***Islamic Beliefs and Practices***

The word Islam means “Peace through submission to God.” Muslim practice is defined by the *Qur’an* (sacred book) and the *Sunnah*, or example set by Prophet Muhammad and transmitted through the *Hadith* (recorded words and deeds). According to Islam, a Muslim is “one who seeks peace through submission to God.” “Seeking the face of God” is an expression often used to describe this lifetime goal. To be a Muslim, a person must do certain things, and live a moral life.

These basic acts required of a Muslim are called the Five Pillars. The Five Pillars of Islam are:

(1) *Shahadah* -- to state belief in One God and that Muhammad is his prophet.

(2) *Salat* -- to pray five times per day.

(3) *Siyam* -- to fast (refrain from eating or drinking) from dawn to sunset during the month of Ramadan each year.

(4) *Zakat* – to pay obligatory charity each year.

(5) *Hajj* -- to make the pilgrimage to Makkah once in a lifetime.

**The Five Pillars of Islam**

**1. Shahadah (the Islamic Creed)** The declaration of faith in Islam is a simple statement that begins *“*I witness that” and continues with the statement *“*There is no god but God”, and ends with the affirmation *“*and Muhammad is the messenger of God”. The first part defines the role of the Muslim, a continuous striving throughout life. This striving reaches into all aspects of personality and activity toward the self, the family, the community, and the natural environment. The second part affirms the existence of one God by negating the existence of any other creature that people might worship, or any partner with God. The third part of the creed states that God sent prophets to humankind, then it affirms that Muhammad was a prophet, or messenger who received revelation (the Qur’an) from God. Among the earlier revelations mentioned in the Qur’an are the Torah (given to Moses), the Psalms (given to David) and the Evangelium (given to Jesus).

**2. Salah (Muslims’ Daily Prayer)** is the five daily prayers that are the duty of every Muslim. Each of the five prayers can be performed within a window of time. (1) Between dawn and sunrise, (2) noon to mid-afternoon, (3) between mid- afternoon and just before sunset, (4) at sunset, and (5) after twilight until nighttime. Before praying, Muslims perform a brief ritual washing as a symbol of the cleansing effect of prayer. No matter what language they speak, all Muslims pray in Arabic.

**3. Sawm (Fasting)** During one month each year, Muslims fast, meaning that they do not eat or drink anything between dawn and sunset. Fasting is a duty for adults, but many children participate voluntarily. While fasting, Muslims perform the dawn, noon and afternoon prayers, and go about their normal duties. At sunset, Muslims break their fast with a few dates and water, then pray, then eat *iftar* (a meal that breaks the fast). *Iftar* is usually eaten with family and friends. After the evening prayer, many Muslims go to the *Mosque* (Muslim place of worship)for prayers from the Qur’an each night. They complete the whole Qur’an by the end of the month.

Each individual experiences hunger and its discomforts, but in a few days the body gets used to it. Muslims are supposed to fast in the spirit as well, and make extra effort to avoid arguments, conflicts, and bad words, thoughts, and deeds.

3. **Zakah (Charity)** is the annual giving of a percentage of a Muslim’s wealth and possessions beyond basic needs. The word means "purification," meaning that a person is purified from greed by giving wealth to others. When Muslims have cash savings for a year, they give 2.5% of it as *zakat*. Paying the *zakat* reminds Muslims of the duty to help those less fortunate, and that wealth is a gift entrusted to a person by God rather than a possession to be hoarded selfishly.

Muslims may distribute *zakah* to needy and deserving people and groups on their own, and each person is responsible for figuring out the amount owed. Of course, 2.5% is a minimum amount, and more may be given.

**5. Hajj (Journey to Makkah)** The basic act of worship in Islam is the pilgrimage (journey) to the city of Makkah during a certain time of year. Muslims must perform the *hajj* at least once in their lives, provided their health and finances permit. Over 2,000,000 people perform the hajj annually during the twelfth month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

Muslims from all over the world, including the United States, travel to Makkah (in today’s Saudi Arabia). Before arriving in the holy city, Muslims remove their ordinary clothes and put on the simple dress of pilgrims--two seamless white sheets for men, and usually, white dresses and head covering for women. The pilgrims are dressed in the same simple clothes. No one can tell who is rich, famous or powerful. White clothes are a symbol of purity. The gathering of millions of pilgrims at Makkah is a reminder of the gathering of all humans before God at the Judgment Day.