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Abu Hanifa, one of the four Sunni Imams, says in his *Al-Fiqh Al-Akbar* (a credal statement): 'God created the creation – humanity – free from belief or disbelief. He then spoke to them, through his messengers, commanding them to believe and prohibiting them from disbelief. So whoever disbelieved did so by his choice and whoever believed, it was also by his own choice.' This statement of Abu Hanifa expresses the Sunni point of view that man, by the nature of his creation, is free from both disbelief and belief. According to the Qur'an (Koran) 'we have truly shown him the way and he may be thankful or unthankful' – Chapter 76, verse 3 (76:3). Again, the Qur'an declared 'and pointed out to him the two conspicuous ways' – 90:10. The same idea is expressed in the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad in his saying, 'Every child is born to the nature which God has made him conform to – that is, upright. But his parents make him either a Jew or a Christian or a Magian.' This means in theological terms that minors are not under any religious obligations until they reach the age of maturity, which is defined in religious legal books as the attainment of manhood or womanhood. At this stage he becomes entirely independent of the thinking of his parents and is responsible for discovering the right type of faith he thinks fit for himself.

This is, strictly speaking, the Islamic point of view and according to this those who die before that age are not accountable for the religion of their parents and community if it turns out to be a false or unacceptable one with God.

It is incumbent on a Muslim to obey each and every one of the commands of Allah the Almighty with genuine faith and intensity. It is essential to value time. He must be able to arrange it in strict accordance with discipline, proper principles, and codes of life laid down in the Holy Qur'an and explained in the Sunnah. He must not neglect or ignore

his duties but must carry them out at the correct times. So just as salat (prayers) are obligatory for Muslims daily at the stated times, so from birth to death certain rites and ceremonies are solemnized at the appropriate age. Initiation of children into the fold of Islam is the duty of an adult Muslim and is part of the duty he owes to others, his other duties being to himself and above all to Allah the Almighty. From birth to about the age of ten years the rites of *adhan* (call to prayer) and *iqamat* (start of prayer), shaving of head, naming, circumcision, *aqiqa* (sacrificial offerings) and *bis-mallah* (in the name of Allah the Almighty) are performed by the parents alone or with the help of the religious leader.

Adhan

After birth the baby is given a bath. Then the act of *adhan* is performed, so that the first words he hears will be the words of the *adhan*. The call is said in a normal tone in the right ear with the aid of a hollow reed or any other tubing. The Arabic call may be translated as follows:

Allah is great; Allah is great; Allah is great; Allah is great.
I bear witness that none is worthy of worship but Allah;
I bear witness that none is worthy of worship but Allah.
I also bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah;

I also bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.

Come to prayer;¹

Come to prayer.¹

Come to salvation;¹

Come to salvation.¹

Allah is great; Allah is great.

No one is worthy of worship except Allah.²

Those hearing the call repeat the formulas to themselves. Those clauses in the call that are numbered must not be repeated but be answered differently in Arabic which when translated reads:

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¹ There is no ability (to do good) or power (to refrain from evil) except by the grace of Allah. (This is said four times.)

² And I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, the One, who has no partner unto him. And I bear witness that, indeed, Muhammad (peace be upon him) is his servant and messenger. I take joy in the lordship of Allah and the religion of Islam and the messengership of Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Iqamat

The *iqamat* that the religious leader recites in the left ear of the baby differs slightly from the text of the *adhan*. The first 'Allah is great' is said only twice and after

'Come to salvation.'

Then the following is said twice:

'Indeed, the prayer is ready (to be said).'

This is answered by a listener who says twice:

May Allah ((the Almighty) establish (this) prayer for ever.

This practice is carried out without exception by Muslims throughout the world. When the religious leader is not available the father usually discharges this duty.

Aqiqa

On the seventh day of the birth, the baby's hair is shaved and the equivalent weight of gold or silver is given away as charity. The shaving of the baby's head is a symbolic act to take away the uncleanness of the act of birth as well as to help the hair grow in greater profusion. Olive oil is usually applied to the shaven head.

