Timing and Clothing for Prayer

Timing and Clothing for Prayer

Mohammad Ali Shomali

Al-Islam.org

Article

Authors(s):

Mohammad Ali Shomali [1]

Timing and Clothing for Prayer

Mohammad Ali Shomali
International Institute for Islamic Studies, Qum

Spiritual Quest, Summer and Autumn 2012. Vol. 2. No. 2

******

One of the important aspects of prayer is to observe its correct timing. One is free to pray or speak to God at any time one wishes. However, ritual prayers have defined timings. Regarding this, Qur'an states,

فَإِذَا قَضَيْتُمُ الصَّلَاةَ فَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِكُمْ ۚ فَإِذَا اطْمَأْنَنْتُمْ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ ۚ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ كَانَتْ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ كِتَابًا مَوْقُوتًا

***When you have finished the prayers, remember Allah, standing, sitting and lying down, and when you feel secure, perform the* [*complete*] *prayers, for the prayer is indeed a timed prescription for the faithful*.** 1(4:103)

The requirement to perform prayers at set times is not a superfluous regulation prescribed to makes life difficult for the believers; rather, it is related to the fact that at those times we are in the greatest need of prayer. We need to energize ourselves with remembrance of God.

Similar to a battery which has to be charged with electricity at the proper time, the specified prayer times are the best times to regain our spiritual power and energy. God says in the Qur'an,

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ أُولَٰئِكَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ مُكْرَمُونَ

And those who are watchful of their prayers. They will be in gardens, held in honour. (***Qur'an 70:34-35***)

Unfortunately, many people say their prayers when it is convenient for them instead of immediately when the time for a particular prayer arrives. It is not a respectful treatment of prayer, and indeed of God, to perform it after completing all other tasks. Each prayer has its own carefully specified timing and one experiences spiritual growth by adjusting one's schedule to perform prayer at its appointed time. Prayer

shouldn't merely be part of our daily schedule, but it should occupy a central place in it.

However, unfortunately, many people carefully plan their daily tasks and even routine matters such as eating and sleeping, but do not set a fixed time for their prayer. It is unfortunate that many people build their lives around food, sleep, and business and so on when prayer is not a difficult or time-consuming task and can be performed in a few minutes without preventing us from carrying out our normal activities.

In Qur'an 2:238, God says,

حَافِظُوا عَلَى الصَّلَوَاتِ وَالصَّلَاةِ الْوُسْطَىٰ وَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ قَانِتِينَ

Be watchful of your prayers, and [***especially***] ***the middle prayer, and stand in obedience to Allah.*** (***2:238***)

According to some narrations, the middle prayer in this verse refers to the noon (zuhr) prayer. Interestingly, the first prayer performed by the Holy Prophet (s) was the noon prayer.

Some Narrations About Importance of Timing of Prayer

The holy Prophet of Islam (s) stated,

إذا زالت الشمس فتحت أبواب السماء وأبواب الجنان واستجيب الدعاء فطوبى لمن رفع له ذلك عمل صالح

When the sun passes the middle of the sky (i.e. at midday), the gates of heaven and the gates of Paradise will be opened and one's invocations will be answered [by God]. Joy is for the one from whom a righteous act is taken up [i.e., is accepted] at that time. ('Amili 1988, 4:165)

It is obvious that when the gates of heaven are open, one's supplications can reach the highest possible place. Also, when the gates of Paradise are open, one can receive its blessings; just like in the month of Ramadan when, according to the Holy Prophet (s), the gates of heaven are open. Thus, the precious moments of the blessed month of Ramadan can be partially experienced right after midday when the noon prayer is performed.

Imam Baqir (a) is reported to have said,

للمصلي ثلاث خصال إذا هو قام في صلاته: حفت به الملائكة من قدميه إلى أعنان السماء (3)، ويتناثر البر عليه من أعنان السماء إلى مفرق رأسه، وملك موكل به ينادي: لو يعلم المصلي من يناجي ما انفتل

There are three merits for those who perform prayers: when they stand for prayer, the angels surround them from their feet up to heaven; blessings descend upon their head from heaven; and an angel, appointed for them calls, "If they knew with whom they are conversing, they would never stop [praying]." (ʿAmili 1988, 4:33)

According to this narration, the one who performs prayer is not alone; rather, he/she is accompanied by a great number of God's angels. Likewise, we should not consider saying prayers to be like leaving recorded voice messages for a person who will listen to them later. This image is totally wrong. God listens to those who say prayers at the same moment, so much so that, after praising God in the state of rukuʿ, we stand up and say, سمع الله لمن حمده له (God heard the one who praised Him), which indicates that at the same moment that the praying person praises God in ruku,, the Almighty listens attentively to them. Hence سميع (All– Hearing) and مجيب (Responsive) are amongst divine attributes and our appointed angel declares that if we knew completely and perfectly to Whom we are talking and whispering, then we would never want to stop doing so.

