

Salat: The ritual prayer

Introduction

The salat has been described in some ahadith as "the pillar of religion." Imam 'Ali (a.s.), after receiving the fatal injury by Ibn Muljim (may Allah curse him), in a part of his advice to his sons, al-Hasan and al-Husayn (a.s.) said, "[Fear] Farewell Allah, and keep Allah in view with regardst salat, for it is the pillar of your religion. [Fear] Allah, and keep Allah in the matter of the house of your Lord (i.e., mosque): do not leave it empty as long as you live."^{[1](#)}

As-Sukuni narrates from Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.), "The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.) said, 'Satan is frightened from a believer as long as he keeps up salat on time; but when he starts neglecting them, Satan becomes emboldened and tempts him to commit major (sins).'"^{[2](#)} Yazid bin Khalifa said that he heard Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) say, "When a person stands for salat, mercy descends upon him from the heaven to the earth and the angels engulf him, and an angel calls out: 'if this person knew what is [the reward] for the salat, he would never stop.'"^{[3](#)}

From these [few selected ahadith] we can understand the clear and obvious importance of salat in Islam. And since salat is like having audience with the Almighty Allah (as the ahadith have it that a person standing for prayer is as if he is standing in audience of the Almighty), the worshiper should approach Allah through presence of heart by not thinking or occupying his mind with anything worldly and transitory. Almighty Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

"Indeed successful are the believers who are humble in their prayers." (24: 1)

When Imam 'Ali Zaynu 'l-'Abideen (a.s.) said his salat, he used to stand "firm and motionless like a tree: nothing moves on it except what is moved by the wind."^{[4](#)} When the Imams, al-Baqir and as-Sadiq (a.s.), stood for their salat, "their colour would change to red and then yellow as if they were talking to someone whom they could see."^{[5](#)}

General Rules

71. The mujtahids say that salat cannot be skipped under any circumstances. It means that it is not to be omitted whether one is travelling or at home; even if the time is running out, it is obligatory upon the Muslim, for example a traveller, to say his salat in a plane, ship, car, or a train whether stationary or moving; it could be performed any where: in the waiting room, in a public park, on the side of a road, or at the work-place, etc.

72. When it is not possible for the traveller to say the salat in a plane or a car or a train in a standing position, he should say it while he is seated.

If it is not possible for him to find the direction of the qiblah, he should face the direction that he most probably thinks to be the qiblah; if he is unable to prefer one direction to the other, he should pray in whatever direction he is facing. If it is not possible to face the qiblah except for takbiratul ihram (the opening "Allahu akbar"), he should at the least say the takbir facing the direction of qiblah. (See the question-answer section below.)

73. It is permissible to ask the airhostess about the direction of the qiblah so that she may ask the pilot about it. If you have confidence in their information, you can rely on it even if they are non-Muslims.

Similarly, it is permissible to rely on scientific instruments for determining the direction of the qiblah, for example the compass, if a Muslim is convinced about its correctness.

74. If a Muslim cannot do wudhu (minor ritual ablution) for the salat, then he should do tayammum instead.

75. The length of day and night differs from place to place. If the day and the night are clearly known by the rising of the sun and its setting, the Muslim should rely on the rising and the setting of the sun for determining the times for salat and fasting. This is so even if that means that the prayers have to be said more frequently shorter days or that fasting becomes lengthier shorter nights.

76. In some places the sun does not set or does not rise at all for a number of days or months. As a matter of precaution Muslims should rely on the timings of the closest city that has night and day in a twenty-four hour period. Thus, they will, pray five salats according to the times of that closest city with the intention of qurbat in general [i.e., without saying ada (prayer on time) or qadha (prayer outside its time)].

77. If it is not possible for a Muslim to determine the beginning of true dawn (fajr) or the midday or sunset for his prayers and fasting, and he has faith in the timings given by the observatories, he can rely on the same, even if the scientists running the observatories are non-Muslims—as long as you have faith in their determining true dawn or noon or sunset times.

78. For a traveller, it is obligatory to say salat in qasr form; that is, he will recite the noon, afternoon and night prayers only two cycles (rak'at) [instead of the normal four rak'at] provided he travels for forty-four kilometers or more (in both ways), starting from the last houses of his city in normal cases.[6](#)

There are detailed and specific rules in the Manual of Islamic Laws explaining when to pray qasr and when not to pray qasr while travelling. (For some rules, see the questions–answers at the end of this section.)

