



# Islam, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism

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## Prayer, Islam

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## Synonyms

Du‘ā’ ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100201](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100201)); ‘ibādat ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100202](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100202)); Namāz ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100203](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100203)); ṣalāh ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100204](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100204)); ṣalāt ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100205](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100205)); ṣolāt ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100206](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100206)); Supplication ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100207](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100207)); Worship ([https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\\_100208](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100208))

## Definition

Prayer in Islam is known as *ṣalāt*, or *ṣalāh*, or *ṣolāt*, the plural of which is *ṣalawāt*. In Persian and Urdu, *ṣalāt* is known as *namāz*, a term widely used by Muslims in the Indian subcontinent. The Arabic term *ṣalāt* has a wide range of meanings such as supplication (*du‘ā’*), invocation (*zīkr* or *dhīkr*), mercy (*raḥmat*), worship (*‘ibādat*), glorification (*tasbīḥ*), recitation (*qira‘ah*), etc. It is one of the five pillars (*arkān al-Islām al-khamsa*) prescribed by God for Muslims five times a day.

## Conditions of Prayer

Unlike other religions, *ṣalāt* or prayer is not confined to a specific place; any Muslim, regardless of social status and geographical location, can perform this sacerdotal rite anywhere on earth [8], even on an airplane, bus, car, train, wheelchair, and so forth, and in any position – sitting, standing, and lying. Prayer has five conditions: (1)

ablution (cleanliness of the body with clean water or earth and cleanliness of the place of worship enshrined in the Qur'ān, V:6); (2) specific time (prescribed times, Qur'ān, IV:103); (3) direction (facing the *Ka'ba*, the sacred cubical block house in Mecca, Qur'ān, II:143); (4) covering specific parts of the body; and (5) performing a series of bows and prostrations accompanied by some recitation from the Qur'ān.

## Historical Development of Prayer

The term *ṣalāt* contains several roots [1] of which the most relevant one is *ṣilāt*, which means “connection” or “correction,” and from this standpoint, *ṣalāt* connects the servant (*‘abd*) with his or her Lord (*Rabb*). The term *ṣalāt* can be further elucidated in the context of *ṣilāt al-rahīm*, which means “close relations” between consanguineous relatives. However, scholars attempt to trace the origin of the term *ṣalāt* in an Aramaic word *ṣalāt*, meaning “bowing” in order to find external influences on Islamic prayer [5]. John Bowker, for instance, studied *ṣalāt* in Islam in comparison with *Kusti* in Zoroastrianism [3].

The term *ṣalāt* refers to a certain type of worship during the Meccan period of revelation. Historians of the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad (*Sīrah*) claim that the first order the Prophet was given by God was *ṣalāt*. Ibn Ishāq narrated that *ṣalāt* was prescribed for the Prophet from the very beginning of revelation in the cave of Hira in 610 C.E. It is believed that Archangel Gabriel showed him how to perform ablution and the postures to offer *ṣalāt*. Since then, the Prophet of Islam performed the *ṣalāt* with two cycles (*rak'ah*) twice a day – morning and evening. In the ninth year of his mission, he made a miraculous journey from Mecca consisting of *isrā'* (journey from Mecca to Jerusalem) and *mī'rāj* (nocturnal ascent to the heavens from Jerusalem) to the Divine Presence Itself and, according to a *ḥadīth*, was gifted with 5 times daily prayers – reduced from the initial 50 times at the advice of Moses ([4], *Ḥadīth* No: 3674) – to be observed by himself as well as his followers [6]. Thus, it became obligatory to all Muslims in the second century A.H. (*anno hijri*). The Qur'ān explicitly and implicitly refers to its importance in as many as 83 places; for instance, “establish prayer (*ṣalāt*) and pay the poor-due (*zakāt*)” (Q. II:43).