Regarding the significance of timing, Imam Sadiq (a) has said,

> إذا صليت صلاة فريضة ، فصلها لوقتها صلاة مودّع يخاف أن لا يعود إليها أبداً

When you intend to perform your obligatory prayer, perform it on time, like the prayer of a person who is about to depart [this life] worried that they may never have another opportunity to perform prayer. (ʿAmili 1988, 4:34)

If we were somehow able to realize that the time of our death had arrived and we only had the opportunity to perform two units (rakʿa) of prayer, then we would try to perform them in the best possible way we could, because we knew that it was our last chance to speak with God and ask Him for His mercy and forgiveness, which we will desperately need in the Hereafter. So Imam Sadiq (a) reminds us that each prayer we perform may be our last prayer, since no one is aware of the time of their death. Therefore, we have to appreciate each opportunity for prayer and try to perform it in the best possible way we can.

It may be helpful to remember that postponing the prayer does not reduce its supposed difficulty as prayers must be performed, whether on time or delayed. So if this is the case, then why not perform them on time to gain greater rewards and blessings? Satan frightens us with an illusion of difficulty which quickly vanishes if we do not listen to him for a while and practice performing our prayers on time.

In another narration, Imam Sadiq (a) has been quoted as saying,

> إن العبد إذا صلى الصلاة في وقتها وحافظ عليها ارتفعت بيضاء نقية، تقول: حفظتني حفظك الله، وإذا لم يصلها لوقتها ولم يحافظ عليها ارتفعت سوداء مظلمة، تقول: ضيعتني ضيعك الله

Indeed, when a servant [of God] says their prayer on time and cares about it, their prayer will ascend [to heaven] while being illuminated and pure, and will tell them, "You cared about me; may God care about you!" But if they do not say their prayer at its proper time and do not care about their prayer, it will ascend [to heaven], while being dark and black, and will tell them, "You neglected me. May God neglect you! (Ibn Babawayh 1992, 1:209)

In the same vein as the second part of this narration, Qur'an 19:59 states:

فَخَلَفَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ خَلْفٌ أَضَاعُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَاتَّبَعُوا الشَّهَوَاتِ ۖ فَسَوْفَ يَلْقَوْنَ غَيًّا

***"But they were succeeded by an evil posterity who neglected the prayer, and followed* [*their base*] *appetites. So they will soon encounter* [*the reward of*] *perversity."*(*19:59*)**

Therefore, in addition to those who fail to perform their prayers, those who constantly perform their prayers without adequate care and attention should also be worried. God has warned this latter group in Qur'an 107:4–5:

فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ

***"Woe to them who pray, those who are heedless of their prayers."*(*107:4–5*)**

Obviously, when those who perform their prayers heedlessly are faced with such grave warnings, the fate of those who totally deprive themselves of prayer is extremely perilous.

Clothing and Its Role in Prayer

Wearing proper clothing during prayer is one of the conditions for acceptance prayer. Prayer clothes must be ritually clean (tahir). The one who prays must own or have the permission to use the clothing. Wearing other people's clothes without their permission, even to the extent of a single thread is forbidden and invalidates one's prayer. Correct ownership of clothing also entails that it must not be part of the one-fifth (khums) of one's property which belongs to the Imam of our time (a) and has to be submitted to his representatives, who would give a part of it to poor people among the descendants of the Prophet (s) and spend the rest in the cause of Islam.

Thus, praying in clothes bought with money which has khums due on it makes the prayer invalid. Many people detest the idea of refusing to pay back their debts to people but do not have the same feeling when they fail to pay khums, while both acts are equally abhorred and forbidden. It could even be claimed that refusing to pay khums is worse, because it is in fact stealing the property of the Imam of our time (a) and the poor among the descendants of the Prophet (s).

Another condition for the clothing of prayer is that it should cover the body correctly. The details of this condition are different for men and women and are explained in Islamic law manuals.