79. Praying Friday salat with due attention to its required conditions is preferable to praying the noon salat, and is sufficient; that is, if a person says Friday prayer, he does not have to say noon prayer.

80. Praying in congregation (jama'at) is preferable to praying individually. Its preference is stronger in the dawn, sunset and night prayers. A noble hadith says: "A salat [in congregation] behind a learned scholar is like [praying] a thousand cycles; and behind a Qurayshi is like [praying] a hundred cycles." As the number of the worshippers increases, the preference [and the reward] also increases.

Questions and Answers

81. **Question:** A person used to make mistakes in the way he performed his wudhu (minor ablution) or ghusl (major ablution). After many years, he comes to realize his mistakes. When he inquires as how to solve his problem, he is told: "Repeat all your prayers and perform the pilgrimage again." Since saying all the prayers and doing the pilgrimage again is difficult, is there a solution which would salvage his prayers and pilgrimage performed with wudhu and ghusl that he thought was correct? Is there such a solution as a concession to this person so that he does not become disheartened and rebellions against religious obligations in a society which encourages such kind of rebellion?

Answer: If he was ignorant out of innocence, and therefore made mistakes without causing harm (e.g., did not follow the proper sequence in washing the head and the other parts of the body in ghusl; or did the wiping of the head or feet [mash] with a new water), then his wudhu and ghusl will be considered correct; and, consequently, his past prayers and pilgrimage will also be considered correct.

But if he was ignorant out of negligence in learning the Islamic laws or did mistakes which do invalidate the act in general (e.g., leaving out some parts of the body which must be washed in wudhu or ghusl), there is no way to validate his past prayers and pilgrimage.

However, if there is the fear that he would totally rebel when asked to make up all the past prayers and pilgrimage, then it is not appropriate to ask him to do so. Maybe Allah will improve his situation in future.

82. **Question:** Some people pray for years and even perform pilgrimage, yet they do not pay khums.[7](#) Is it obligatory on them to repeat their prayers and pilgrimage?

Answer: Based on precaution, it is obligatory on them to repeat prayers and pilgrimage, if the particular

dress that they used in prayers, in tawaf and in salat of tawaf was from items on which khums had become due.

However, if only the dress they used in salat of tawaf was from items on which khums had become due, and they were ignorant (even out of negligence) of the law or the status of the dress, their pilgrimage is valid, but they have to repeat salat of tawaf if they had no excuse for their ignorance.

[In this case,] they have, as a matter of precaution to return to Mecca [to perform the salat of tawaf again], if it does not entail great difficulty; otherwise they can perform that salat wherever they are.

Similarly, they will have to do the pilgrimage again if the animal offered as a sacrifice was bought with money on which khums had become due. However, if they had bought it with money whose unspecific portion was liable for khums –as is the case normally – there is no problem in their pilgrimage, even if they used it from the money on which khums had become liable; of course, they will be responsible for that amount [for payment of khums].

All this is applicable, if they knew about the obligation of khums and the law forbidding them to utilize items on which khums has become wajib or if they were ignorant out of negligence. But, if they were ignorant out of innocence, their prayers and pilgrimage are valid.

83. Question: If a traveller leaves his home town immediately after the adhan of noon prayer, i.e. without saying that prayer, and reaches his destination after sunset, has he committed a sin? And is it obligatory on him to make up for noon prayer?

Answer: Yes, he has committed a sin by neglecting the obligatory prayer in its appropriate time, and he has to make it up.

84. Question: Is the ink that had dried [on our hands, for example] a barrier to perform wudhu or ghusl

Answer: If it does not form a mass that would prevent water from reaching the skin, the wudhu and ghusl is valid. However, if one has doubt whether it forms a mass or not, it must be removed.

85. Question: Is it permissible for a Muslim to involve in pleasure by continuing to watch an entertaining movie even, though salat time is due, and then he goes to say his prayers just before it becomes overdue (qadha)?

Answer: It is not appropriate for a Muslim to delay the saying of salat from its preferred time (i.e., at the beginning of its time span) except for an excuse; what has been mentioned in the question is not an acceptable excuse.

