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The Five Pillars of Islam in the Hadith

Scott Edgar

Whether one is Sunni or Shi'ite Muslim, the Five Pillars of Islam are the same: Faith (witness), Prayer, Charity, Fasting, and the Pilgrimage. These Pillars come from the Qur'an, but are not well defined therein. It is in the Hadith literature that the Five Pillars are fully defined and detailed. This paper shows how the Hadith elucidates the Five Pillars set forth in the Qur'an.

From Arabia arose a prophet who would transform a society and inspire the eventual Islamic Empire—which at its height spread from Spain in the west to the borders of China in the east. The weapon in this conquest was not the sword, however, but the message of One God and his messenger, the Prophet Muhammad. That Muhammad was able to accomplish this was remarkable since he lived in a time when the Arabian Peninsula was inhabited by different warring tribes, but he did not come alone. He brought with him the Qur'an, the eternal word of God. From the Qur'an came the basis for the Islamic law, that governed the newly united Arabian tribes, and where the Qur'an was silent or not precise, the word of Muhammad dictated the law.

While Muhammad was alive, the umma functioned well, but in 632 A.D. Muhammad died. This caused two great dilemmas. The first was that of succession. Who should lead the umma since Muhammad was the Seal of the Prophets? There needed to be a successor, but how was he to be chosen: through lineage or merit? This issue was solved soon enough, and it was decided that

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succession should be according to merit, or according to who was most similar to the Prophet. The second issue was that of governing and law. Guidelines outlined in the Qur'an were still in effect. Although it had not yet been written down, certain men had memorized it, and it was still the basis for governing among the Muslims. The Qur'an, however, was still not clear on certain issues and was completely silent on others; something more was needed. Fortunately, before his death Muhammad clarified points on which the Qur'an was not clear and expounded where the Qur'an was silent.

Background of Hadith

The first four Caliphs, the Rashidun Caliphs, governed as best they could. They “led the Muslims in the spirit of the Prophet, though leaning sometimes on their personal judgment.”¹ This was not sufficient for long though.

After some time, . . . when difficulties arose for which they themselves could not find a solution, they began to take as an example the sunna, the customary behaviour of Muhammad, following the recollections of some of the Companions and making adherence to it the pre-eminent guiding principle after the Qur'an.²

The Qur'an was the main source for law and religion, but the “Ways and Wont of Muhammad and his utterances form[ed] a living commentary on and a supplement to the Qur'an.”³

These “Ways and Wont of Muhammad” that were gathered were termed Hadith.⁴ G. H. A. Juynboll defined Hadith as “all the

¹ G.H.A. Juynboll, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt* (E.J. Brill: Leiden, Netherlands, 1969), 5.

² Juynboll, 5.

³ *The Sayings of Muhammad*, compiler and trans. Allama Sir Abdullah al-Mamun al-Suhrawardy (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc, 1941), 17.

⁴ Hadith with a capital “H” refers to the collection, and hadith with a lower case “h” refers to an individual hadith.

sayings, deeds and decisions of the Prophet Muhammad, his silent approval of the behaviour of his contemporaries, and descriptions of his person.”⁵ The Hadith contain many teachings of Muhammad that might seem minute to the non-Muslim. For example, we learn that Muhammad was fond of beginning things on the right hand side.

The Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was fond of beginning on the right side, in putting on his shoes and in combing his hair and in performing ablution, (in fact) in all his actions.⁶

This may seem trite, but Muslims seek to imitate the Prophet in any mode possible. The Qur’an teaches that in Muhammad Muslims have “an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allah and the Latter day, and remembers Allah much.”⁷ Therefore, it seems proper to try and live like Muhammad in all ways possible—even in the parting of the hair.

The Hadith are not just filled with the everyday actions of Muhammad. They also elucidate many doctrinal matters that are central to Islam whether Sunni or Shi’i. Chief among these are the Five Pillars of Islam. The Qur’an is the main source for the Five Pillars, which are Shahada (faith), Salat (prayer), Zakat (charity), Sawm (fasting), and Hajj (pilgrimage), but without the clarifications or adjuncts in the Hadith, the explanation of the Five Pillars in the Qur’an would not be “sufficiently precise.”⁸ It is through the lens of the Hadith that the Five Pillars of Islam are made clear and the proper mode of each is put forth—in fact, it is in the

⁵ Juynboll, 4.

⁶ *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari*, trans. Dr Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1979), 4.

⁷ Qur’an, trans. Mawlana Muhammad Lahore (Pakistan: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha’at Islam, 1973), 33:21.