The Importance of Wearing Nice Clothes in Prayer

According to some narrations, it is recommended to put on one's best clothes during prayer (especially if one is praying in a mosque), because when we pray we meet and speak with God, the Lord of the worlds. Although God does not need it, putting on nice clothes during prayer is a sign of our attention to and respect for prayer. Furthermore, as believers, we should not be concerned about our fine clothes becoming worn out in prayer. Regarding this, the Holy Prophet of Islam (s) has said,

من اتقى على ثوبه في صلاته فليس لله اكتسى

The one who is worried about his clothes [becoming worn out] in his prayer has not put on clothes for the sake of God. ('Amili 1988, 4:454)

Wearing one's good clothes when one goes to a mosque is highly recommended. Qur'an 7:31 reads,

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ خُذُوا زِينَتَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ

"O, Children of Adam! Take care about your adornment, [***regarding proper and clean garments***] ***at every mosque*** [***or place of worship***]***."***

As one's children are regarded as one's adornment (18:46), some scholars have suggested that, according to this verse, taking one's children to mosques is advisable. Of course, one has to look after one's children to avoid causing any inconvenience to other people.

Spiritual Clothing as Compared to Material Clothing

Whilst keeping all these physical conditions in mind, one should not forget the spiritual aspects of clothing when one puts on one's clothes for prayer. All physical aspects of prayer are meaningful, replete with secrets, and deserve contemplation.

Regarding this, Imam Sadiq (a) has been quoted as saying,

أزين اللباس للمؤمن لباس التقوى، وانعمه الإيمان، قال الله ـ تعالى ـ: ولباس التقوى ذلك خيرٌ وأما اللباس الظاهر، فنعمة من الله ـ تعالى ـ تستر بها عورات بني آدم... ولا تفضح أحداً حيث ستر الله عليك ما اعظم منه. واشتغل بعيب نفسك واصفح عما لا يعنيك حاله وامره. واحذر أن يفنى عمرك بعمل غيرك، ويتجر برأس مالك غيرك، وتهلك نفسك، فان نسيان الذنوب من أعظم عقوبة الله... وما دام العبد مشتغلا بطاعة الله ـ تعالى ـ، ومعرفة عيوب نفسه،

وترك ما يشين في دين الله ـ عز وجل ـ، فهو بمعزل عن الآفات، خائض في بحر رحمه الله

The most beautiful clothing for a believer is God– consciousness and the most pleasant clothing is faith. God Almighty has said, "***Yet the garment of God– wariness that is the best"*** [***Qur'an 7:26***]. As for outer clothing, it is a blessing from God with which He covers the private parts of human beings. Do not disclose the faults of others since God has covered for you greater than that. Mind your own faults and do not interfere in what is irrelevant to you. Beware not to spend your lifetime on what other people do, not to let others do business using your capital, and not to cause your own destruction. Indeed, one of the greatest punishments of God is to forget your own sins. As long as a servant [of God] is busy obeying the Almighty, recognizing their own faults, and avoiding what damages their religiosity, they are far from harm, immersed in the sea of God's mercy. (Muhaddith Nuri 1987, 3:324–5).

Thus we see that although clothing is important for covering our physical body however it is much more important to have the clothing of piety otherwise we will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment with our sins visible to other people. In the Hereafter, the greatest pain suffered would be to lose our honour. Everyone will want to save themselves from being identified as a criminal but there will be nothing to hide behind. So, firstly we should not try to find out about other people's sins and if we do come to know about someone's sins then we should cover them up. We should provide protection to others so that God protects us.

Clothing as a Virtue for Human Beings

The blessing of clothing was bestowed by God upon humanity at the time of Prophet Adam (a). Before Adam (a) and Eve ate from the forbidden tree, their private parts were concealed. Qur'an 7:22 narrates the rest of the story:

فَدَلَّاهُمَا بِغُرُورٍ ۚ فَلَمَّا ذَاقَا الشَّجَرَةَ بَدَتْ لَهُمَا سَوْآتُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ ۚ وَنَادَاهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا أَلَمْ أَنْهَكُمَا عَنْ تِلْكُمَا الشَّجَرَةِ وَأَقُلْ لَكُمَا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمَا عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

"Thus he brought about their fall by deception. So when they tasted of the tree, their nakedness became exposed to them, and they began to stitch over themselves with the leaves of paradise. Their Lord called out to them, Did I not forbid you from that tree, and tell you, Satan is indeed your manifest enemy?"(***7: 22***)

God has made mankind different from other creatures in various ways, one of which is that other creatures have no idea about covering themselves, whereas human beings feel ashamed of being naked in front of others. This need for covering is related to our bodies, but we are in a much greater need of a covering that could hide our faults and imperfections. Out of His mercy, God provides us with this covering: He does not disclose our sins, some of which no one knows about except Him. Hence He

is called ستار العيوب (Concealer of defects).

God is so Merciful that He has even prohibited His sinful servants from telling other people about their own sins. Accordingly, in Islam, one is not allowed to confess one's sins to other people.