86. Question: Is cream a barrier to water reaching the skin, and if so should it be removed prior to wudhu and ghusl?

Answer: Apparently the effect left on the skin after it is applied is nothing but just moisture, and so it does not constitute a barrier to water reaching the skin.

87. **Question:** Some women let their nails grow longer than necessary for beauty. Sometimes a nail breaks up, requiring a cover that must be placed over the broken nail. Knowing that such a cover prevents water from reaching the nail in wudhu and ghusl, is it permissible to use it? How should wudhu and ghusl be performed with that cover?

Answer: Wudhu and ghusl with such a cover over the nail is not valid; therefore, it is necessary to remove it for ablutions. And the purpose mentioned above for the cover is not justifiable.

88. **Question:** When should one say his salat full (tamam) and when should one say it qasr (two rakat instead of four)? Is the general perception about a person being resident of a city sufficient for him to say his salat fully [in that city]?

Answer: The conditions for qasr in travelling have been mentioned in the Manual of Islamic Laws. When a person considers residing in a city for a long time, and in the general perception it is considered as such, he is not considered as a traveller (e.g., if he intends to reside in that city for year and a half, it will be considered as his home-town after one month). But if he intends to stay in that city for a short while only and is considered, in the general sense, as a visitor, he should pray qasr.

89. **Question:** How can we know the time of mid-night? Do 00.00 hours the point of mid-night as it is commonly held by some people?

Answer: Midnight is halfway between sunset and true dawn. So if the sun sets at 7 p.m. and the true dawn begins at 4 a.m., then midnight will be at 11:30 p.m. The criteria for determining midnight are the timings of sunset and true dawn, which differ according to place and season.

90. **Question:** A person who believes that he will not be able to wake up for dawn prayer if he goes to sleep, is it obligatory on him to stay awake till the time of prayer? Is he committing a sin if he sleeps and does not wake up for dawn prayer?

Answer: It is possible for him to ask someone to wake him up for dawn prayer or use an alarm clock, etc, for this purpose. If these means of waking up are not possible, then he is not committing a sin by going to sleep unless it is considered, as is widely believed, an insult to, and neglect of, the salat.

91. **Question:** How can we say our obligatory prayers in an aircraft, especially if we do not know the direction of the qiblah taking into consideration the instability of the floor [because the plane is in motion]?

Answer: As for the qiblah, it is possible to identify its direction by asking the captain or the airhostesses because their answers usually carry validity and are a source of assurance. One should therefore act accordingly.

As for the stability of the floor where salat is to be performed, that condition will be waived when it is not possible to achieve it. However, other conditions of prayers should, wherever possible, be observed. Under no circumstance should the prayer be delayed beyond its appropriate time span.

92. Question: How should we say our salat in trains and cars? Is it necessary to do prostration (sajda) on something or is it not necessary, in that would bending of the neck be sufficient?

Answer: It is obligatory to say salat in the usual way where possible. So, one should face the qiblah in all stages of the salat; if not, at least while saying the opening takbir. Otherwise the condition of facing the qiblah will be dropped.

Similarly, if it is possible to do the bowing (ruku') and prostration (sajdah) normally (e.g., in the aisle of the bus or the train), those parts of salat should be done normally. But if it is not possible, then one should try to bow normally for ruku' and sajdah [for example, from a sitting position on the seat or the berth of the train].

For sajdah, one has to put the forehead on an item on which sajdah is valid, even if by lifting that item to the forehead. If bowing normally is not possible, one should just indicate by bending the neck [halfway for ruku and fully for sajdah].

93. Question: If the time for salat has come while the student is still on his way to the university. When he reaches the university, he realizes that the time of salat has ended. In this case, is it permissible for him to say salat in the car although there are places in which he could pray, yet by going to those places he may risk becoming late [for his university]?

Answer: The delay in getting to the work place [or university] is not a good enough reason for praying in the car. This is because it involves non fulfillment of some of its conditions while it is possible to get down and pray normally on the earth with all the conditions fulfilled. However, if the delay is going to cause him considerable harm or put him in an untenable situation, it is permissible for him to pray in the car, (without being able to fulfill some of prayer's conditions).

