

# Dialogue on prayer

## Importance of Prayer in Islam

It has been related from the Prophet (s.a.w.), “Prayer is the buttress of religion. If it is accepted, by Allah, the Most High, every other good deed by the faithful is accepted. And if it is rejected, every other good deed is rejected”.

Prayer is an audience with the Creator, offered at prescribed daily times. Allah has outlined the times at which prayers are said and the manner which they must be conducted. During this audience you be fully absorbed in the experience. You talk to Him and invoke His Mercy. You come out of this meeting with clear conscience and serene heart. It is quite natural that you may feel the presence of Allah while you say your prayer.

It is no wonder that Imam Ali (a.s.) used to remove the arrows embedded in his body in battle while fully engrossed in the spirit of worship, for it used to help him take his mind away from pain.

When Imam, Zainul Aabideen (a.s.) used to do wudhu his face would turn pale. And when members of his family asked why he looked so haggard, his reply was, “Don’t you know in whose presence I am going to be?”. When he started prayer, it sent shivers down his spine. And when asked why he was shivering, he replied, “I want to have audience with my Lord and implore Him. That is why I tremble”.

The story of Imam al-Kadhim’s (a.s.) worship is a model for all devout Muslims. When the Caliph Harun ar-Rashid ordered him to be imprisoned in his prison, the Imam passed most of his time in worship, giving thanks to Allah for answering his prayer and availing himself of that golden opportunity.

## What is a prayer?

Prayer is an expression of inner feeling that we all belong to Allah, the Most High, who has overall control over everything. And when you utter the phrase, “Allahu Akbar” at the start of every prayer, all material things should become insignificant because you are in the presence of the Lord of the universe who controls every aspect of it. He is greater than everything. As you recite the Chapter of “al-Fatiha”, you say, “You do we worship, and You do we ask for help”. Thus, you rid yourself of dependency on any mortal. With that beautiful feeling of submission to Him, you enrich your spirit five times a day.

## Types of Prayers

If you want more benefit, you may perform mustahab prayer.

\* Now you must be thinking "Does this mean there are two types of prayer - i.e. wajib and mustahab?"

- Yes, that is true.

\* You know the wajib prayers. They are the ones we say five times a day - subh, dhuhr, asr, maghrib, isha.

- No, those are not the only wajib prayers. There are more:

1. Prayer for ayaat (signs, or natural occurrences).
2. Tawaf payer that pilgrims say during umra and hajj.
3. Prayer for the souls of the dead.
4. Any compulsory prayer not said by the father who had passed away. [It is incumbent on his eldest son to say it on his behalf].
5. Any prayer that becomes compulsory because of hire (ijarah), oath, votive offering, or any other reason.

### **Things to consider before starting Prayer**

The five daily prayers should have the following:

- a. The time of prayer.
- b. The Qiblah.
- c. The Place where prayer is said.
- d. The clothes of the person saying the prayer.
- e. The taharah necessary to saying prayer.

It should be noted, though, that these five basics should be present in other types of prayer, except for the time of prayer.

Lets discuss each of these points in detail.

#### **1. The time of prayer.**

For each of the five prayers there is an appointed time that must not be taken lightly. The time for Subh prayer is from the start of dawn till sunrise. The time for Dhuhr and Asr prayers is from zawal to sunset. The first portion is confined to Dhuhr prayer and the second to Asr prayer in as long as each of which takes.

\* How would you know the time of zawal?

- It is the midway between sunrise and sunset.

The time of Maghrib and Isha starts from sunset and lasts till midnight. The first part is confined to Maghrib and the latter part to Isha in as long as each of which takes .

[You should not start Maghrib prayer until the dusk, appearing in the East, disappears from the sky].

\* Could you explain what Eastern dusk is?

- It is a reddish colour that appears in the East, opposite the direction of sunset, that disappears once the whole disc of the sun descends below the horizon.

\* How can you determine midnight; the sign for the end of time for Isha prayer?

- It is the midpoint between sunset and dawn.

\* Suppose, come midnight and you had deliberately not said Maghrib and Isha, what should you do?

- You have to hasten to offer it before the onset of dawn with the niyyah of alqurbal mutlaqah (The intention must be made with a view to seeking closeness to Allah, i.e. without stating whether it is being said on time "ada" or in lieu "qadha").

