

Core Curriculum

3 Foundations of Islam - Obligatory Acts

3.3 **Salāt: Obligatory Ritual Prayers in Islam**

INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to the Muslim Converts Channel! In this lesson, we will have an overview of the first and the most important of the furū‘ al-dīn called salāt.

More specifically, we will look into the difference between ritual prayer and supplication as well as the different kinds of obligatory and non-obligatory prayers in Islamic law.

BODY OF TEXT

And observe prayer (salāt) for it restrains one from immorality and wrongdoing and remembrance of God is indeed the greatest [good.] (Chapter 29, verse 45 of the Holy Qur’an)

The term for ritual prayer in Islam is called salāt. In pre-Islamic Arabic, salāt meant different things. The most common meaning, however, was that of an invocation, as in invoking God. The meaning, of course, is much more specific in Islam. When we talk about salāt in the furū‘ al-dīn we are talking about the five obligatory ritual prayers which all Muslims must believe in.

The times of these prayers are not static but dynamic as they follow the

movement of the sun.

The first prayer is the morning prayer. In Arabic it is called salāt al-fajr and it begins at dawn.

The second prayer begins at noon and is called salāt al-dhuhur,

the third is the afternoon prayer and it is called salāt al-‘asr,

the fourth praying is the sunset prayer called salāt al-maghrib

and finally, the last prayer is called salāt al-‘ishā which is the night-time prayer.

Each prayer has units called rak‘ats where you bow with your hands on your knees. The total amount of times a Muslim must do this is 17 times across 5 prayers throughout the day.

The five obligatory salāt are the most important rituals of Islam. Knowingly dismissing their obligatory nature is tantamount to apostasy in Islam. It is important for it is the foremost method of worship in Islam and it is the central practice which keeps a Muslim connected to Allah.

In one hadīth from our fifth Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir (as), he said the following about salāt:

The prayer is the pillar of religion and its parable is that of the pole of a tent – when the pole remains upright, the pegs and ropes remain straight and upright, but when the pole bends or breaks neither the pegs nor ropes remain straight.

Salāt is the foundation of religion. Without it, none of Islam’s other practices or beliefs will stand. We say this because salāt is what establishes our relationship with God.

But prayer must be done on God’s terms. We often think of praying to God in the form of a supplication where we supplicate to him in our own

personal manner and on our own time.

In Islam this is called a du‘ā, which is different from salāt as the latter is obligatory and involves special physical movements such as bowing and prostrating. Du‘ā, although a highly recommended act, is not obligatory to do.

But a relationship of servitude means that we must pray to God the way He wants and how He wants. This is how ritual prayer develops with its own specific movements and recitations.

Prayer is the only ritual in Islam that a person cannot be free from. One may be relieved from fasting, or Hajj, or any other ritual, but with prayer one may not do away with it as long as one is conscious, sane and reached puberty.

If we are too sick to pray for example, we can pray sitting down. If we are too sick for that, then we can pray lying down. If we cannot pray this way either, we can pray with our eyelids by opening and closing them as a sign of prostration. If our eyelids don't open, then we can pray inside our minds. Either way, we cannot escape from this obligation as long as one we are conscious.

There is another set of obligatory prayers in Islam, but they are less regular. These are called the Prayers of the Signs called salāt al-ayāt. These prayers are performed when special natural events happen. As a response to these events, like earthquakes, or special eclipses, it is obligatory for a Muslim to perform the salāt.

There are also funeral prayers for the dead called salāt al-mayyit which are obligatory on the community. This means that as long as a group of people fulfill this obligation, then others are relieved of it.

The other set of prayers in Islam are what we call “recommended” prayers. The word for recommended in Arabic is mustahab. Among other prayers, these include the Friday Prayers (called Salāt al-Jumu‘a in Arabic) and the two Eid Prayers. The first Eid prayer marks the end of

Ramadan, and the other marks the end of the Hajj season.

Connected to the daily obligatory salāt is a set of prayers we called nāfila. Nāfila prayers are extra prayers that one offers after an obligatory prayer. The most important of all of these extra prayers is what we call the late night prayer. The late night prayer is known as salāt al-layl in Arabic. This prayer is the most recommended of all extra prayers and it is the one prayer that is characteristic of spiritually high achieving Muslims.

In one hadīth from the Prophet Muhammad (s), he said the following about salāt al-layl:

When the servant of Allah turns to his Lord in the middle of the dark night, and whispers to Him, Allah establishes His light in his heart . . . then He tells the angels: O my angels, look at my servant. He has turned to Me in the middle of the dark night while the false ones are playing, and the heedless ones are sleeping; bear witness that I have forgiven him.

Until Next Time, Thank you for watching. As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh