

Salat: Daily Prayers

Summary: Daily prayer (*salat*) is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Salat begins with ritual ablution (*wudhu*) as preparation for prayer. Muslims pray facing the *qiblah* (direction of Mecca), often indicated in mosques by a *mihrab* (niche in the wall). Fridays and holidays like Eid include performance of other types of *salat*.

One of the most distinctive aspects of Muslim life is the emphasis on daily ritual prayer. Ritual prayer, called *salat*, is one of the Five Pillars of Islam; every Muslim after reaching adolescence is required to perform five daily prayers. The prayers punctuate the whole day: the first prayer takes place before sunrise, followed by a prayer at midday; the third is at mid-afternoon, another after sunset, and the final prayer when the sky grows dark. The *salat* provides a regular interruption of the day's activities in order to focus the mind and heart on the first priority of life, service to God.

Muslims prepare for prayer by performing ritual ablutions, called *wudu*. This begins with washing of the hands, followed by rinsing of the nose and mouth, washing of the face, ears, arms, hair, and finally ending at the feet. It is a complete ritual washing that prepares the worshipper physically for the prayer. Facing the *qiblah*, the direction of Mecca, worshippers stand to begin the prayer. They state their intentions, raise their hands, and pronounce “*Allahu akbar*” (God is greater). This is followed by recitation of Qur'an, and other formulas of praise and glorification of God corresponding to each of the four postures of *salat* which are standing, bowing, prostrating, and sitting. After standing, worshippers move into bowing, and recite “*subhana rabbiyal azim*” (“Transcendent is my Lord, the Mighty”). This is followed by prostration of the face, hands, and feet on the ground while reciting, “*subhana rabbiyal a'laa*” (“Transcendent is my Lord, the Most High”). While the *salat* begins with extolling the transcendence of God, it ends with sending royal praises to God, as if worshippers have entered into His presence. The worshipper formally exits from *salat* by proclaiming peace on both the right and left sides while in the sitting position. The entire cycle of prayer—its pronouncements and postures—is a concrete expression of the Muslim's submission, inner and outer, to the service, adoration, and path of God. *Salat* is performed according to the practice of Prophet Muhammad, who, according to tradition, was taught by the angel Gabriel.

Though Muslims pray *salat* five times daily, they may also perform additional types of *salat* which occur on holidays and other special occasions. These include *salat al-jum'ah* performed weekly on Fridays in congregation, *salat al-eid* performed on the Eid holidays, and *salat al-tarawih*, nightly prayers during the month of Ramadan. Muslims may also pray additional *salat* during anytime, wherever they are, as long as the place is clean; however, this is optional.

Technological advances have also facilitated observing regular performance of *salat*, whether in the mosque, at work, school, or at home. Instructional videos enable new Muslims and children to learn how to pray; scientifically calculated prayer times allow Muslims an easier method to know in which times to pray; Smartphone apps include digital Qur'ans and automated reminders or audio that play the *adhan* five times daily, making it easier for Muslims to remember to do so at work or when outside.

Ritual prayer is also not the only kind of prayer in Islam; after *salat* has been performed, or at any other time, Muslims may sit with uplifted palms and pray a *du'a* or individual prayer of petition and praise. Sometimes these prayers are preceded by reciting praise formulas 33 times, or the 99 Beautiful Names of God, for which a rosary, called a *masbaha*, is used. Prayer is a central pillar of Muslim life, both for the individual and the larger Muslim community.