makkah at other times, this is called the **umrah**.)

Role of Hajj

- To remember Ibrahim's story.
- To visit where Muhammad lived and the Qur'an was revealed.
- To fulfil a duty to Allah.
- To grow closer to Allah, spend time concentrating on faith, and read the Qur'an (Hajj means 'striving').

Significance of Hajj

- Muslims visit the holiest places in their religion.
- Allows Muslims to move further in their spiritual journey.
- Something which the whole Muslim community takes part in.
- Completes the duties of being a Muslim (the one of the **Five Pillars** and **Ten Obligatory Acts** which cannot be undertaken generally in day-to-day life).

Day 1, (Day 3), and at the end of the Hajj

- ① & ⑥ Visiting the **Ka'aba** (in Makkah), the shrine built by Ibrahim and rebuilt by Muhammad.
- Muslims circle the **Ka'aba** seven times anticlockwise, which is called **tawaf**. Muslims try to kiss or touch the black stone in the **Ka'aba**, or stretch their hands towards it. Tawaf is done several times during Hajj.
- This is significant as the circling represents tawhid and also the unity of the Muslim community (**ummah**).

Id-ul-Adha

- The most important Muslim festival, celebrating Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail, but Allah rewarding his faith and allowing him to sacrifice a ram instead. (The name means 'feast of the sacrifice'.)
- Lasts four days – 10th–13th Dhu al-Hijjah.
- Important to Muslims in Great Britain today, as it reminds them that they too need to submit to Allah and have faith.
- Muslims go to the mosque and have parties with family and friends. They sacrifice an animal (in person or by proxy) and give the meat to the poor. They may also give extra charity.

Id-ul-Fitr

- The second most important Muslim festival – the feast of breaking the fast at the end of Ramadan for three days.
- Muslims have parties, and are thankful to Allah for having helped them fast.
- Muslims (including in Great Britain) pray for forgiveness and pay their **zakah**.

Origins

- The **prophet** Ibrahim, his wife Hagar and son Ismail are believed to have been in the desert without food and water.
- Hagar ran between two hills to find help, but found none. Then the infant Ismail brought forth a spring of water when he hit the ground with his foot. A well has since been built here.
- Allah commanded Ibrahim to build a shrine to him here (the **Ka'aba**). Inside, he placed a black stone, which Muslims believe is sacred and a sign of his covenant with Allah.
- All these features now play a part in the **Hajj**, and Muhammad led the first Hajj, rededicating the **Ka'aba** to Allah.

There are a number of rules when on Hajj, including a ban on sex, arguing, shaving / cutting nails, and women must cover their faces. Muslims must also wear **ihram** – special white



Hajj pilgrims wearing the traditional (and compulsory) white clothing.

Id-ul-Adha begins on Day 3 of the Hajj and ends on Day 6.

How is Hajj performed?

Day 1

- ② Visiting the well at **Zam Zam**.
- This is significant because it reminds Muslims of Ismail kicking the ground and producing water – a blessing from Allah.

Day 1

- ③ Visiting **Safa and Marwa** – the two hills Hagar ran between.
- Muslims run (or walk) between these hills – known as **sa'ee**.
- This is significant as it reminds Muslims what Hagar did for her son, and what Allah did for them.



Arabic for Id Mubarak / Blessed Id

Festivals and Commemorations

Ashura

- Shi'as commemorate **Husayn's martyrdom** at the battle of Karbala (third imam). Some Shi'as beat/whip themselves. (British Muslims may donate blood instead.)
- **Sunnis** pray for forgiveness for their sins and remember Musa (Moses) and Nuh (Noah), as Muhammad did.
- Muslims in Britain may spend some time before Ashura reading the Qur'an, fasting, and focusing on self-improvement.

Sunni and Shi'a Muslims broadly follow the same Hajj. Shi'as may have to try to follow Sunni practice, such as praying five times a day and not having a stone to rest their head on when praying, and may be discouraged from paying respect to the graves of Muhammad and his family, as the Sunni authorities see it as worship of someone other than Allah.

Day 2 (Muzdalifah) and Days 3, 4, 5 (and potentially 6) (Mina)

- ⑤ Visiting **Muzdalifah** and **Mina**.
- Muslims collect stones at **Muzdalifah**, which they then throw at stone pillars in Mina. Stoning of the pillars happens for at least three days.
- This is significant as the pillars represent the devil, and it reminds Muslims of Ibrahim throwing stones at the devil, who was tempting him to disobey Allah and not sacrifice Ismail (Allah stopped him sacrificing Ismail later, having seen his faith). When the pilgrims stone the devil they are expressing love for Allah and hatred of evil.
- Day 3 is the start of **Id-ul-Adha** and after stoning the pillars, pilgrims must sacrifice an animal (though many now pay an abattoir to do so on their behalf). This reminds Muslims of when Ibrahim sacrificed a ram instead of Ismail when Allah stopped him. The meat is given to the poor. Then male pilgrims shave their heads and women trim the ends of their hair – this shows humility.

Day 2

- ④ Visiting the valley of **Arafat** (near Mina).
- Muslims sleep in tents and go to the plain of Arafat. They stand in the hot sun praying and meditating on their faith and their lives.
- This is significant as Muslims believe they will have to stand on a hot plain waiting to be judged on the **Day of Judgement** – Muslims, therefore, want to be ready for this spiritually.

'Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you...' (Qur'an Surah 2: 190)

Conditions for declaring Lesser Jihad

- ✓ To protect Muslims/Islam, including in self-defence, or freeing oppressed Muslims.
- ✓ Declared by a religious leader.
- ✓ If there are no alternatives.
- ✗ To force people to convert to Islam.
- ✗ Non-religious reasons, e.g. greed or politics.

For Shi'as, jihad is one of the **Ten Obligatory Acts**, but few Shi'as are involved in **lesser jihad**, as they believe that very senior figures, or even the **Madhi**, need to declare this.

Jihad means 'struggle', and is struggling for Allah. The **Greater Jihad** – the more important – is personal, spiritual struggle. **Lesser jihad** is armed struggle in the cause of Allah.

Greater Jihad

- Personal spiritual struggle to have faith in Allah and turn away from evil.
- Struggle for a fair (and Islamic) society.
- ↳ These are significant because they recognise that it is not always easy to be a good person, and it is easy to become complacent, and so Muslims need to keep trying to please Allah.

Lesser Jihad

- Wars / armed conflict in the name of Islam.
- ↳ This is significant because it means that Islam is not a **pacifistic** religion.

Jihad

Origins

- There is guidance about greater and lesser jihad in the Qur'an.
- Muhammad led wars against non-Muslims to extend the domain of Islam.

Influence

- In modern times, certain understandings of **lesser jihad** have led to terrorism, or groups such as so-called Islamic State trying to forcibly install a **caliphate**.
- ↳ Most Muslims feel these are wrong, and not Islamic.