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Practising Islam — the Essentials

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PRACTISING ISLAM – THE ESSENTIALS

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This guide is educational, sourced from verified Quran and hadith records. It is not a substitute for the guidance of qualified scholars. Questions? Ask at deen2u.com/ask/.

CHAPTER 01

Islam Built on Five

Islam is built on both belief and action, and the heart of that action is captured in a well-known hadith reported in *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*. It names five pillars — a statement of faith, then four acts of worship that shape the day, the year, and a lifetime. This page keeps to the essentials Muslims broadly agree on, noting where the schools of law differ rather than picking sides.

Islam is built upon five...

Sahih al-Bukhari 8, Sahih Muslim 16

On method: every practice here is stated with its direct evidence from the Quran and the Prophet's ﷺ authentic Sunnah first. All four founding imams are reliably reported to have said some version of "if a hadith is authentic, that is my madhhab."

CHAPTER 02

The Shahada — the Testimony of Faith

The Shahada declares that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad ﷺ is His Messenger. It is the only pillar that is a statement rather than an act, yet saying it once with sincere belief and understanding is what makes a person a Muslim — *Ashhadu an lā ilāha illā Allāh, wa ashhadu anna Muḥammadan rasūlu-llāh*. Its two parts are both needed: a negation that clears away every false object of worship, then an affirmation of the one true God and acceptance of His final Messenger.

Whoever's last words are "there is no god but Allah" will enter Paradise.

Sunan Abi Dawud 3116

Because it is a matter of the heart as much as the tongue, the Shahada cannot be forced — the Quran states plainly that "there is no compulsion in religion" (2:256).

CHAPTER 03

Wudu – Purity Before Prayer

Prayer requires being in a state of ritual purity, and wudu is the washing that achieves it. The four Quranic obligations are to wash the face, wash the arms including the elbows, wipe the head, and wash the feet including the ankles; the Sunnah adds the fuller seven-step sequence. Where there is no water, or using it would harm you, clean earth stands in through *tayammum*.

O you who believe, when you rise to pray, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, and wash your feet up to the ankles.

Surah al-Ma'idah 5:6

Only the four washes, with the intention, are obligatory (fard); saying Bismillah, washing the hands first, rinsing mouth and nose, and repeating three times are sunnah. More items on the "what breaks wudu" list are genuinely disputed between the four schools than agreed — follow your own school or a local teacher consistently.

CHAPTER 04

The Whole Earth a Masjid

A question many quietly wonder about: do you need a prayer mat, and does prayer only "count" on one? The answer, straight from the Prophet ﷺ, is freeing — he was given the entire earth as his place of prayer, so grass, carpet, bare floor, sand, or stone all serve, anywhere clean and facing the Kaaba. The mat is a convenience, not a condition.

وَجَعَلْتُ لِيَ الْأَرْضَ مَسْجِدًا وَطَهُورًا

...the earth has been made for me a place of prayer (masjid) and a means of purification — so wherever a man of my ummah is when the prayer overtakes him, let him pray.

Sahih al-Bukhari 335 · Sahih Muslim 521

There are a few exceptions: "The whole earth is a place of prayer except the graveyard and the bathroom" (Sunan Abi Dawud 492 · Jami' at-Tirmidhi 317 — graded sahih).

CHAPTER 05

Salah — How to Pray, Step by Step

Each of the five daily prayers is simply a number of units — *rak'ahs* — repeated in the same pattern: the opening takbir, standing to recite al-Fatihah, bowing (ruku), prostrating (sujood), the sitting testimony (tashahhud), and the closing salam. Al-Fatihah is obligatory in every single rak'ah.

There is no prayer for the one who does not recite the Opening of the Book.

Sahih al-Bukhari 756, Sahih Muslim 394

Forgetting is human — it happened to the Prophet ﷺ himself, who mended it with two extra prostrations (sujud al-sahw). Where the four schools differ on which recitations are obligatory versus recommended, that is noted rather than settled one way.

CHAPTER 06

Zakat – Obligatory Charity

Zakat is a yearly charity due from Muslims whose wealth reaches the *nisab* (roughly 85g of gold or 595g of silver, or the equivalent) and has been held for a full lunar year; on money, gold, and silver the rate is 2.5%. Far from an arbitrary tax, zakat literally means "purification" — of the wealth that remains and of the heart's attachment to it. Surah at-Tawbah (9:60) names the eight categories it may go to.

The rate is "a quarter of a tenth" — as fixed in the document Abu Bakr wrote out for zakat collectors.

Sahih al-Bukhari 1454

Zakat on gold or silver jewellery worn regularly is a genuinely debated case: the Hanafi school holds it due whether worn or stored, while the Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools treat everyday personal jewellery like clothing — exempt.

CHAPTER 07

Sawm — Fasting in Ramadan

Sawm is fasting from dawn (Fajr) until sunset (Maghrib) during Ramadan — abstaining from food, drink, and marital relations, while striving to guard the tongue and behaviour. Its aim is *taqwa*, God-consciousness, which the Quran gives as the very purpose of the fast, not hunger for its own sake.

O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may attain taqwa.

Quran 2:183

Concessions apply to the elderly and chronically ill, travellers, and menstruating or pregnant/nursing women; missed days are made up later (qada) when able, or compensated by feeding a needy person (fidyah) where fasting isn't realistically possible.

CHAPTER 08

Hajj – The Pilgrimage to Makkah

Hajj is the pilgrimage to the Sacred House (the Kaaba) in Makkah, obligatory once in a lifetime for every Muslim physically and financially able. Its rites — standing at Arafah, circling the Kaaba (tawaf), and walking between Safa and Marwah (sa'i) — re-enact the trials and trust of Ibrahim, Hajar, and Ismail (peace be upon them). It can be entered in three modes set by the intention at ihram: Ifrad, Qiran, and Tamattu.

Hajj is Arafah.

Jami' at-Tirmidhi 889

The Prophet ﷺ and his Companions performed all three modes during the Farewell Hajj — none is "more valid" than another (Sahih Muslim 1211).

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Disclaimer. This guide is educational and every citation can be checked against its source. It is not a substitute for the guidance of qualified scholars.

أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

"Guide us to the straight path." (Quran 1:6). This booklet is a study aid to help you begin, not a substitute for a qualified teacher — small differences in wording and method are valid across the madhhab.