When saying any prayer, it is important to observe the appointed time of each prayer before you set out to say it.

## **2. The Qiblah:**

You ought to set your face towards the qiblah, which is the place where the Holy Qa'ba, in Mekkah, is situated.

\* Should you fail to determine the direction of the qiblah, after exhausting all means, what should you do?

- Set your face towards the direction you feel the qiblah could be in.

\* If still undecided as to where would the qiblah be?

- Say your prayer, facing any direction you think the qiblah is in, on the basis of probability (guess).

\* Suppose you said prayer, facing a direction you thought was , approximately, the right one, then you found out you were wrong, what would happen?

If the direction from the qiblah is less than 45 degrees to right or left, your prayer is in order. If its greater than that, or you said your prayer facing the opposite direction, and there were still time to repeat the prayer, you should do so.

If the time of prayer pass away, you need not repeat the prayer.

### **3. The place where prayer is said :**

[Be aware that the place where you say prayer should be ownerless, i.e. not in someone's ownership, because prayer shall not be in order in a place that is maghsoub].

Among what is considered maghsoub are possessions, such as property and furniture, that although taxable, yet khums tax on them was withheld.

\* And if the property or land was not maghsoub but the prayer mat, for instance, was?

- performing prayer on such a mat would render prayer invalid.

The spot where you do prostration must be tahir (clean) not najis (unclean)

\* Is the spot of prostration where you place your forehead?

- Precisely, such as the clay tablet (turba) and similar objects.

\* What about the rest of the place, that is where you stand or sit, etc.?

- Taharah is not a must, if the source of najasah present, is not wet.

However, there are few more points concerning the place where you say your prayer:

a. It is not permissible, during prayer and otherwise, to turn your back on the graves of the Infallibles (a.s.).

b. [Both the prayers of a man and a woman would not be in order, if they were very close to one another and standing side by side, or the woman was slightly ahead]; the distance between the two positions where they say prayer should not be less than ten yards, if there is no barrier, such as a wall, separating the two.

c. Prayer is mustahab at mosques, and the most honoured ones are the Grand Holy Mosque at Mekkah, and the mosque of the Prophet (s.a.w.) at Medinah. Prayer is also recommended at the holy shrines of the Infallibles (a.s.).

d. It is strongly recommended that women choose the most secure (sitr) place, even within the boundaries of their own home.

**4. There are certain conditions that should be met when putting clothes on for prayer:**

a. The clothes must be tahir and [not maghsoub]. However, what is worn during prayer should have been acquired lawfully. This only applies to that which covers the private parts. Also, there is a difference between what is acceptable for a man to cover himself with and a woman. For example, in a man's case, garments, such as a pair of knee-length shorts, is enough. Whereas for a woman, wearing such a garment would not do, for she is required to cover her body during prayer.

b. It should not be a part of an animal, such as the skin of an unslaughtered animal even if it is not sufficient by itself to cover one's private parts].

\* Would prayer be valid if the person who said it was wearing a leather belt, bought from a Muslim dealer or made in an Islamic country, although there was no information about the slaughtering of the animal from whose hide the belt was made?

- Yes, the prayer is in order.

\* What about a leather belt acquired from non-Muslims or made in non-Muslim countries?

- The prayer shall be in order, [unless you knew that the hide used was that of an unslaughtered animal].

\* If you were not sure as to the nature of the material of the belt, whether real or synthetic?

- Generally speaking, prayer can be said with such a belt on.

c. Products made from carnivorous animals are not allowed to be worn during prayer, even if they were of these which could cover the private parts. [And other products made from animals, whose meat is not permissible to consume].

d. Pure silk garments must not be worn by men during prayer. As for women, wearing silk clothes is allowed.

e. Pure, or adulterated, gold jewellery is not allowed for men. However, there is no harm in wearing fake jewellery.

\* So if it was a wedding ring?

- Yes, the prayer will not be in order with such a ring worn. Not only this, it is forbidden for men to wear gold at all time.

\* What about gold caps on teeth and gold pocket watches?

- These are permissible and the prayer said with these things on is in order.

\* Suppose you did not know that my ring was made of gold, or you knew but forgot to take it off before you said prayer. Would my prayer still be valid?

- Yes, the prayer is in order.

\* And women?

- They are allowed to wear gold at all time, including prayer time.

It is obligatory to cover the private parts.