Obviously, then, if one becomes aware of someone else's sins, he is not allowed to tell others about them. Furthermore a much greater prohibition is made in Islam regarding falsely attributing sins to innocent people. Since God has covered our sins and He does not want His servants' reputation to be damaged, this then calls for us to refrain from disclosing other people's faults.

Looking for Faults of Others or Focusing on One's Own Faults?

Continuing with the review of clothing as a virtue, according to our narrations, instead of looking for other people's faults and imperfections, we should focus on our own faults. Imam Ali (a) has stated,

طوبى لمن شغله عيبه عن عيوب الناس

Joy is for the one whose [focus on] their own faults prevents them from [looking for] other people's faults. (Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 176)

A student taking a test is supposed to give his full attention to his own test; as he would fail if he kept looking at other students' test papers. Likewise, our lifetime is the only opportunity we have to build our eternal life so we must not waste it by focusing on other people's faults, instead of focusing on our own imperfections.

Rumi tells the story of four people who entered a masjid and started praying. When they were praying, the muadhdhin called for prayer, which meant that they had not performed their prayer at its correct time. While all of them were in the middle of performing their prayers, one of them started arguing with the muezzin about the time of prayer. His friend then told him, "Why did you speak in the middle of your prayer? Your prayer is void." The third person reproached the second person, saying, "You also spoke and your prayer is void as well." Hearing this, the fourth person said, "I give thanks to God that I did not speak to any of you!" Thus, they all made the same mistake because they were all focusing on each other's mistakes and therefore did not recognize their own faults. This is the problem that many of us have. We always criticize other people for their faults, even when we are making the same mistakes ourselves.

With respect to faults, we should be concerned about ourselves first, because if someone else goes astray we will not be accountable for their actions. Of course, this does not mean that we should forget about other people and not try to help them. We can always encourage good and discourage bad when it is appropriate.

Allamah Tabataba'i has said that part of caring for ourselves is to carry out our social duties as a responsibility which we must do. So we should firstly sort out our own problems and then try to help sort other people's problems

We are not required to be perfect, what is important is that we are in the process of reforming ourselves. If a doctor knows that his patient takes his medication on time and avoids harmful foods and drinks, the doctor would not be worried if the patient is not cured immediately. The problem occurs when the patient does not care about the doctor's instructions.

We are all spiritually ill because we are not infallible. What is important is to listen to our doctor, take our spiritual medication on time, and avoid anything that is harmful. This will increase our spiritual health day by day until all our spiritual diseases are cured and we become absolutely healthy in our spirituality. The significance of spiritual health becomes clearer if we know that on the Day of Judgment, the only thing that will help is having a "sound" heart. Qur'an 26:87-89, quoting Prophet Abraham (a), reads,

وَلَا تُخْزِنِي يَوْمَ يُبْعَثُونَ يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ

Do not disgrace me on the day that they will be resurrected, the day when neither wealth nor children will avail, except him who comes to Allah with a sound heart. (***26:87-89***)

Therefore, our most important duty is to start curing our spiritual illnesses immediately before our time is over. Based on the above- mentioned narration, there are glad tidings for those who start this spiritual journey and as the Holy Qur'an indicates, they will be embraced by God's love from the very beginning, because God loves those who seek purity (Qur'an 9:108).

As discussed in this paper, in order to get the most benefit from prayer, we need to make the effort to say the prayers on time and also be mindful of both physical and spiritual clothing.

References

The Holy Qur'an, Translated by Ali Quli Qara'i.

Nahj al-Balaghah. Subhi Salih edition.

'Amili, Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Hurr al-. Wasa,il al-Shi'a. Qum: Mu'assasat Al al-Bayt, 1988.

Ibn Babawayh, Muhammad b. Ali. Man La Yahduruh al-Faqih. Edited by Ali Akbar Ghaffari. Qum: Daftar Intisharat Islami, 1992.

Muhaddith Nuri, Husayn. Mustadrak al-Wasa,il wa Mustanbat al-Masa,il. Qum: Mu'assasat Al al-Bayt, 1987.

1. According to some hadiths, mawqutan means necessary, which is compatible with its literal meaning which has been stated above.

Get PDF [2] Get EPUB [3] Get MOBI [4]

Topic Tags:

Salah (Prayers) [5]
Youth [6]

Source URL:
https://www.al-islam.org/articles/timing-and-clothing-prayer-mohammad-ali-shomali#comment-0

Links
[1] https://www.al-islam.org/person/mohammad-ali-shomali
[2] https://www.al-islam.org/printpdf/book/export/html/41769
[3] https://www.al-islam.org/printepub/book/export/html/41769
[4] https://www.al-islam.org/printmobi/book/export/html/41769
[5] https://www.al-islam.org/tags/salah-prayers
[6] https://www.al-islam.org/tags/youth