⁸ Faruq Sherif, *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur’an* (London: Ithaca Press, 1985), 1.

Hadith where the Pillars as such are definitively listed.⁹ In this paper, I will examine how the Hadith have added to and expounded on the Qur'anic treatment of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Shahada

The first of the Five Pillars is shahada or the Witness of Faith. It consists of, first, the acknowledgement that Allah is the one true God and that no other gods or offspring are associated with him, and second, that Muhammad is his messenger and that Allah's word is revealed through Muhammad. This doctrine is clearly laid out in the Qur'an and is reinforced throughout the Hadith.¹⁰ There is no new doctrinal aspect developed in the Hadith about the shahada, but it does reiterate what the Qur'an says on the issue. There is a story related in the Hadith about Muhammad being asked by a group of people for "something good so that we may (carry out) take it from you and also invite to it our people whom we left behind (at home)," and he answered, "I order you to do four things and forbid you from four things," and the first of the four things he ordered was "[to] believe in Allah. (And then he explained it to them i.e.) to testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and I (Muhammad, peace be upon him) am Allah's Apostle."¹¹ This leaves no doubt in any Muslim's mind about what the Witness of Faith entails.

Salat

The second Pillar in Islam is salat or the five compulsory prayers each day. The Qur'an teaches that prayer has been "enjoined on the believers at fixed times."¹² However, it does not go

⁹ Bukhari, 1:17.

¹⁰ For a few selections of references to Allah see Qur'an 2:163; 2:116; 3:17; 16:51; 112:1; and for Muhammad, see 2:253; 5:15.

¹¹ Bukhari, 1:298.

¹² Qur'an 4:103.

into detail about the times of prayer each day. It touches on general times of prayer, but not specific times. The Qur'an instructs the believers to "keep up prayer at the two ends of the day and in the first hours of the night,"¹³ but to get specific times of prayer, the believer must consult the Hadith.

The five prayers are named and defined in the Hadith. They are Fajr, Zuhr, Asr, Maghrib, and Isha. The times of each are also given, and the importance of knowing the proper times of prayer is set forth in a hadith reported by a companion of the Muhammad named, Abdullah. He asked Muhammad, "Which deed is the dearest to Allah?" and Muhammad replied, "To offer the prayers at their early stated fixed times."¹⁴

The times of the prayers were set forth in the Hadith:

- *Fajr*. This is the morning prayer which is offered before the sunrise. Aisha, one of Muhammad's wives, told of going and offering the Fajr prayer with Muhammad, and "after finishing the prayer they would return to their homes and nobody could recognize them because of darkness."¹⁵
- *Zuhr*. This is the noon prayer. In the Hadith we learn that the "Prophet used to offer the Zuhr prayer just after mid-day (as the sun declines at noon)."¹⁶ During the hot months, however, Muhammad would allow the delaying of the Zuhr prayer until the heat of the desert subsided a bit because the "severity of the heat is from the raging of the Hell-fire."¹⁷
- *Asr*. This is the prayer said after the Zuhr and before the sun sets. Aisha remembered that the "Prophet used the pray the Asr prayers at a time when the sunshine was still inside my chamber and no shadow had yet appeared in it."¹⁸

¹³ Ibid., 11:14

¹⁴ Bukhari, 1:300.

¹⁵ Bukhari, 1:321.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1:305.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1:304.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1:307.

- *Maghrib*. This is the evening prayer and the “time for the evening prayer is that when the sun disappears and (it lasts) till the twilight.”¹⁹ The Hadith teaches that Muhammad observed the evening prayer before the “twilight had vanished.”²⁰
- *Isha*. The last of the compulsory prayers is prayed any time from twilight until midnight. From the Hadith we learn that Muhammad “used to offer the Isha prayer in the period between the disappearance of the twilight and the end of the first third of the night.”²¹

Now, aside from clarifying the times of prayer, the Hadith also advises on times when prayers are not to be offered. For instance, the Fajr prayer is to be offered before the sunrise, the Zuhr prayer is offered after the sun declines from its noontime zenith and the Isha prayer is to be offered after the sunset. In relation to those times of prayer, Muhammad prohibited prayer when the “sun begins to rise till it is fully up, when the sun is at its height at mid-day till it passes over the meridian, and when the sun draws near to setting till it sets.”²² This prohibition was in place because, according to Muhammad, the sun “rises between the horns of Satan.”²³ Concerning Salat, the Hadith offers the necessary information to fulfill that which is dearest to Allah by defining the times of prayers.

