

# The Second Pillar: Salat

The second pillar is called *salat*. It requires Muslims to pray five times a day toward Mecca. They must pray at sunset, in the evening, at dawn, at noon, and in the afternoon. In Muslim countries, the call to prayer is announced from a minaret atop a mosque. A mosque is where Muslims gather to pray, although it is acceptable to pray alone. In many Islamic countries, women pray at home. If they pray with the men, they do so from behind them or in a separate group. The leader of a mosque is called an *imam*, which means "one who walks before." The imam leads the prayer and gives sermons. However, unlike a priest or rabbi, the imam does not hold special authority. Instead, he is chosen by virtue of his dedication and sincerity. (As you will see, the title of imam holds a very different meaning for the Shiah sect of Muslims.)

Each prayer involves different bowing positions, or *rakahs*. In the morning prayer, for example, after laying out his prayer mat, the devotee raises his hands, touches his earlobes, and proclaims, "*Allahu akbar!*" meaning "God is great!" Next, he rests his hands at his waist and recites the first verse of the *Koran*. The prayer continues when the worshipper bows, prostrates himself, and sits back, each time declaring faith in Muhammad and Allah. If the person is in a mosque, he will turn to either side and wish another person peace and blessings.

## The Bowing Positions of Salat