Women have to cover their entire body including hair, but excluding the face, hands - to the wrists, and feet - to the ankles during prayer. They should do this even when they are alone.

### **Parts of Prayer**

The above discussed steps are the basics of prayer. Prayer itself comprises a number of parts and duties. They are, niyyah, takbiratul ihram, standing, recitation of some chapters of the Holy Qur'an, dhikr (remembrance), ruku', sujud (prostration), tashahhud, tasleem. The order, of all these series of acts and utterances should be vital.

Some of these acts and utterances are called the fundamental parts; they are niyyah, takbiratul ihram, Qir'at (recitation), ruku' and sujud. Thus, they are set aside from the other parts of prayer in that if any of these five fundamental parts is not properly executed or missed out either deliberately or by mistake, the prayer is invalid.

Reciting adhan and iqamah in daily prayers is a strongly mustahab act. So, you shall be rewarded if you stick to reciting them prior to your daily prayer.

\* What about bearing witness to the appointment of Imam Ali (a.s.) as a successor?

- It is mustahab, i.e. it is not an integral part of either adhan or iqamah.

### **1. Niyah:**

The first part of prayer is niyyah.

- Niyyah is your intention to offer prayer, that is you seek to be close to Allah and gain His favour and reward by way of submission.

\* What is meant by submission?

- It is the inner spiritual feeling that goes hand in hand with all kinds of acts of worship; this can be summed up as feeling of humbleness before the Creator.

\* Is there a particular utterance?

- No, it is a mind set. That is why it does not have a particular utterance; its seat is the heart. If, however, you do not set your mind to performing prayer seeking nearness and submission to Allah in those utterances and movements, your prayer shall be rendered null and void (batil).

## **2. Takbiratul Ihram:**

The second fundamental part of prayer is takbiratul Ihram.

\* What is takberatul Ihram?

- In a still standing posture, facing the qiblah, you say: Allahu Akbar. You should say it in Arabic, stressing the sound of (hamza) in the word (‘Akbar). You should also clearly utter the rest of the letters of this word and the others. It is preferable, though, to pause between takbiratul Ihram and the start of the recitation of the Chapter of Al-Fatiha (Suratul Fatiha).

\* We must say takiratul ihram while standing but If you were unable to stand unaided due to illness then?

- You can say your prayer in a sitting position; if not, you can say it lying on your right or left hand side, with your face towards the qiblah. [Whenever possible, lying on the right hand side must be given preference over the left hand side].

\* If you were not in a position to do either?

- You could offer prayer while lying on your back with your legs pointing to the qiblah.

\* Suppose you could only manage takbiratul ihram in a standing position.

- You could say takbiratul ihram from a standing position and perform the rest of your prayer from a sitting one in any way possible.

## **3. Qir’at (recitation):**

The third fundamental part of prayer is the recitation.

After takbiratul ihram, you recite Surat (Chapter) of al-Fatiha [and another full chapter after it]. The recitation must be carried out correctly. You must also not forget to recite the Basmalah ( Bismillahir Rahman ar Rahim: In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful) at the beginning of every chapter, except for Chapter of Tawbah.

\* If you have not sufficient time to recite the second chapter?

- You could leave it out. You could do so, should you be ill and cannot recite the second chapter. The same goes for situations of fearfulness or when you are in a hurry.

\* In what manner should you recite the two chapters?

- [Men have to recite them in such a manner that recitation is audible during Subh, Maghrib and Isha prayers. As for reciting the two chapters during Dhuhr and Asr, these should be done in an inaudible voice].

\* What about women?

- They are not required to recite the two chapters audibly. [They should, though, recite inaudibly during Dhur and Asr prayers].

\* Suppose you were ignorant of the rule on reciting audibly or inaudibly, or you made a mistake in the manner of reciting, i.e. you got mixed up, would my prayer still be valid?

- Your prayer should be in order.

\* Now you know what you should recite during the first and second raka'. What should you read during the third and fourth raka'?

- You have the choice of either reciting the Chapter of al-Fatiha only, or utter the tasbihat (or dhikr) [inaudibly in both the cases] except the Basmalah where you can recite it in an audible voice.

\* If you choose to read the tasbihat, what should you say?

- It is enough to say, in a lowered voice, "Subhanallah, wal Hamdu Lillah, wala Illaha Illal Lah, Wallahu Akbar": Glory be God, and Praise be to God; there is no god but God; God is the Greatest. These phrases could be said either once or three times, whichever you prefer.



