

Salaat (Prayers)

The five daily mandatory prayers are the 'Pillars of Islam'. Referred to as Salat (Namaz), the Muslim form of prayer comprises of a series of postures in which Qur'anic verses are recited and Allah Almighty is praised and supplicated.

The primary purpose of prayer is to instill Allah-consciousness in an individual. It is our duty as a creation of Allah to worship Him at any time or under any circumstances. It will make a Muslim more disciplined and help him avoid committing deeds that are forbidden by Allah.

Prior to performing prayer, the Muslim purifies himself/herself. He/she must be clean and pure from any najaasat or impurities before performing the prayer. The purification process, via ablution or a complete bath, is with water. In the absence of water, one can perform the tayammum with sand or other alternative substances.

The five obligatory prayers that Muslims perform every day are Fajr, Zuhr, Asr, Maghreeb and Isha. In countries where there are large Muslim communities, the call to prayer (azaan) is announced loudly from the mosques to indicate the time of each prayer. That is followed by the iqamah which denotes that the prayer is about to begin. The command concerning prayer is contained in the following Qur'anic verse:

"Verily! I am Allah! None has the right to be worshipped but I, so worship Me, and perform As-Salat for My Remembrance." [Taaha: 14]

While in prayer, a state of full concentration or khushoo should be attained to ensure that the person's heart is attuned to make his/her act a true remembrance of Allah Almighty and is turned to Him for forgiveness. When khushoo is attained, the worshipper feels a kind of calmness and strength to obey Allah and to avoid what He forbids.

There are several blessings that Muslims should notice while performing their prayers. Prayer makes us fully aware that we are servants of Almighty Allah and thus we should adore and obey Him by performing what has been prescribed to us. That is why the prayer has been described as 'remembrance' in the Qur'an - its true meaning and purpose lie in remembering Allah.

Regular establishment of prayer makes one constantly aware that we live in His presence and His love, and at the same time fear His power so as to avoid whatever that may displease Him. This is emphasized in the following Qur'anic verse:

"Recite what is sent of the Book by inspiration to thee; and establish regular Prayer, for Prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds; and remembrance of Allah is the greatest (thing in life) without doubt. And Allah knows the (deeds) that ye do." [Al-Ankaboot: 45]

On the importance of prayer, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said:

"The first matter that the slave will be brought to account for on the Day of Judgment is the prayer. If it is sound, then the rest of his deeds will be sound. And if it is bad, then the rest of his deeds will be bad." [Bukhari]

Apart from the daily five, there are also several recommended prayers that Muslims can perform in order to please Allah Almighty and to gain rewards in the Hereafter.

The other Arabic word that can be translated as prayer in English is du'aa, which means supplication or asking assistance from Allah to fulfill a specific need of this life or in the Hereafter. In Islam, worship means to revere, serve and obey Allah in one's life wholly and completely. The word du'aa indicates a direct relationship between the worshipper and his Creator. Affirming this, the Prophet (pbuh) said:

"Du'aa is worship." [Abu Dawood]