

**Islam 101**  
**Transcript of Part 3**  
**The Five Pillars of Islam**

**presented on March 5, 2015**  
**by Dr. Natana DeLong-Bas**

So what is it that Muslims all believe in? Muslims have these things called the Five Pillars and a When you proclaim the shahadah, this marks your entry into membership in the Muslim community. So if you need a Christian parallel, that would be baptism, when you become a member of the Church. You are supposed to make your shahadah in front of two witnesses because this is a public statement, a public act, that you are joining into this community. And if you're worried that you may not be able to find two Muslims near you, you can go to IslamicCity.com which will set you up with a teleconference with two Muslims in some other city so that you can proclaim your shahadah. And they have a little runner on the left side of the page that indicates brother or sister so and so proclaim the shahadah at such and such a time on such and such a day, so that you can st

## Boston College

You still want to say your five prayers, but you do it in three time slots. Shiis tend to do that on a regular basis to kind of distinguish themselves.

What happens if you happen to be in outer space? This is a picture of Prince Sultan bin al Salman. He's the son of the new King of Saudi Arabia. He was the first Muslim and first Arab to go to outer space. He flew with the Challenger in 1985. He was a payload specialist, and I had the opportunity to interview him about that experience, and well, how did you do it? How do you pray in zero gravity? How do you know what direction to turn? And you're supposed to pray facing Mecca. What time frame do you use because you're orbiting the Earth?

He said, well, he had to talk to some of the religious scholars about these things. And it was determined that because he had taken off from Cape Canaveral, that he would follow whatever the timing was in Cape Canaveral. He said when it came to finding the direction of Mecca, he ended up having to look out the window to see where it was on the Earth from where he was.

But he said the hardest part was the prostration, because as you can see from the positions there, Muslim prayer is actually, physically, very involved. Try prostrating in zero gravity. They had to build special shoes for him that were attached to the floor and then have two of his fellow astronauts hold him one by each arm to help him be able to get down to wherewh5.6(d)-8.8(e)0.

# Boston College

Christians refer back to this practice as well. If you've ever heard the Old Testament benediction about "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you," that's lifting his head. "The Lord lift his countenance upon you and give you peace. May he grant your request." So a very nice symbolic connection.

Pillar number three is *zakat*, or almsgiving. Once every year, Muslims are expected to give two and a half percent of their entire wealth—that's not income after taxes, Social Security, Medicare, and what have you. This is two-and-a-half percent of your entire wealth, so stocks, bonds, bank accounts, car, house, all of those things together. And it's to be given to redistribute to the less fortunate members of the community. So again, there's this community focus on always looking out for those who are less fortunate. If you're not sure how to calculate what your *zakat* is, there is *zakat* calculators available online. You just plug-in all your assets and they'll add it up for you.

*Zakat* has proven to be a real challenge for Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11, because there's been so much concern about this money that is being channeled to terrorists. And concern that people are going to the mosque and paying their *zakat* there or paying it to a particular sheikh or organization and not really knowing exactly where that money is going. And so there have been mechanisms put into place to try to make sure that the money is being used for legitimate purposes. I think most people understand that, but it does take away a little bit of the personalized aspect of being able to decide who you want your money to go to.

[Pillar #4, *Sawm*: Fasting during Ramadan] You may have heard of the month of Ramadan when Muslims are supposed to fast. The fast traditionally begins at the moment when you can distinguish a black thread from a white thread, and then the fast ends for the day when the sun goes down. Muslims follow a lunar calendar, rather than our solar calendar, which means that the year is shorter. And that means that the month of Ramadan circulates through all of the seasons.

So this coming summer [2015], Ramadan will fall in the month of June. The fast of Ramadan—no food, no water, no smoking, no sex from sunrise until sunset—is a little bit easier to do when it falls in December and you live in Boston where it's not very warm. The days are short in winter, and so being without food and water may not be as difficult. But just imagine the level of discipline it takes to engage in that fast if you live in Baghdad, or Riyadh, or Kabul, and Ramadan is in August, and the days are very long and very hot, and you cannot have any food or water.

Why would God ask people to do this? Again, because there is this sense of focusing







## Boston College

happen? Because I've never known a man." "Don't worry; with God, everything is easy." God simply says, "Be," and it is. It's the same way that the God of the Old Testament creates in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis.

The terminology that is used to describe Jesus is also reminiscent of biblical language. Jesus is referred to as a Word from God and a Spirit from God, and those phrases are only used in the Qur'an to describe Jesus. It's reminiscent of the language opening the Gospel of John. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. So we have this Word from God and Spirit of God confirming that this Jesus has a very special status and no earthly father.

And the Qur'anic telling of the story, which we'll take from chapter 19 of the Qu5(ua)4.622.4(e)11.6(l)2.9(l)

## Boston College

tradition teaches that when God goes to judge you in the afterlife, your good deeds will be weighed against your bad deeds. If your good deeds are heavier, you'll go to Paradise. If your bad deeds are heavier, then it's unfortunate for you, you will end up in Hell.