\* Are there any other requirements for the recitation?

- Yes, you must observe the correct pronunciation of the Arabic words, both individually and within the context of other words; when you stop on a word, you must always pronounce it with an ending tone (sukoon), i.e. you should ignore the accent on the last letter, be it fatha, kasrah, dhamma, etc. On the other hand, you must pronounce the words with their full harakat (diacritical marks, such as shaddah (stress), maddah (lengthening), tanween (noon) , hamzatul wasl or hamzatul qat', appearing above the characters or below them that help the proper pronunciation of the words). These are usually found in the print of the Holy Qur'an.

In a word, you should master the rules of correct recitation, in the same way, you are required to do when reciting the verses of the Holy Qur'an.

Could you give me an example of hamzatul wasl and hamzatul qat'?

- Words in Chapter al-Fatiha, such as (Allah, Arrahman, Ihdina) start with hamzatul wasl which is not stressed when these words are used in a context of the sentence, i.e. the way they are pronounced is determined by the pronunciation of words immediately before them. Thus, they are more or less silent. As for hamzatul qat', it is the one that should be pronounced very clearly. The way this type of hamza is pronounced is not determined by its closeness to other words. Examples of such a hamza are found in the words of (Iyyaka and An'ama) in the same Chapter.

And if you may add, to ensure that your recitation and other utterances during prayer are perfect, you should seek the help of those who have mastered prayer to enlighten you. This may sound somewhat strict; yet you must try to get the ability to guarantee that your prayer is correct.

#### **4. Qiyaam:**

The fourth fundamental is qiyaam (standing upright).

It is the only part or unit of prayer that carries a double message. It could be a rukn as in the case of uttering takbiratul ihram and the qiyaam immediately before ruku. Thus, it can be considered as any other rukn. Or it could be a compulsory act (wajibat), not a rukn, such as the standing while reciting the two chapters or tasbihat, or standing up from a bowing position. Rules of wajibat should, therefore, apply.

#### **5. Ruku:**

The fifth fundamental is ruku.

- You bend your body, placing the palms of your hands on your knees, and saying (Subhana Rabiya Adheemi wa Bihamdih: Glory and praise be to my Lord) once, or you say either (Subhanal Lah: Glory be to God), or (Allahu Akbar: God is Great), or (Alhamdu Lillah: Praise be to God) three times each.

You should then stand upright, saying as you do the movement (Sami'llahu Limen Hamidah: May God accept the words of those who praise Him), after which you prostrate.

## **6. Sujood:**

The sixth fundamental is sujood. You must do two prostrations (sujoods) in each ruku.

\* How should you do sujood?

- Put your forehead, the palms of the hands, the knees and toes on the floor, forming an angle out of the torso and thighs. It should be noted, though, that you must place your forehead on the earth or what is grown in it, except that which is edible or can be worn.

\* Could you give me an example of what cannot be used for sujood because it is of that which could be consumed or worn?

- Vegetables and fruits cannot be used for sujood, nor can cotton and flax.

\* So, what are the other things that are permissible to use for sujood?

- You may use earth, sand, stone, shingle, wood, or inedible leaves. You may choose to do prostration on paper made of pulp, cotton, flax, or chaff (dry, scaly protective casings of the seeds of cereal grain).

You should not use grains such as wheat and barley for sujood, nor wool, tar, glass, and crystal. The best object you can perform sujood on is the earth taken from land of Karbala, Iraq where Imam Hussain (a.s.) is buried.

\* Suppose you were unable to conduct sujood on any permissible object or matter because it was either unavailable or out of fear for myself?

- In the event of non-availability of any of the permissible things for sujood, you may use tar or Asphalt/bitumen. If not, you may prostrate on anything you deem possible, such as the garment you are wearing or your hand. If your well-being was threatened, you may act according to that which would be helpful to preserving yourself.

Moreover, do not forget to observe the requirement of level of the places where you rest your forehead, your knees, and the toes of both feet, i.e. none should be higher than the other for about ten cm. [Nor should the level of the spots where you stand and prostrate be].

\* Having taken this posture, what should you do next?

