

Jum'ah: The Friday Prayer

Summary: Jum'ah, refers to when Muslims gather for congregational worship during Friday midday prayer time. Prayer is followed by a sermon (khutbah) from an imam. Friday prayer is required only for men, but women may attend. In the U.S., Friday prayer brings together Muslims of many diverse backgrounds under one community.

Friday is called *Yawm al-Jum'ah* in Arabic, meaning the Day of Assembly. Muslims gather for congregational worship during midday on Friday. Establishment of the Friday prayer is a commandment found in the Qur'an:

"O Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of God and leave off your business—that is better for you, if only you knew!" (Qur'an 62:9, trans. Abdel Haleem)

The Friday prayer is like the ritual prayers, or *salat*, performed during the rest of the week, except that on Friday the imam, the leader of the congregation or prayer leader, delivers a two-part sermon known as the *khutbah*, with a pause between the two parts of the sermon to allow for a time of personal prayer, or *du'a*. Though the imam who leads the prayer can be any learned person whom the community deems appropriate, many mosques in the U.S. appoint an official imam who serves as a leader and guide for the community. The *khutbah* can be centered around a wide range of topics relevant to the community - spirituality, intellectual challenges, social justice causes, and others. This is accompanied with Qur'anic verses and *hadiths* relevant to the discussion, as well as reminders for the community to fulfill their obligations towards God and people, and exhortations to live as a true Muslim in daily life. The Friday prayer is required only for men, though women are encouraged to attend.

While Friday is the start of the weekend in many Muslim-majority countries, Muslims in America take just enough time off from work or school to attend a service at a nearby mosque. Some may take a half or full day off if work permits. In the past, many sprouting communities would gather to perform their prayers in local parks, storerooms, or other makeshift locations until they could build a mosque. In larger American cities, Muslims have developed simple storefront "commuter mosques" close to their places of business so they may pray during their lunch hour. Today, it is not uncommon for American

mosques to bring together over 1,000 worshippers for Jum'ah, whether in the Silicon Valley, Manhattan's upper east side, or at the Islamic Center in Washington, D.C. At these centers, and at other mosques around the U.S., Jum'ah prayers bring together a spectrum of people as one community, united in prayer.