## Norms of Prayer

The way prayer is performed with stipulated postures is the way God wants human beings to perform it. The Prophet, who was taught by Gabriel, disseminated this canonical rite to his followers, as he said “pray as you see me pray” ([4], *Ḥadīth* No: 206). It is worth mentioning that Jerusalem had been the first direction (*qiblah*) of facing in prayers, before it was replaced with the sacred Mosque (*Ka'ba*) in Mecca by a Divine Order (Q. II:150). Thus, *ṣalāt*, developed during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, has been transformed from generation to generation without, of course, innovating any new form of worship (*‘ibādah*).

At the outset, the very first utterance of prayer begins with “I take refuge in Allah from Satan, the outcast” followed by “In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.” Formal performance of *ṣalāt* starts with *takbīr* (saying *Allāhu Akbar*/Allah is the Great(est)) and ends with *taslīm* (saying *al-salām alaykum*/may peace be upon you).

The person willing to perform *ṣalāt* must be clean physically as a prerequisite and should undergo ritual purity known as *wudhu*, comprising a few steps of cleansing hands, feet, etc. Proper dress-code for men and women is also recommended; for men, to cover the area from navel to ankle without exposing the shape of the private parts and for women to cover the entire body except face and wrists. The person who makes *ṣalāt* has to face the direction of the *Ka'ba* in Mecca (*qiblah*) and to follow the way performed by the Prophet Muḥammad.

The supplication including recitation during the *ṣalāt* is meant to be conducted in the Arabic language; however, supplication in vernacular languages can be offered after finishing the formal *ṣalāt*. Furthermore, Muslims do not need a mediator such as a priest or agent to perform prayer; however, *ṣalāt* performed in a group or with the congregation is usually led by an *imām* (religious leader). And it is crucial to mention that due to the differences of the Muslim schools of jurisprudence (*madhhab* or *mazhab*), variation of prayer in terms of bodily movement, or postures, is observed across the Muslim world.

## Kinds of Prayer

Primarily, prayer can be classified into two types: the obligatory (*farḍ*) and the non-obligatory (*sunnah*). The obligatory prayers constitute five times a day, namely, dawn (*fajr*, approximately 1 hour before sunrise, noon (*zuhr*), afternoon (*‘aṣr*), evening (*maghrib*), and night (*‘ishā’*). The optional prayers are offered after or before obligatory *ṣalāt*.

Apart from those mentioned above, there are also other prayers such as *Eid* prayers (*wājib/sunnah*, *Eid* – a Muslim festival – is observed twice in the Muslim lunar calendar as *Eid al-fitr* and *Eid al-aḏḏhā*), supererogatory prayer (*nafl*), concluding prayer at night (*witr*), funeral prayer (*janāza*), late night prayer (*tahajjud*), Ramaḏān prayer (*tarāwīḥ*), Friday noon prayer (*jummah*) – the last being obligatory for men in the mosque led by a religious leader (*imām*) with a sermon (*khuṭbah*), etc. On the spiritual level, prayer embedded in supplication encompasses every aspect of human life; mystics may offer supplication by way of reciting a verse of the Qur’ān for and against changes and moves in nature, for instance, supplication for rain in drought, supplication against war, supplication on sighting the new moon, etc.

## Implications of Prayer

Prayer lies at the heart of Islamic rituals as a means for enhancing inter-personal and intra-personal relationship and establishing inner connectivity between humans and God in the realm of spiritual reality. In their daily prayers, Muslims, for example, among the Ṣūfīs in India belonging to the Hanafī *madhhab*, revere the earlier prophets of Islam such as Moses and Jesus, whom the Prophet met on his celestial journey, *mī'rāj* – “the prototype of all spiritual wayfaring and realization in Islam” [8]. The inner significance of prayer lies in remembering God, His bounty, and His mercy upon man and the world created by Him, as He says: *There is no deity except Me, so worship Me and establish prayer for My remembrance* (Q. XX:14). True, the human hearts, the citadel loci of human conducts, find rest or peace by way of the invocation

of God (XIII:28), for invocation (*dhikr/zikr*) purges the hearts from cluttering caused by false pride, jealousy, hypocrisy, lying, etc. In daily prayers, the optimal virtue (*ihsān*) is the realization of the presence of God, as the Prophet articulates, “that you worship Allah as if you were seeing Him; and if you couldn’t see Him He is seeing you” ([4], Ḥadīth No. 50). Therefore, Islamic prayer is offered with the intent (*niyyah*) and awareness of surrendering only to God (Q. II:83).