- You should say (Subhana Rabiya Al 'Ala wa Bihamdih: Glory and Praise be to my Lord, the Most High) once, or (Subhanal Allah), or (Allahu Akbar), or (Alhamdu Lillah) three times. Then, lift your forehead and sit down still, putting the legs under the buttocks, crossing the right foot over the left one, and saying (Allahu Akbar). You should do the second sujood in exactly the same way you did the first.

\* If you were unable to bend for sujood properly due to sickness, for example, what should you do?

- Try to bow as far as you can, placing the object of sujood on a raised place, provided that you position all other parts of your body during the posture of sujood on their respective spots.

\* And if you were not able to do so?

- You may nod with your head to the place of sujood. Should you not be able to do so, you may use your eyes as a substitute; close them to denote performing sujood and open them to express the lifting of the forehead from the place of sujood.

### **7. Tashahhud:**

The seventh fundamental part of prayer is tashahhud.

Tashahhud is compulsory to say after the second sujood of the second ruku of every prayer and after the last ruku of maghrib, dhuhr, asr and Isha prayers

\* How should you go about uttering it?

- Say (Ashhadu Alla Illaha Illal Lah, Wahdahu La Sharika Lah, Wa Ashhadu Anna Mohammadan Abduhu Wa Rasuluh. Allahumma Salli Ala Mohammadiw Aali Mohammad: I bear witness that there is no god but God, and that Mohammad is His servant and messenger; May peace be with Mohammad and his Pure descendants). It is noteworthy, however, that you sit still and that your reading should be continuous.

### **8. Tasleem:**

The eighth fundamental is tasleem.

Saying tasleem is mandatory in the last ruku of every prayer. It is said immediately after tashahhud, while you are still in your sitting position.

\* What should I say?

- The bare minimum is to say (Assalamu Alaikum: May peace be with you). It is highly recommended, though, that you add (Wa Rahmatul Lahi wa Barakatuh: and God's mercy and blessings), (Assalmu Alaika Ayyuhan Nabiyyu wa Rahmatul Lahi wa Barakatuh: May peace, mercy of the Almighty and His blessings be with you, Oh Prophet), and (Assalamu Alaina wa Ala Ibadil Lahis Saliheen: May peace be with us and the good among Allah's servants. Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatul Lahi wa Barakatuh: May peace, mercy, and blessings of the Almighty be with you).

### **Qunoot:**

\* Is there any reason why you did not mention qunoot (the raising of both hands for supplication in prayer)?

- Qunoot is mustahab once in every prescribed prayer and other prayers [except Shefa' prayer]. If you wish, you can say it, with your both hands raised in supplication, after you have finished reciting the second surah of the second ruku, i.e. immediately before bowing.

\* Is there any particular supplication I can say in qunoot?

- No, there is not. However, you could recite a verse from the Holy Qur'an, pray to your Lord; you may ask Him for anything.

### **Things that invalidate prayer**

\* Now that you have explained to me how to say prayer, I would like to ask you if there are any actions or otherwise that invalidate prayer?

- Yes, there are:

1. When prayer is stripped of any of its fundamental units, such as niyyah, takbiratul ihram, ruku, and sujood, it can no longer be valid.

2. Whatever spoils ablution, such as breaking wind, is bound to nullify prayer, [even if it happens, unintentionally or out of necessity, after the last sujood].

3. The head or the upper body should not be turned away fully from the qiblah.

\* And if the turn is slight so much so that it would not spoil the actual facing of the qiblah?

- This does not invalidate prayer, although it is maqrouh.

4. Deliberate (on purpose) laughing nullifies prayer.

5. [Deliberate weeping or crying for worldly matters invalidates prayer]. Weeping for any matter relating to the Hereafter is in order.

6. Intentional speech, even though pronouncing a single letter, other than utterances relating to prayer, makes prayer invalid. The only exception here is the response to a salutation, which is compulsory, by repeating that salutation.

7. Doing anything that spoils the movements or utterances of prayer, such as rocking or swaying, invalidates prayer.

8. Eating or drinking during prayer is not allowed, even if this does not spoil the acts and utterances of prayer.

9. [Deliberate crossing of one's hands, over the abdomen, while standing in prayer, in situations other than taqiyyah (hiding one's religious beliefs in order to protect oneself, family or property from harm)].

10. Deliberate utterance of the word "Amen", after the imam has finished reciting "Al-Fatiha" [or the person who is praying alone says it after he has recited it], if there was no case for taqiyyah.