Aqiqa follows the procedure that two goats or sheep in the case of a baby boy and one in the case of a baby girl are sacrificed. The animal must be free from any physical defects and healthy. The meat should be cooked sweet, as an omen that the child will be good-natured. One-third of

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the meat is given away in charity to the poor and the two-thirds distributed among the relatives. The Prophet, peace be upon him, maintained that by the performance of *aqiqa* the child is freed and made safe from calamities in the future. If this ceremony is missed for any reason, it should be performed at some time in the child's future life, bearing in mind that the rites are performed on the day before the birthday. However, this has no authoritative injunction. Nor can other culture-based rites be traced to religious sources.

Name

Abu Musa, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, had a baby son. He took the baby to the Prophet who gave him the name Ibrahim. Likewise parents generally seek the help of the religious leaders in naming their children. The Prophet has also said that Allah the Almighty likes the names Abdullah and Abdul Rahman (meaning literally the servant of Allah and the servant of the Gracious, i.e. Allah). Meaningless or uncomely names were not favoured by Allah the Almighty and were often changed by the Prophet. It is customary to avoid names the opposite of which is not good, such as mercy, success and bliss. If a child has an unacceptable name, he should change it when he reaches maturity.

Names for women are usually chosen from one of the 99 Names of Allah the Almighty with the prefix of *Amat* linked with *ul*, the definite article, e.g. Amat-ul-Karim. Some examples of male names are Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Umar, Muhammad Musa and Muhammad Isa; other female names are Ayesha, Fatima, Umme Salma and Maryam. A name is important because it has a deep influence on one's life and personality.

Circumcision

The Prophet Muhammad has said that circumcision is the practice of the prophets of Allah. Therefore it is an important ceremony of initiation. It is important that it is carried

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out under the age of ten, because after this age the lack of it would constitute a form of shamelessness. Some people make it coincide with the rites of *aqiqa*. Some money or alms in kind are given away, but only if the parents can afford it. Profuse spending is against all norms of religious practice. Muslims in Great Britain arrange privately for this rite with a general practitioner.

There is much discussion as to the authenticity of the religious basis of this practice.

Bismallah (mainly in India)

The Prophet of Islam laid great stress on the learning and acquisition of knowledge. He said, 'Seek knowledge even in China,' (i.e. however far you may have to go to seek it). He also said, 'To seek knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman.' There are many more and similar sayings of the Prophet on record. Therefore Muslim parents are anxious to teach Islam to their children. When the child attains the age of four years and four days and is talking fluently, a ceremony of *bismallah* is solemnized. Guests are invited and, in the presence of children all seated on the floor (carpeted or mat-covered), the father makes the child recite the formula *Bismallah-hir-Rahman-nir-Rahim* ('In the name of Allah the most gracious, the most merciful') followed by verses from the Holy Qur'an, preferably from Chapter 96 which was the very first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him:

Read: In the name of thy Lord who createth,
Createth man from a clot.

Read: And thy Lord is the most bounteous,
Who teacheth by the pen,

Teacheth man that which he knew not. (Qur'an 96:1-5.)

Sweetmeats are distributed among those present at the ceremony, but no overspending is acceptable. In all the above rites unnecessary spending, except for alms, is prohibited.

It is when the child attains the age of discretion – as distinct from maturity – that the first ritual act begins to take place. Although it is a very good thing to take children to the mosque to familiarize them with what takes place

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there, the tradition reported from the Prophet gives the age of seven as the age from which teaching the performance of the ritual starts. It is reported that he said, 'Teach your children prayer at seven and punish them for neglecting it when they are ten.' This does not mean that a child is to be neglected until he reaches the age of seven. It simply means that serious attempts at educating him in the faith and practice of Islam commence from that moment. Islam gives those who are born in a Muslim family an *ipso facto* status of Islamic membership of the Muslim community, its rights and obligations. This is indicated in the case of inheritance, where a child inherits from his dead parents and his parents inherit from him if he dies. The law of inheritance makes it a condition that those who are entitled to inherit from each other should be of the same religion. The same rule applies to a foundling, if found in a predominantly Muslim country. He is considered to be a Muslim, although the person discovering him might not be a Muslim.

But all these rules do not change the basic Islamic rule that it is on attaining the age of maturity that the person becomes legally responsible to take the decision that he is to become a Muslim. It is this decision, and not any other act or confession, which makes him a full member of the Muslim community.