Basic Beliefs and Practices

Islam means submission to God. The goal for Muslims is to live their entire lives in submission to the will of God.

Three core beliefs:

In general, what a Muslim does is more important than what they believe. However there are certain non-negotiable core beliefs that all Muslims must accept in order to be part of the Islamic community. There are six core beliefs. Muslims must believe in God, angels, prophets, revelation, the afterlife, and divine sovereignty. These 6 beliefs are grouped into three categories.

1. **Tawhid** is the oneness of Allah. God is the only God and His is one. This is the most fundamental Islamic belief. People who deny this doctrine are guilty of the sin of *shirk*.
2. **Risalah** refers to the role of revelation in Islam. Allah has given his revelation to people through prophets, the most important of whom is Muhammed, the final prophet. Prophets would include figures from the Bible as well as extra biblical characters. The Qur’an names 25 prophets, 21 of whom are mentioned in the Bible. There are other unnamed prophets according to Islam. Muslims believe the prophets are also models for how we should live and thus “sinless.” However, the nature of that sinlessness is debated. There will be no more prophets.
3. **Akhirah** refers to belief in the afterlife. This forms the basis for accountability for our actions. Allah will judge every human on the Day of Judgement according to their deeds good and evil. Angels record each individual’s every action.

The Five Pillars of Islam are the basic fundamental practices required of Muslims

1. **Shahadah** is the voluntary recitation of the basic Muslim confession “There is no god except Allah, Muhammed is the Messenger of Allah” Reciting the Shahadah is how one converts to Islam. The recitation must be made voluntarily and with understanding.
2. **Salah** refers to the five daily required prayers
3. **Zakah** is an annual payment of 2.5% of a Muslim’s earnings and savings. Zakah is to be spent on helping the poor. Shia and Sunni view Zakah differently and scholars differ on how much of a person’s wealth is exempt and the exact rate for different kinds of wealth.
4. **Sawm** is the fast during Ramadan. Muslims must refrain from eating, drinking, smoking and sex from dawn to sunset every day during the month of Ramadan. Certain people are exempt from Sawm given extenuating circumstances such as health
5. **Hajj** is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca during the month of Dhul Hijjah. This is required for all Muslims with the means to perform it. During the Hajj, Muslims participate in a series of rituals over several days.