

Salat

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



Prayer has always been an integral part of Islamic faith and is accorded a central place in the religious practices. Salat is the ritualized form of prayer laid out and codified in the Quran. Though Islam has formalized many practices in detail, salat has not been codified in detail in the Quran. The practices of Prophet Muhammed served as worthy of emulation and has been carried over into the religious practice in the form of oral reports called hadiths.

In the early stages Islam and its rituals were in a state of constant change and hence scholars and jurists spent considerable effort in expounding the religious practices of Muslims. The Quran places great emphasis on prayer and the prayer finds expression in various forms like supplication, remembrance, repentance, glorification, litany and ritual (p. 8054). Salat is the ritual part of the prayer and needs to be understood in this overall context. Keeping up with the schism in early Islam and subsequent formation of Sunni and Shia sects, salat has incorporated the influences of these sects.

Prayer is of such a paramount importance to the faith, it is also included in the Islamic jurisprudence and salat is one of the Five Pillars of Islam as defined in Islamic law ' Shariah'. Salat can either be mandatory or voluntary. It is voluntary when one has reached the age of reason and obligatory when one has reached puberty (p. 8055). There are exact and stringent specifications for conducting salat and Islamic laws describe them in detail. Though men and women performed the prayers together in Muhammad's time, the later hadiths have excluded or severely limited presence of women in the communal salat performed in the mosques.

Islam stresses communal prayer and hence the mosque forms the central locus for salat. It is permitted to conduct salat on the street or elsewhere, if no mosque is available. In the early days of Islam salat was performed three times in a day, but later hadiths took reference to Muhammad's night journey and increased the number of mandatory salats to five in a day. Muslims are called to prayer by muezzin fifteen minutes before the salat time and the muezzin calls out by glorifying God and his messenger Muhammad.

Before the salat begins the followers of the faith should make themselves clean for the ritual by cleansing themselves with water. Shariah specifies both major impurities, which require a complete bath and minor impurities that require ablution at the mosque itself. Apart from the physical purity, one also has to purify himself mentally by declaring the intention to pray. Various schools of thought differ on this aspect i. e. some schools say that intention should be pronounced audibly and some say it should be silent.

The very act of performing the salat is pretty simple and brief. According to Shariah " each salat consists of two or four cycles of bowing, called rak'ah" (p. 8057). It also specifies that at least seventeen cycles should be completed in a day during the five salats. Salat is performed by a series of steps accompanied by specified incantations. For example, salat begins with the incantation " God is great" followed by certain bodily movements. The Sunnis and Shias have different interpretations here as well.

This is then followed by extolling the glory of God and finally the follower performs various other actions like asking for forgiveness or offers petitions to

the God. Salat needs to be understood not only as a pure ritual form but also needs to be located in the historical context. Salat has played a fundamental role in forging a Muslim identity. It has also been interpreted as a path to spiritual encounter with God or merely as ritual observance and submission to God's law (p. 8058). For the followers however salat denotes purification of mind and body and union with the God.