

Islamic Prayer

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Salat (Prayer) is one of the five fundamentals that a Muslim is obligated to perform. Salat is given the highest priority in the Holy Qur'an.

'...observe Prayer. Surely, Prayer restrains one from indecency and manifest evil, and remembrance of Allah indeed is the greatest virtue... (29:46)

The Quranic verse shows Prayer has both a safeguarding function and an elevating effect, both essential for cultivating ideal human conduct. It first protects the worshipper by liberating them from sins of all types and then refines character and cultivates qualities to make one worthy of communion with God.

According to Islam, each human soul in relation to the human body can be likened to a foetus in utero. Maternal influences are constantly transferred to the developing foetus. Of all the influences that work towards the development of the human soul, Prayer is the most important single factor.

The Holy Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) drew the comparison of the effect of 5 daily Prayers on our soul with the taking of 5 daily baths and asked whether there could be any dirt left on our bodies after such regular washing.

The frequency of the Prayers is a constant reminder of a Muslim's purpose in life which is the worship of Allah, as is clear from the

Quranic verse, 'And I have not created the Jinn and the men but that they may worship Me'. (51:57) Remembrance of God and pondering over His attributes during the Prayer helps man in refining his spirit, bringing it more into harmony with the nature of God.

Does God require our Prayers? His Holiness Khalifatul Masih V explained in one of his Friday sermons that these days, due to the influence of atheism people have certain questions on their minds, such as why one should pray or whether God is in need of our prayers. Elaborating on these the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) states: 'God Almighty is Self Sufficient and is in no need for our prayers, rather, we are the ones who require prayer.'

Indeed, the commandment for Prayer is for our good. The Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) said:

'I do not find adequate words to express the faith that I have in recovery of the sick through the prayer. The Physician goes up to a certain stage and he stops there and loses hope. Further to that, it is God who opens up the way through the prayers. The understanding of the prayers is the real comprehension of the Divine and trust in God the Almighty. One should go beyond the limits that the people have fixed and he should be full of hope...It is at this stage that a man begins to recognise God.'

As well as spiritual benefits, the physical and psychological benefits of Islamic Prayer are increasingly understood. Salat can be seen as a form of regular exercise involving the whole body with benefits to cardiovascular, musculoskeletal and mental health. Most of the body muscles and joints are exercised during Salat; and Sajdah (prostration) is the only position in which

the head is lower than the heart and therefore, receives increased blood supply. This is said to have a positive effect on memory, concentration, and other cognitive abilities.

From an engineering perspective an ergonomic study of body motions found that the repetitive physical movements of Salat can reduce chances of lower back pain and increase flexibility. Interestingly an inverse relationship was seen between the time spent on each prayer posture and the

back compression force affecting the person during that posture

Neuroimaging studies of Muslims whilst praying have demonstrated a decrease in activity in areas associated with depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Remarkably, the changes were only seen when the individual performed Prayer with concentration. In automatic/rote Prayer brain imaging showed no change from daily activity!

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