Zakat

The next Pillar is zakat or charity. Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, in his translation of Imam Muslim’s compilation of hadiths, prefaces the section on zakat by stating that it is not a “mere tax, but a form of

¹⁹ *Sahih Muslim*, trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqi (Lahore, Pakistan: Ashraf, 1980), 1:300.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:300.

²¹ Bukhari, 1:317.

²² *Muslim*, 2:395.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2:395.

worship whereby a man comes close to his Lord.”²⁴ The Qur’an states that the adherence to charity is a characteristic of the true believers and of the God-fearing.²⁵ As such, it is pertinent to understand the requirements and bounds of the zakat. The Qur’an teaches that it is only for the poor and needy,²⁶ leaving unspecified what one must pay on and how much one is required to pay.

The amount of the charity that one must pay is according to his possessions and how he earns his living. For example, no charity is “payable on less than five wasqs of (dates or grains), on less than five camel-heads and on less than five uqiyas (of silver),”²⁷ and there is no charity due on slaves or horses.²⁸ If one earns a living through agriculture then “[a] tenth is payable on what is watered by rivers, or rains, and a twentieth on what is watered by camels.”²⁹ The distinction is this: that which is watered by natural means (rivers or rains) has only one tenth due on it whereas that which is watered by artificial means (camels) has one twentieth due on it. Also, if one earns his living dishonestly then he is forbidden from paying the charity because “Allah accepts only honestly earned money.”³⁰ Even if a man has no form of income, he can still pay charity by striving to be righteous.

Abu Dharr reported: Some of the people from among the Companions of the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) said to him: Messenger of Allah, the rich have taken away (all the) rewards. They observe prayer as we do; they keep the fasts as we keep, and they give Sadaqa [charity] out of their surplus riches. Upon this he (the Holy Prophet) said: Has Allah not prescribed for you (a course) by following which you can (also) do Sadaqa? In every declaration of the glorification of Allah

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:465.

²⁵ Koran, trans. N.J. Dawood (New York: Penguin, 1999), 2:177.

²⁶ Qur’an 9:60.

²⁷ *Muslim*, 2:466.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:467.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Bukhari*, 2:281.

. . . there is Sadaqa, and every Takbir is a Sadaqa, and every declaration that He is One is a Sadaqa, and in man's sexual intercourse (with his wife) there is a Sadaqa.³¹

Or in short, “[e]very act of goodness is [charity].”³²

The Hadith also teaches the importance of giving charity in secret. Muhammad told of seven types of people to whom “Allah would give protection with His Shade on the Day when there would be no shade but that of Him (i.e., on the Day of Judgment)” and among those people is he who “gives charity and conceals it (to such an extent) that the right hand does not know what the left has given.”³³ Beyond secrecy, another virtue in charity giving is that of giving while the giver is still “healthy and close-fisted, one haunted by the fear of poverty, hoping to become rich (charity in such a state of health and mind is the best).”³⁴

The sin of neglecting charity is great. Even if one can give only half of a date then he is better off than not giving anything. There is a hadith that echoes a similar point of Latter-day Saint theology. It states that Muhammad, speaking of charity, said, “He who among you can protect himself against Fire, he should do so, even if it should be with half a date.”³⁵ More specifically, Muhammad revealed that the punishment for

any owner of gold or silver [who] does not pay what is due on him, when the Day of Resurrection would come, plates of fire would be beaten out for him; these would then be heated in the fire of Hell and his side, his forehead and his back would be cauterized with them.³⁶

Then, after the plates cool down, the process is repeated for a day, which is equal to the length of fifty thousand years until judgment

³¹ *Muslim*, 2:482

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 493.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 494.

³⁵ *Muslim*, 2:486; cf. Doctrine and Covenants 64:23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:470.

comes,³⁷ and so, according to the Hadith, there is great incentive to pay the zakat if just to be spared cauterization.

Sawm

The fourth Pillar of Islam is Sawm or Fasting—specifically during the month of Ramadan. The Qur’an is not silent on this Pillar. From the Qur’an we learn that the fast can be postponed if one is traveling,³⁸ that sexual intimacy with one’s wife is permissible during the nights of Ramadan,³⁹ that the fasting should begin when “the whiteness of the day becomes distinct from the blackness of the night at dawn,”⁴⁰ and that the fast ends at nightfall.⁴¹ The Hadith literature elaborates on many aspects of the Fast of Ramadan beyond the basics found in the Qur’an.

