

Importance of Prayer (Salaah)

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

The ritual prayer (Salaah¹) is the heartbeat of Islaamic worship, a living expression of Islaam. It keeps a Muslim in permanent contact with Allaah. The recitation of the Qur'aan, the sacred scripture of Islaam, is an inseparable element of the prayer. In it, one finds the purest expression of the essential elements of Islaam. Being a ritual act of devotion to Allaah, it has two faces: the legal prescription and the spiritual dimension. We shall discuss the latter in this lesson.

The first duty on a person upon becoming Muslim is the performance of the prayers. The prayers are obligatory on every Muslim man and woman five times a day throughout their life once they declare Islaam. The prayer (Salaah) is the second pillar of Islaam, after the two testimonies. Whether one is rich or poor, healthy or sick, travelling or resident, a Muslim must pray.² Every Muslim should learn the rules and regulations of praying correctly and pray five times a day. Learning and performing the prayer should be the first priority of every new Muslim. If you are new to Islaam, incorporating a new religious practice done in an unfamiliar language may feel strange and intimidating, but soon with patience and Allaah's help it will become part of your life. Prayer to a Muslim is as important as breathing, and it isn't as difficult as it may seem!

The prayer revolves around three supreme realities in a Muslim's life: Allaah, His Prophet, and the community of believers. Allaah is constantly praised, glorified, thanked, and remembered in prayer (Salaah). A Muslim turns himself inwardly and outwardly to Allaah. The method of the prayer is that of the Prophet in which he is mentioned as well. Lastly, the prayer ties one to the community of the faithful, especially when performed in the mosque with a local congregation.

The prayer (Salaah) is considered the most important act of worship prescribed for human beings. It is the backbone of religious observance of a Muslim. Without a spine, the human body would collapse. Similarly, without the prayer a person's Islaamic practice would fall apart. The Prophet himself compared it to the spine:

¹ Salaah: The prescribed actions and words said between the pronouncement of Allaahu Akbar and closing with As-Salamu 'Alaykum.

² The requirements are flexible for the sick and the traveller. A menstruating woman is excused from the prayer.

Importance of Prayer (Salaah)

“The head of all affairs is Islaam, its spine is the prayer (Salaah)...”³

Emphasising its importance, the Prophet said:

“Between a person and disbelief is discarding the prayer (Salaah).”⁴

What this means is that if a man stops to pray completely, he slides into disbelief.

There are quite a few other points which emphasise the importance of the prayer (Salaah), from them the following:

- The Prophet at his death bed advised the Muslims to pay attention to Salaah.⁵
- It was the first act of worship made compulsory on Muslims who were required to observe the prayer while in Makkah before migration to Madinah. Compulsory charity (Zakaat⁶), fasting, and pilgrimage were made compulsory in Madinah.
- The first matter we will be questioned about on the Day of Judgment is Salaah:

“The first matter which a slave will be held to account for on the Day of Judgment is the prayer (Salaah). If it is good, all the rest of his deeds become good, but if it is bad, all the rest of his deeds become bad.”⁷

- Abraham asked his Lord to give him descendants who would abide by their prayers:

[“My Lord! Cause me and (some) of my offspring to remain constant in prayer. And O our Lord! Accept my supplication”]⁸

The Qur’aan is full of commands to pray to emphasise its importance. The prayer has been divinely transmitted to us in two ways. First, Allaah Himself commanded Prophet Muhammad when he ascended into the heavens in a journey known as the Mi’raaj (The Ascension). The commandment for the prayer (Salaah) was not brought down by an angel to the Prophet, but the Prophet was taken up to the heavens, and Allaah addressed him directly in its obligation. Second, the great angel Gabriel descended to teach the Prophet the five prayers and their times.

³ Al-Tirmidhee and ibn Maajah

⁴ Saheeh Muslim

⁵ As collected by Imaam Ahmad, Nisaa, and Ibn Maajah.

⁶ Compulsory charity required of wealthy Muslims.

⁷ Tabaraanee

⁸ Qur’aan [14:40]