94. Question: It happens that the time of salat sets in while the Muslim worker is at his work-place, – noting that finding work is not easy – thus, he finds it difficult to leave the work for salat. Sometimes he ends up losing his job because of his insistence on saying salat. Is he allowed to say his prayers as qadha? Or must he say them [on time], even if it leads to him losing his job?

Answer: If the need to work at that place reaches the level of necessity, then he should pray in time in whatever way possible: even just by indicating [by lowering the neck halfway for ruku' and fully for sajdah]. However, such a situation would arise only exceptionally. So he should fear Almighty Allah and not accept a job which leads to neglecting the pillar of faith; thus, he should remember the words of the Almighty: "And whosoever fears Allah, He will make a way out for him [from difficulties] and provide for him from where he does not expect." (65:2)

95. **Question:** Many big companies and business in the West employ large numbers of employees who work in offices about whose ownership they have no idea. So what is the ruling on:

- a. Praying in those offices and using the water for wudhu?
- b. If praying there is problematic, what would become of past prayers said in those places?

Answer:

a. There is no problem in praying in those places nor in using the water for wudhu as long as it is not known to have been usurped.

b. If it becomes clear after saying the salat that the property was usurped, the past prayers are valid.

96. **Question:** If I pray with a leather belt or a wallet made from leather of a mayta and realize it during the salat or after finishing it but before the end of its time span or after the ending of its time span—what would become of that prayer?

Answer: The prayer with a wallet made from leather of a mayta is valid just as it is acceptable to pray with a belt made from such a leather, provided that the probability of it being from zabiha is not a very low probability that would be ignored by sensible people.

In the second case [of very low probability], if he was ignorant [of this rule] and realized during salat, he should take it off immediately and his salat would be valid. The same rule would apply if he forgot [that he had the wallet or the belt on him] and remembered during salat, provided that his forgetfulness was not a result of carelessness and indifference. In other cases, he will have to repeat salat in time or qadha as a matter of obligatory precaution.

97. **Question:** One of the famous trousers these days is the one known as jeans. It is made in non-Muslim countries. It has a piece of leather used as a label. It is not known whether the leather is that of an animal slaughtered Islamically or non-Islamically—is it permissible to say salat with these trousers?

Answer: Yes, it is permissible.

98. **Question:** Is salat valid if the person uses cologne? Is cologne ritually pure?

Answer: Yes, it is pure.

99. **Question:** Is it alright to do sajdah on concrete or on mosaic?

Answer: Yes, it is alright.

100. **Question:** Some prayer-mats are made of synthetic material; is it permissible to do sajdah on them?

Answer: Sajdah on such items is not good enough.

101. **Question:** Is it permissible to do sajdah on writing paper and on paper tissues, especially, if it is not known whether or not the raw material they are made of was from items on which sajdah is valid?

Answer: It is not permissible to do sajdah on paper tissues, only after ascertaining that they have been made from items on which sajdah is allowed; it is permissible to do sajdah on paper if it is made from material on which sajdah is allowed or from cotton or flax.

102. **Question:** A reciter of the Holy Qur'an recites a verse of wajib sajdah, on hearing it from a cassette player, is it obligatory on us to do sajdah in this case?

Answer: It is not obligatory.

[1.](#) Tafsilu Wasa'ili 'sh-Shi'a, vol. 4, p. 35.

[2.](#) Imam 'Ali, Nahju 'l-Balagha (ed. Subhi as-Salih), p. 422.

[3.](#) Tafsilu Wasa'ili 'sh-Shi'a, vol. 4, p. 28.

[4.](#) Sayyid Muhammad Hadi al-Milani, Qudatuna: Kayfa Na'rifuhum, vol. 6, p. 164 which has a special section on the prayers of Imam Zaynu 'l-'Abideen (a.s.).

[5.](#) Sayyid as-Sistani, Minhaju 's-Saliheen, vol. 1, p. 193.

[6.](#) "In normal cases" means other than the major metropolitan cities where going from one end to another is considered travelling.

[7.](#) Translator's Note: Khums is an annual Islamic tax applied, among other things, on the savings. See the Manual of Islamic Laws or the present translator's, Khums: An Islamic Tax for details.

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