Ramadan is supposed to last for thirty days—from new moon to new moon. However, the sky is not always clear and the moon is not always visible. Concerning this problem, Muhammad said, “Do not fast till you see the new moon, and do not break fast till you see it; but if the weather is cloudy, calculate about it.”⁴² To “calculate about it” means to count thirty days. Another point about the length of the Ramadan fast is made in the Hadith. It is told by Aisha that

[w]hen twenty-nine nights were over, the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) came to me . . . I said: Messenger of Allah, you had taken an oath that you would not come to us for a month, whereas you have come after twenty-nine days which I have counted. Whereupon he said: the month may also consist of twenty-nine days.⁴³

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Qur’an 2:185.

³⁹ Ibid., 2:187.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *Muslim* 2:524.

⁴³ Ibid., 2:528.

Muhammad's intent in this hadith was to dispel a superstition of pre-Islamic Arabia that had carried over into Islam. The superstition held that a month consisting of twenty-nine days was inferior to a month consisting of thirty days.⁴⁴

The Hadith also contains other rules and guidelines for the Fast of Ramadan. For instance, it is forbidden to fast for "a day or two days ahead of Ramadan."⁴⁵ Also, those who do not fast in order to have the strength to serve in times of great need are praised,⁴⁶ and if one dies in a state of fasting thereby leaving part of the fast undone, then the portions of the fast left undone need to be completed by another. Muhammad likened it to an unpaid debt and explained that the "debt of Allah deserves its payment more than (the payment of anyone else)."⁴⁷ And so, the Hadith provides essential guidelines for the Sawm that are not found in the Qur'an.

Hajj

The fifth Pillar of Islam is the Hajj or Pilgrimage. The Qur'an teaches the necessity of the Pilgrimage,⁴⁸ the prohibition of hunting during the Pilgrimage,⁴⁹ what is done to make restitution if game is killed intentionally,⁵⁰ and the circling of the Ka'bah, or "Ancient House." One finds in the Hadith, however, many details concerning the Pilgrimage that shed light on its doctrines and practices.

One of the doctrines of the Pilgrimage is that it can be performed through proxy, and, as with the Fast, it is found only in the Hadith. A man by the name of Abdullah bin Abbas told of his

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:528, see n. 1477.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:527.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:545.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:556.

⁴⁸ Qur'an 2:196; 22:27.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5:1, 5:95.

⁵⁰ Qur'an 5:95.

brother who was riding behind Muhammad. He recalled that a woman said:

“O Allah’s Apostle! The obligation of Hajj enjoined by Allah on His devotees has become due on my father and he is old a weak, and he cannot sit firm on the Mount; may I perform Hajj on his behalf?” The Prophet (may peace be upon him) replied, “Yes, you may.”⁵¹

Along with the doctrine of proxy, the doctrine of being reborn through observance of the Pilgrimage is also found in the Hadith with the prerequisites for rebirth being set forth. Muhammad taught that:

whoever performs the Hajj for Allah’s pleasure and does not have sexual relations with his wife, and does not do evil or sins then he will return (after Hajj free from all sins) as if he was born anew.⁵²

The hope of this cleansing effect would be a powerful incentive for any Muslim who is striving to draw nearer to Allah to perform the Pilgrimage. We also learn that “no pagan is allowed to perform Hajj . . . and no naked person is allowed to perform Tawaf [circumambulating] of the Ka’aba.”⁵³ So, where the Qur’an underscores the necessity of making the Pilgrimage, the Hadith contains the doctrines and blessings of this Pillar.

In addition to expounding on the blessings and doctrines, the Hadith also presents many of the practices that the Muhrim⁵⁴ adopts during the Pilgrimage such as the kissing of the black stone,⁵⁵ what clothing to wear,⁵⁶ the running between Safa and

⁵¹ Bukhari, 2:344.

⁵² Ibid., 2:347.

⁵³ Ibid., 2:401.

⁵⁴ *Muhrim* is one who is in the state of ihram for the purpose of the Hajj.

⁵⁵ Bukhari, 2:394.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 2:358.

Marwa,⁵⁷ and the need for self-reliance during the Hajj⁵⁸. These are only a selection of a few of the practices that are taught in the Hadith, but there are more that guide the Muhrim through the Pilgrimage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, whether one is Sunni Muslim or a Shi'i Muslim, it is the binding thread of the Five Pillars that link the divisions of Islam. To be sure, the Qur'an is the basis for each of the Pillars, but to the clearest idea of what each Pillar consists of, one must go to the Hadith. It is in the Hadith that the Five Pillars are magnified so they can be clearly understood and practiced.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 2:348.