The Qur’ān holds that each of His creation in this world belongs to God (Q. XV:21), that each has been created by God in proportion and measure (Q. LIV:49), and that each one of them prays and exalts Him in its own way (Q. XXIV:41). Muslims pray to Him simply, because God has obliged them to do so, and thus by doing so, human beings obey God’s Will, as God says: *I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me* (Q. LI:56). Islam says that God also bestowed upon the earlier prophets before the Prophet Muḥammad with Divine message and asked them to worship only God. In this context, God says to the Prophet: *We have never sent a messenger before thee except that We revealed to him, (saying): There is no god but I, so worship Me* (Q. XXI:25). According to the prophetic tradition, *ṣalāh* distinguishes a believer from a non-believer ([7], Ḥadīth No: 1078). Muslims believe that the first question in the Hereafter will be concerning *ṣalāh* based upon which other actions of life in this world will be judged ([2], Ḥadīth No: 413).

The person who prays to God consistently and constantly with an attitude of submission to Him and engages in good deeds will be rewarded in the afterlife. Thus, the opt-quoted prophetic tradition is “prayer is the key to heaven” [2]. It is worth mentioning that *ṣalāt* has simplified forms to facilitate those who require special arrangement of postures owing to their health conditions and circumstances. In performing prayers, devotees feel the soul’s calmness and tranquility, happiness and pleasure, peace and inspiration, and above all God’s grace (*barakah*) and His Presence. For Muslims invoke God in prayer, and God recalls them, as He says in the Qur’ān: *Remember Me; and I remember you* (Q. II:152).

A human being is the microcosm of the body, the mind, and the soul that together can make a harmonious relationship through prayer – vocal or silent. Thus, prayer is not to be discerned merely as a ritual activity to expose religious service to God; rather, it is an indispensable means for developing an intimate communion with God with a fervent zeal for spiritual reality, in other words, to transform oneself from what the Qur’ān (LXXXXV:4–5) holds, “the lowest of the low” (*asfala safīlīn*) to “the best stature” (*aḥsānī taqwīm*) – the pristine purity of human nature. Supplication (*munājāt*) to God encapsulated in prayer is offered, reflecting the socio-political and economic affairs of supplicants, for the protection from mischievous conduct. The Qur’ān says: *Lo! Worship (ṣalāt) preserveth from lewdness and iniquity, but verily remembrance of Allah is more important* (Q. XXIX:45).

Metaphysically speaking, prayer means supplication, which facilitates a two-way communication between God and humans, as stated in a *ḥadīth al-qudsī* (considered extra-Qur’ānic revelation). When a worshipper offering *ṣalāt* recites the opening chapter (*ṣūrat al-fātiḥah*) of the Qur’ān, which is compulsory in each cycle (*rak’ah*), God expresses His happiness with this communication and answers to him directly without any agent or mediator. As God says in the *ḥadīth-al-qudsī*: “This is for My servant, and My servant shall have what [s/] he has asked for” ([7], Ḥadīth No: 395).

Thus, even though the communication between humanity and God formally ceased with the completion of the prophetic mission to humankind, it continues indirectly through *ṣalāt* and supplication.

## Cross-References

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- [Festival](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_100293) (https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\_100293)
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- [Qur'ān Translation in South Asia](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_863) (https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\_863)
- [Ramadān](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_866) (https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\_866)
- [Ummah](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3_2016) (https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1267-3\_2016)
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